



**North-East Naga Tribal Women: A Saga of Their Struggle and Victory in Esterine
Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy***

Rahamatulla

Ph.D Scholar,

Dept of English, H.N.B.G.U (A Central University)

Email: mdrahamat.najrul@gmail.com,

&

Prof. Deepak Kumar

Email: drdeepakkr74@mail.com

Abstract

North-Eastern frontier zone is very apparent region for its rich tribal culture, custom and patriarchal society as well. North-Eastern frontier area consists of seven states, so called 'seven sisters' by their own dialectic languages. The proposed area traces NE tribal women and their socio-cultural schemas followed traditionally from generation to generation by Naga male dominated tribal community. Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, therefore, a coming of age novel is based on the real life people of Angami society, a colony of Naga tribes in Kohima. As per book reviewer Paul Pimomo, 'it traces first of all "the coming out story of a girl" (P iv), Dielieno, the young protagonist of the story, is "a powerful young woman" (viii) growing up in her small tribal colony of Naga society. She lives with her unmarried aunt Bano in her violent grandmother Vibano's domicile. Being an intellectual little girl among the Nag tribal girls, she does not get lost "her femininity" power to her society anymore; rather she bravely struggles against her abusive orthodox grandmother's horrifying opinions "to get education and a place in her family and society" (Kire viii). The proposed paper will anatomize NE Naga tribal women as a saga of their struggle and victory in Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*.

Keywords: Naga tribal society, culture, domination, stereotype, patriarchy, terrible, struggle, victory.



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Email: drdeepakkr74@mail.com

Introduction:

Esterine Kire Iralu, a poet, a storyteller and the first Naga novelist in English, was born in March 1959 to an Angami Naga family in Kohima, Nagaland, India. As an English author she lives nowadays in northern Norway. She by profession is a writer, a journalist and a social activist. She has completed her PhD Degree in English literature from Savitribai Phule Pune University. She is the first Naga tribal woman from Nagaland to win Bal Sahitya Puraskar for “*Song of the Thundercloud*” in 2018 awarded by Sahitya Academy. She is well-known in North-East literature.

Naga Hills were colonized by Esterine Kire for her excellent creative writing in Naga literature was awarded Governor’s Medal in 2011. In 2013, her bestselling novel entitled *Bitter Wormwood* was shortlisted for *The Hindu Prize*. She was awarded *The Hindu Literary Prize* for her novel *When the River Sleeps* in 2015. In 2018, Sahitya Academi had awarded Kire Bal Sahitya Puraskar for her Naga novel titled *Son of the Thundercloud*. Later Catalan PEN Barcelona had awarded Free Voice Award to Kire. She is recognized to the world readers for translating her novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* into UN languages. Her other writing novels like –*A Naga Village Remembered*, *Forest Song*, *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Naga Folktales Retold* and *Mari* have been translated into German language. Like Langston Hughes, Jack Kerouac, Amiri Baraka, John Sinclair, and many more, Kire, in her poetic life, also writes Jazz Poetry for her band Jazzpoesie.

Primitive Status of Naga Women:

Through her simple written English novels, she depicts contemporary modern living stories of tribal men and women, their social status, cultural performance, education and non-educational lives, folksongs and tales, tribal rituals, superstitions with gods and goddesses, discussion images of Naga heritages, believes of folklores and historical-geographical map of Naga community. Her recapturing Naga tribal tales and historical background endeavor to show clearly the voiceless condition of tribal men and women in the times of land conflict and wars in their own land. Being tribal communities, marginalization and discrimination status from different points are imposed on lives of Naga men and women. At a time, Naga Tribes are so frustrated with long days' silent mouth staying in non-status of life and place in their own land that all types of oppression and suffering of silence they have abided blindly in every ways of sphere of life during the times of Indo-Naga conflicts and wars in North-East zones. Therefore, in one of her interviews, Kire explores about North-east region:

This is highly politically loaded question because if we go into it, I have to honestly state that during the time of the Mughals, the NE was not part of India and even India was not India as we know it after 1947. Historically speaking, the the British in the 1800s and on their departure, the British ignored Naga appeals to leave them out of the Indian union. Rather treacherously, the British halved Naga territories and gave the one half to Burma and the other to India. So, there was no cultural connection between mainland India and the NE. There wasn't even a historical connection so it is not surprising that following Mughal Hindustan, mainland India did not 'recognize NE' as you have put it (Kire 2).

Inequality Biologically:

In the rules and forms of Naga traditional culture, Naga tribal women have been confessed traditionally of inequalities as householders only, portions of left over meals, non decision maker position, merely following patriarchal schedules of life, status of subordination, deprivation from all modes of social education for girls, strictly prohibited in case of participation in many political and socio-economical spheres.

The tribal women and girl children of Nagaland have been excluded socially as well a culturally from every layer of social lives; they as domestic objects are rather included solely in the field of exploitation, subjugation, marginality and marginalization, discrimination of race, gender and feminism, continuous oppression, frustration, suffering and tortures in their daily lives. For instance, in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, women and girl children are voiceless, women are only householder, or responsible for caring of boys and time giver for their husbands. The little girl Deleino has been continuously and mentally frustrated at home by her own grandmother

who always maltreats her and compels to abide by norms of patriarchal lives to be a good girl and a devotee wife in her husband's house. The grandmother in the novel always calls Deleino as 'the 'the girl', never by her given name, even not in front of her own mother and father as well as brothers. In Naga tribal society, girl's birth is so subordinated or inferior subject to patriarchal community that grandmother, notwithstanding of herself being a tribal woman, dislikes her own gender. So in her interview, Kire remarks:

We have always lived on the periphery. This is my experience; I have been marginalized simply because I am a Naga, twice marginalized because I am a woman and thrice marginalized because I am a tribal, a member of an indigenous community (Aier 273).

A Terrible Matriarchy (2007) by Kire, a coming of age novel, is based on the real life people of Angami society, a colony of Naga tribes in Kohima. It traces first of all the coming out story of a girl, Dielieno, the young protagonist of the story, is a powerful young woman growing up in her small tribal colony of Naga society. Dielieno lives with her unmarried aunt Bano in her violent grandmother Vibano's domicile. Being an intellectual little girl among the Naga tribal girls, she does not get lost 'her femininity' power to her society anymore; rather she bravely struggles against her abusive orthodox grandmother's horrifying opinions "to get education and a place in her family and society" (Kire 2007 viii). It was the societal background of Kohima villages where grandmother resists tribal girls' going to schools and colleges. Grandmothers in this small society notify words by words that the girls are not grown up for schooling, but for working as householders in domicile and field activities. While her own grandmother chides Lieno for her school's agreement from her own parents' side, young girl Lieno fights "against her grandmother's efforts to 'tame' her" (viii). Thereafter, the author remarks that at the time of Lieno's growing up in the Naga tribes, schooling and teaching for tribal girl-children were not given importance.

... Dielieno, who fights against terrifying odds to get education and a place in her family and society? She is a powerful young woman who has not lost her femininity. She is not a feminist, but is more a womanist. Lieno is a curious and intelligent little girl who struggles against her grandmother's effort to 'tame' her...Lieno grows up at a time when education for the girl-child was not prioritized (Kire 2007 viii).

Angami Tribeswomen:

In the storytelling of the novel, non equal status of Angami tribal women in the village society is notified radically more than once from different ways. In this marginal society, women,



girl-child and daughters are not accurate subject to become heir to their ancestral assets and lands; and at the end of the novel narrative, it is superbly explored that whereas unmarried woman Bano, “who has spent all her life looking after Grandmother, shunted out of the house unceremoniously” (viii). Girl –child and women in the Naga stereotype houses are voiceless or unspoken. After the death of grandmother, whilst Leno and Sino, two aunties of Lieno, have shunted out of maternal house, little Lieno has become tacit from protesting during Bano’s disinherit; rather keeps undergoing injustices of the society, because women are radically bound to the customs and canons of their stereotype people. In mainstream societal families, men are merely considerable perfect beings to make decisions of their families. There are lots of complications of etiquettes among the Angami people for women. In her notes, the kire tells:

The non status of women in society is seen again and again. Daughters do not inherit ancestral property. This is evident at the end of the book when Bano, who has spent all her life looking after Grandmother, is shunted out of the house unceremoniously. Women have little or no voice. Lieno feels helpless to protest against the removal of Bano. The decision-makers are the men (Kire 2007 viii).

At the end of the book, the Naga protagonist Dielieno is able to fulfill the destination of her education against her stereotype society by evacuating all sort of patriarchal customs, beliefs and canons of Angami society and on the other hands, uneducated and spinster woman Bano has reoccupied her ancestral land and house-property. Throughout the women character of this novel, Dielieno’s successful struggle in several ways against her grandmother’s harsh treatment for her education and social status in the society that Kire represents to the Naga and world society, as women in male dominated society are always looked down from generation to generation by Naga cultural belief and tradition. After unending suffering and subservience in every sphere of her life, as outcomes, Dielieno has achieved a great victory and appreciation in education and other social activities are traditionally outlawed for girl-child and women by its culture and custom. Thus she provides evidence that a tribal girl is too required to get education to change traditional belief and custom of people like Naga society.

Conclusion:

In concluding the second chapter entitled “Narrative Discourse: Voicing Naga Tribal Women’s Hard Struggle and Victory in *A Terrible Matriarchy*”, the present study has shown how the narrator embodies herself through the portrait of Lieno as a very responsible and patient girl from her child age to the rest of her life. She has capability to endure or admit all short of suffering, torture or problems without getting angry or exasperated or worried. She is

seen in the novel how roughly she is behaved by widow grandmother. Her brutal teasing and violent behavior cannot change Lieno's desire for education from chasing of what she desires to fulfill her intention or objective in her poor life. She has endured the complicated life time for education and learned other social activities in the family. Thus she gives a good message and insights for the other Naga tribal girls who are still deprived from their education and suffered constantly in several areas under subservience of abusive people like widow grandmother. Lieno like aunty Bano could not take pleasure in her child life, or even did not spend her life with her own parents. Through all these troubles she has achieved her teaching-learning and other social works against her widow grandmother and proved her traditional plasticized community wrong about the society's false thoughts on girls- women education. Now she is joined as nurse in the society and lived liberally with her husband in a well educated family without any constriction.

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