

An Exploration of Gender Discrimination and the Quest for Feministic Identity in Angami Culture in Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari*

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Abstract—Nagaland is one of the significant political divisions of India, which is geographically divided into eight states. The cultures of India's northeastern states are distinctive. Each state is discrete regarding its custom, diverse culture, and language. As such, Nagaland, too, is rich and varied in cultural heritage, housing 16 distinct tribes, each with its lingo-African language. Extending the premise of *social realism*, this paper critically examines the fictional works of Easterine Kire, namely *Mari* and *A Terrible Matriarchy*. It brings out the social disparity and injustices meted out to the women's community of the Angami tribes. This research paper focuses on social injustice, matriarchal oppression, and sexual molestation as prevalent in the Angami tribal culture. This work ventures to spread awareness and educate the Angami tribal community on their enshrined prerogatives and the restitution of their emancipation in northeast India while unearthing some of the squalid working conditions of the tribal labour community. The novels *Mari* and *A Terrible Matriarchy* deal with social realism, the literary mode of choice in the nineteenth century. It also vividly portrays how the Nagaland community has been plundered and smeared by battle and bloodshed.

Index Terms—Angami tribe, Gender stereotypes, matriarchal, patriarchal, subjugation

I. INTRODUCTION

Easterine Kier is a Norwegian poet and author currently residing in northern Norway. Easterine Kire is a well-known personality in the domain of Northeast Indian literature. Born into an Angami tribal family in 1959, Kire went to school in Kohima and completed her undergraduate studies in Shillong before enrolling in a journalism programme in Delhi. She was awarded PhD in English literature. The lives of people in Nagaland, India's northeastern state, inspire the bulk of her works. In 2018, the Sahitya Academy awarded Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* the Bal Sahitya Puraskar. Easterine Kire received the Governor's Medal in 2011 for her contributions to Naga literature. Catalan PEN Barcelona also gave her the Free Voice Award. In 2013, *Bitter Wormwood* was a finalist for the Hindu Prize. Her driving force for writing “extensively on the exploration of tribal culture” is summed up in the following words from one of her freewheeling conversations recorded (Karmakar, 2021, p. 2) in an interview. This paper aims to examine the various aspects of Naga society, particularly the Angami culture and the tribal way of life as depicted in Kire's novels, *Mari* and *A Terrible Matriarchy*. This research investigation also attempts to probe the status of Angami tribal women in the context of a modern Naga society (Rengma, 2016).

II. OBJECTIVES

There are two objectives that the current research article is attempting to address. The study's primary objective is to concentrate on the historical perspectives of tribal culture in the select novels of Easterine Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari*. The secondary aim of the scholarly research attempt is to examine Postcolonial Concerns of Identity, Race, Ethnicity, and History of North East Literature, along with Gender and Women's Issues. This paper also probes how the adverse impact of destruction negatively affected one of the most peace-loving ethnic tribes of the Angami Naga community during the post-Second World War.

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III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and descriptive methodology is used to accomplish the study's objectives. A focused search of website databases and an analysis of diverse secondary materials acquired from the university libraries have effectively been incorporated for the critical analysis. The researcher extensively used the novel's text as the primary research material. The researcher rigorously analyzed several feminism-related topics and infused some deep sociocultural insights into his examination of the select novel.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of this paper's literature review, the researcher has analysed essential articles and books about *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari*. This study focuses on the unique position and common historical background of North East culture and feminism by carefully exploring the materials at our disposal, scrutinising the social reality of Easterine Kira's select novels, *A Matriarchy* and *Mari*, and learning about the aspirations and battle of north-eastern indigenous "women for equality in all aspects of life" (Gour & Tripathi, 2021, p. 97). In this regard The Registered political, historical, and cultural stance of north-eastern tribal women in her research article titled, Native Culture and gender politics in Nagaland. A study of Easterine Iralu and *A Terrible Matriarchy*, in which she vividly captures the rich art, culture, customs, and religious beliefs of "the women of Nagaland by examining the Angami, the state's biggest tribe, that are divided in turn into five primary religious groups. The Emergence of Feminist Consciousness in the Select Fiction of Contemporary North East Women Writers" (Luikham, 2020, p. 1). North-eastern states with the largest number of tribal communities are dominated by males with substantially higher socioeconomic status than women in other regions of the nation. Easterine Kire likewise asserts that in the tribal communities of northeast India, there is a lack of formal education. "men and women have their own designated areas that correspond to their activities. Extending this finding, it shows that women spend more time in the kitchen cooking meals and doing daily chores like cleaning and washing clothes and utensils, harvesting roots and vegetables, and caring for new-borns and children than they do taking an active part in the socio-dynamics of the family. Similarly, Roy, in her article Gender Politics & Discrimination in Post-Colonial Nagaland with Special Reference to Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, delineates the horrendous picture of matriarchal preference for the male children over the females, the unflinching that the male enjoyed over the docile and suppressed position of the female, perpetrated and patronised by the matriarchy through the mouthpiece of five-year-old protagonist Delineo.

According to the views of Devi (2021), *Mari* by Easterine Kire, is a socio-historical novel that recounts the struggles of the people of Nagaland and Kohima during the Second World War. This study examines how Kire extends the limitations of life writing and offers a straightforward interpretation of *Mari* as a fictional story. Easterine Kire's natural experience and difficulties as a child are represented in the female lead, *Mari*, through whom the chaotic but thrilling memories of the persecutions of Naga tribal women in the North East region are vividly brought out. Likewise, Pegu explained in his article, A Feminist Reading of Easterine Kire's *Mari*, that it profoundly depicts the male chauvinism and appropriation of women's rights prevalent in Angami tribal culture. He also states that gender inequality has persisted throughout human history for a long time and that female authors like Easterine Kire have focused exclusively on the sociocultural mores and practises of the Angami tribal women in Nagaland (Pegu, 2021).

Furthermore, the fact that Easterine Kire illustrates the themes of love, conflict, and the pursuit of peace and dignity in the face of constant sociocultural adversity speaks volumes for the innocent Angami women's souls striving for peaceful existence ideally in harmony with the ecology right in the middle of the Kohima War, he further adds (Sema & Pathak, 2019). In Biswas (2016), the main character, *Mari*, sees the terrible things that happen during the war and talks about them. It is about her transformation from a native, simple girl who grew up and became a woman whose life is full of frustrations, wants, and longing for recognition and approval from her siblings and family.

From the review, both *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari* have researched several themes, such as the subjugation of women, patriarchal preferences, war mayhem, a staunch crusade for dignity, the socio-psychological oppression of tribal women, Etc. However, the themes of gender equality and feminism are under-explored. On this ground, the current scholarly attempt becomes unique and socially relevant.

V. BACKGROUND TO THE EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MORES IN THE ANGAMI TRIBAL CULTURE

In an essay from 2015, Roy talks about how Nagaland's culture is an essential part of India's multiple cultures. Bamboo and cane are abundant in Nagaland's forests. As a consequence, they create fantastic baskets. The Nagas have a sophisticated basketry tradition. Nagaland, a country of tribes, is an undiscovered sanctuary in the highlands. The beautiful state boasts lovely tea plantations, high mountains, and rich culture. Nagaland's culture is reflected in the Hornbill Festival. The mythology of these tribes portrays their forebears' valorous actions. Their attire is a fantastic depiction of their forefathers.

Moreover, the Naga tribe's traditional cuisine is rice, which they consume with meat or vegetables. "Nagas have a palate for chilli and smemus" (Arya Sekhar, 2018, p. 2). People here like to steam their meals rather than fry them. All tribes have different diets that rely heavily on meat, seafood, and fermented foods. Almost all recipes include herbs, ghost peppers, ginger, and garlic grown locally. Gour mentioned Nagaland's rich and varied cultural history, with 16

tribes speaking various lingo-African languages. Using the theme of social realism, however, despite the bountiful resources of the preserved geographical region and the rich, indigenous tribal culture existing in Nagaland, "the state of women and their social, socio-economic, and political standing in the women's community is far from socially palatable, even in this post-modern world of technological advancement and gender and occupational quality" (Gour & Tripathi, 2021, p. 99).

VI. THE ZEITGEIST OF ANGAMI TRIBAL CULTURAL

The Angami tribe is one of the leading tribes of Nagaland. Another religion that members of this tribe practise is animism. Agriculture is the Angami Tribe's primary source of income. In the mountainous terrain, they grow rice and cereals. They are usually agrarians who produce around twenty different varieties of rice every year. On hilly terrain, they also harvest rice and cereals. Many tribe families switched to Christianity since "Christendom is a religion that focuses on love within tribal families. Many families are still dominated by male society" (Kire, 2007, p. 166). The people of Nagaland, particularly the Angami tribes, as one of the primordial sects, have had great reverence and faith in the providence of nature and hence celebrated the fauna and flora. This deep conviction in the worship of 'animism' has been passed down from generation to generation, discussing the people's history, historical identities, and culture.

Moreover, Nagaland's culture is defined by its long history of festivals and food, which come from its many different cultures. Based on their conviction, the Angami-Nagaland people lived with complete faith in God (Lata Devi & Kalita 2021). They have deep faith in God and are God-fearing. As a result, the moral rules they follow are known as 'kenyu'. Their ancestors worshipped idols, believed in superstitions, and observed numerous traditions. However, after the post-modern period, the Angami culture changed; "People believe the truth about God" (Arya Sekhar, 2018, p. 1). Many members of the Angami tribe prefer men only, and "some households advocate child marriage and refuse to send girls to school. The entire north-eastern region of India is home to 200 tribal groups" (Mahanta, 2017).

VII. THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AS REFLECTED IN *A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY* AND *MARI*

Very few writers have a genuine interest in the exploration of the tribal mores and the heritage of Angami tribes in general or in the deplorable condition of women's discrimination and persecution that are perpetrated against women in the Angami community. Many writers have taken it upon themselves to highlight the region's marginalised issues and rich culture and history. However, Easterine Kire captured the socio-economic-political panorama of injustices against the community of women like no other (Luikham, 2020). Her primary work, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, portrays the excruciating crusade of a young girl, Dielieno's ground-breaking battle for the emancipation of the Angami tribal women, to which she natively belongs" (Roy, 2015, p. 371).

The novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* navigates us through the traditional rituals and tribal mores of Angami culture while also delineating the lives of the Angami women community through the depiction of the female lead, Dielieno. "This novel is narrated through the protagonist so cogently that it captures the socio-ethnicity of Angami tribal culture with at least honest verisimilitude" (Arya Sekhar, 2018, p. 4). Dielieno is five years old when she is sent to live with her grandmother to be moulded into a friendly and obedient Naga's daughter and bride. Dielieno despises her grandma and the prejudice she has against her older brothers. However, as she gets older and learns why her grandmother was so prejudiced, she gains a new level of respect for her. *A Terrible Matriarchy* chronicles Dielieno's struggles and those of her mother and grandmother as they grew up. In Kire, she captures the oppression of Naga women in a male-dominated culture during the colonial and post-colonial periods (Rahimtullah & Kumar, 2022).

The central topic of *A Terrible Matriarchy* is women's subjugation or patriarchy. The reader's "attention is drawn to the blatant appearance of tyranny based on a double standard" (Mill, 1896). Dielieno is oppressed not just by patriarchal society but also by her grandmother Vibano's prejudice. "Due to entrenched patriarchy, women become the victims of own exploitation. Women's oppression is also shown in socioeconomic inequality. Women are barred from inheriting property or money under the male-only heir system (Kire, 2007, p. 22). Kire's description of the constant struggle in her work between tradition and new ideas is essential. Witnessing how a natural function like menstruation is called 'the curse' in the changing Angami civilization, where contemporary concepts and beliefs emerge, is incredible. Lieno and other young girls fear such 'grown-up topics'. "The way Kire depicts Lieno and her relative's reluctance to approach retailers to purchase sanitary napkins gives a decent understanding of how people view such circumstances. However, keeping with the Bildungsroman subgenre, Lieno emerges from her cocoon and eventually learns how to cope with these circumstances practically" (Nyori, 2021).

VIII. THE FEMINIST CHARACTER OF MARI OF PITFALLS IN THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

Easterine Kier is, without a doubt, one of Northeast India's best modern female writers. In her novel *Mari*, she passionately depicts her experiences of love, battle, and peace for her native region of Nagaland. Based on Mari's crucial phase of her life, she projects the fight of Kohima 1944, commonly referred to as a 'forgotten battle' or 'forgotten heroes' by the Naga people. "Mari is the protagonist of her tale, which is situated in the middle of love and conflict. Easterine Kire's *Mari* is set during the tumultuous war years. It is a love story set during World War II, in the

vein of literature and films like *Farewell to Arms* and *Casablanca*" (Pegu, 2021 p. 3963). *Mari* is a story about a little Naga girl who is caught during a quarrel. Her family is split up because they were forced to leave their rural home. Mari is raised by her younger sisters and is estranged from her parents. To dodge the Japanese forces, the tiny girls move from one hiding site to another during the fight. When they run out of food, they hunt for herbs and greens in the wild and hide in cow barns. Mari, 17, aches for her fiancé a British soldier fighting in Kohima, murdered by a sniper only a day before the siege is lifted. Mari and her starved sisters return to Kohima, but the hamlet has been destroyed by artillery bombardment, with just three wooden posts surviving in their home. The deputy commissioner recommends demolishing the wrecked homes and building a new community, but the elderly in the community is furious. Traditional clan boundaries, which are set by village walls and roads, would no longer exist. It has initiated led to fighting and wars (Roy, 2020).

It is a story about the ravages of war on the innocents who have been lost and how conflict has drastically changed their lives in modern Naga culture. "Men appropriate women's depictions in literature, which are skewed. This prompted feminist authors to investigate the reasons for their marginalisation in society. Inequalities between men and women have existed throughout human history" (Jamir, 2021, p. 97). In this regard, women writers from the North East have significantly contributed to women's development and emancipation. One such writer, Easterine Kire, has been fearless in telling the narratives of the indigenous women in her Naga clan. "This is exactly what Kire accomplished in 2010 with *Mari*, her thought-provoking fiction" (Longkumer, 2019, p. 7).

Mari, Easterine's novel, is set in the middle of love and war, and she tells the story via her aunt's wartime journal. In their work, she depicts the Japanese invasion of Kohima and nostalgic recollections of war and warfare. The depiction of being in love during wartime and then becoming homeless with little food and eventually dying with their loved ones shows that the innocent peasants were always scared, emotionally hardened, and fearful in their hard labour for the method of their survival due to the Second World War, which left a significant memory of history in their minds (Karki, 2019).

Easterine Kire's work is notable in Nagaland's literary history because she describes the Naga people's socio-cultural and historical background. She discusses various topics in this interview, including Naga communities' distinctive customs, socio-cultural dynamics, tribal people's multigenerational indigenous knowledge, the community's heterogeneous identity, and Naga society's feminist philosophy. Kire also shows how Naga culture's memories and past have long-term affected how Nagaland is today. She discusses the need to preserve the memory of this region's neglected and marginalised history. In Kohima, I have older relatives. Mari was concerned about her mother since the town was covered in thick smoke (Kire, 2010, p. 19; VeioPou, 2018).

Much to her relief, her brother came to see them in the wilderness. Life also became dangerous in the forests, as wild creatures such as tigers prowled the area. Consequently, they relocated to Chuzie, where they met a lady and her three kids. There, they come across a Japanese soldier for the second time. By this time, Mari had realised she would need to pose as a rural lady (Jamir, 2021). When the Japanese forces entered the hut during the battle in Kohima. she and her sister "Zhabu" took one of the woman's children and put them on their laps. They were thus saved. Since she was the eldest, Mari felt she could lead her sisters to a safe place far from suffering, death, and starvation. She struggled to stay alive while defending herself. It was praiseworthy when Mari, as a lady, defended her family from the threat (Roy, 2020).

Mari met Victor at her construction job when she was seventeen, in the thick of the coming war. Victor was a white soldier assigned to the future fight in Kohima. Sergeant Victor adored her immensely and wanted to see her at her house. Mari, on the other hand, was concerned about his blood mother's response. Her father was a strong man who was respected and feared. He made up his mind at home. It was chosen by her parents, with whom they would become pals. On the other hand, Mari called her parents to ask them to be okay with her relationship with Victor (Devi, 2021).

Death and ruin hung over the protagonists' lives as the conflict approached. Shops and schools were forced to close their doors. Women were groped, and residents were forced to flee their homes. The continuous shooting and sirens made staying in town impossible. Victor drove Mari and her younger sisters to their uncle's village in Chieswema. Because he had Japanese invaders to deal with, he had to depart from them immediately. People in Nagaland have experienced several terrifying incidents due to military force (VeioPou, 2018).

When the Japanese invaded, their time in the hamlet ended. Mari met Japanese troops for the first time in the same town. The Naga tribe's educated men were at risk because they were detained and turned into spies. 2020 The ladies were equally vulnerable because they were scooped up whenever they were happy. To avoid attracting the attention of enemy troops, Mari and her sisters covered their bodies with charcoal and wore Angami waistcloths. In their presence, life was hazardous since they pillaged the neighborhood. Like others, Mari and her sister left the town searching for the mysterious future in the Tsiekhou jungles. Easterine Kire explains that Mari and her sister faced challenging conditions in Nagaland. Mari and her sister set off into the Tsiekhou forests for an unknown future. Because she was responsible for her younger sisters, Mari felt lonely and powerless. Just before the conflict began, her father was asked to depart with critical government paperwork for Shillong. On the other hand, her mother could not be convinced to join them since she did not want to leave her children behind (Biswas & Sabarmati, 2016).

They were forced to migrate from place to place due to hunger and a lack of food. During the war, this was a widespread issue for everyone. There were no animals or plants to eat, and frequent bombings ravaged their rice fields. Mari and her sisters were on the verge of death due to malnutrition. They were pretty weak due to not having enough meals and shelter. They finally reached Shillong, where their father was waiting for them, after a protracted battle through trenches, jungles, and camps littered with explosives, rockets, and gunfire (Patton, 2018).

Mari had lost a lot in the war, completely transforming her life. She discovered that Victor perished battling the enemy right before the war was proclaimed over after the departure of the Japanese soldiers. Mari could not take it any longer. It left a gaping hole in her life. After finding out she is expecting Victor's kid, she can deal with somewhat of her despair. Beauvoir argued that sex is the biological difference between men and women, "while gender is the socially and culturally manufactured difference" (Victor & Vijayakumar, 2023, p. 46). Her mother bolstered her confidence with these encouraging words: "We have lost a special individual, but someone will step in to fill the void in our hearts." Be bold, eat, and attempt to build your strength (Kire, 2010, p. 55).

Her laid-back approach to life reflected her desire to welcome her new love. Roy contributed in his article that Mari was overjoyed that her new companion, Dickie, a military officer who had been sent to Kohima, adored her. Mari had the impression that a younger Victor had returned to her since he was significantly younger than Victor. On the other hand, her parents hesitated to consent to her visiting him at such a young age. She waited for her parent's consent. She was abrasive. However, Dickie could not marry her, and the relationship ended in disaster. When the British forces were ordered to leave India, he returned to England. She had an unmarried child with him named Lily (Patton, 2018).

Despite her parents' reservations, she was not ashamed to have her. They were opposed to her having a child while she was not married. She was just eighteen years old and had little experience with the external world, but Sam, her brother, and her father were all so concerned about her that they refused to send her to England. Mr. Pawsey, the district commissioner of Kohima under the British administration, was an autocratic character who prevented Mari from establishing a new home with Dickie. He would not allow the troops to return to England with their families (Kire, 2010, p. 120).

Her capacity to be a powerful woman was honed in such situations. After just a few months as a mother of two, she plans to pursue her longtime ambition of becoming a nurse. Apart from a few home trips, she made significant sacrifices and worked hard for four years away from her home in Ludhiana. She then went to Delhi for a year of obstetrics training. She was now happier and had a wide range of abilities. This released her and granted her freedom. She gradually acquired the ability to support her daughters (Singh, 2021).

She became self-sufficient when securing a senior staff nurse position at Digboi. She earned enough money to enable her children to live with her. In the meantime, she befriended Patrick O'Leary, who would become her life partner. Patrick's proposal caught Jessica off guard, given her second romantic failure. However, she had no choice but to accept him because of his gentleness and love for her. She prioritized the needs of her children before her own and made sure Patrick treated them as if they were his own (Singh, 2021).

The story depicts Mari bringing flowers to Victor's grave. However, she decides to raise their child as a lovely expression of their unwavering love. It describes how the government retained the Lee Tank, kept beside the national highway at Kohima throughout the war, as a military memorial. The depiction of the 1954 rebuilding of a new church and how Marie's family members in the community of Kohima, now having new homes, began to resume their labor-intensive in the areas as the hot season saw new grains. Nagaland's closely associated natural scenery of young rice fields and newly green trees was restored. It describes how Kohima, a tiny town, recovered from the effects of war in the 1950s. Many homes were newly constructed, with lovely windowpanes and silvery, flexible roofs. She claims that the villagers and little town are glowing. Since everyone knew one another, the part of town was cosy, pleasant, and welcoming (Tripathi, 2020, p. 27).

She takes advantage of the chance to rejoice once more. She was delighted to be able to aid and support her family members in their time of need. A new war started between the Indian Army and Naga agitators seeking independence from India, again turning Kohima into a battleground. Mari was pleased with the job offer (Karki, 2019). She could also offer her daughters the best possible education. Finally, she was concerned about her daughters' decisions as women and mothers. Her mother, she understood, was the glue that held the house together. Like the fathers of other families, her father became a significant player in deciding family concerns. Mari's mother encouraged and interested her in being a valuable human being. As a result of the conflict, she became an emancipated individual. It taught her to be self-reliant and brave and see things from many angles. At a period when having a kid beyond marriage was looked upon by society, she took the risk. She chose to be a role model for others, and she overcame numerous challenges throughout her life. The Angami tribal culture says that a widowed woman cannot get married again, but she does it anyway. Through the character of Mari, Easterine Kire made it clear how women were taken advantage of in the Angami culture of Nagaland (Sema & Pathak, 2019).

Her mother, she understood, was the glue that held the house together. Like the fathers of other families, her father became a significant player in deciding family concerns. She realized that her mother was the glue that kept the home together. She had become a free human being as a result of the battle. It taught her to be self-reliant, bold and see things from many angles. She ventured to bear an unmarried kid when doing so, frowned (Tripathi, 2020, p. 28).

IX. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study incorporates several feminist ideas and features into the narrative of tribal culture, demonstrating how tribal women are positioned and challenging the region of north-eastern India. However, there have been certain limitations in the research process since it is challenging to characterize Easterine Kire's position regarding feminist notions. The study's shortcomings may be traced to its inability to consider the plethora of accessible data. The research would have benefited more from narrowing its emphasis.

X. CONCLUSION

The gender division and the rights of Angami males against women run throughout Kire's novel. Being a patrilineal community, they follow an inheritance system in which property is handed down to the male heir of the household (Luikham, 2020). The gender division and the rights of Angami males against women run throughout Kire's novel. (IndiaNetzone) Keeping with tradition, Grandma Vibano lavishes her love and devotion on Vini and sets aside a portion of her estate for him. Lieno is not to get anything from the matriarch, even if she remains with her, performs all her labour, and looks after her home. According to Kire, Patriarchal society is neither universal nor inherent, universal nor innate; nevertheless, it develops over time in response to various forms of authority and violence (Victor & Vijayakumar, 2022).

On the other hand, Kire shows the traditions, culture, beliefs, and way of life of the Naga people through her works. She spends much time presenting the journey of a young girl named Delieno and Mari as they bloom into mature ladies. In portraying their transformation, Kire also highlights the different issues women like her face in society because young girls face many family life difficulties. Both novels are full of stories about the different difficulties' women face in society. Finally, the portrayal of tribal culture and the way of life of a young girl in *A Terrible Matriarchy* and *Mari* is accurate and life-like since the author has experienced gender discrimination, cultural ties, and social and economic hardships herself (Sema & Pathak, 2019).

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