

# **Annihilation of Nature: a Critical Analysis in Easterine Kire's *Bitter Worm Wood***

**S.Robin Stanly**

Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of English

Manonmaniam Sundaranar, University

Tirunelveli-12

and

**Dr. R. Vasuhi**

Assistant Professor of English

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

Tirunelveli-12

Environmental awareness had been developed strongly in India from 1993 onwards after the entry of LPG (Liberalization, privatization, Globalization). Easterine Kire, a famous and prominent writer from Nagaland in India authored many novels and poems. The theme of her novels either directly or indirectly touches environmental crisis such as deforestation, contamination, eco-terrorist and ecotourism. The novel *Bitter worm wood*, narrates the story of Mose whose life becomes a witness for environmental crisis. Since he lived one with the nature His entire life changes whenever the nature changes. This paper enlightens, showing how the human beings ruined the beautiful Naga Hills, long rivers, trees, wild animals, medicinal herbs. The theme and the message ignite the people to be aware of environmental crisis and guides to find out a proper solution to save it for the future solution.

The word Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, which facilitates or necessitates looking at literary studies through a green lens. The word 'eco-criticism' first appeared in William Rueckert's essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism* in 1978. Eco-criticism is a unique contemporary literary and cultural theory as it has a close relationship with the science of ecology. The New Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) defines ecology as 'the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment'.

In Bible (Gen 1:28) stated that God created man and gave rights to look after the nature. But man completely failed to protect the nature and natural resources. He started to manipulate the rights for his selfish motives. As a result, disaster, catastrophe, flood, occur regularly all over the world. In 1967, historian Lynn White wrote a challenging and contentious essay *The Historical*

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*Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* suggesting that present environmental problems emerged from a Judeo-Christian worldview of 'domination' over non-human species. For example, the biblical words of Genesis 1:28 (man's dominion over creation) gave him complete power to control over nature.

His statement in the essays was quiet right and appropriate to the present situation. It may be wrong interpretation according to the biblical scholars but practically the non- human species have been dominated by the human beings. In particular, the state Nagaland was known for its flora and fauna but today it is facing terrific ecological crisis. The state is becoming prey to ecological imbalance. There are many Naga writers such as Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalang, Avino Kire and Easterine Kire have written volumes of poems, abundant essays and plentiful stories on ecological crisis.

North-East India, a place for numerous ethnic tribal groups, is one of the vibrant, fascinating and most culturally and linguistically diverse regions located at the international borders. All the sixteen major tribes in Nagaland always co-existed with nature. The state was surrounded by massive mountains, green valleys and beautiful rivers and so on. In an elaborate way, the lives of Nagas were bound to nature in their social, cultural, ethical and religious values. Easterine Kire dynamically portrayed it in the novel *Bitter Worm Wood*, how the livelihood activities of Nagas were closely related to nature. She titled the novel *Bitter Worm Wood* because *Bitter Worm Wood* means 'a type of bitter herb was traditionally believed to keep the bad spirits away'.

The writings of the author created awareness about rich the traditions, identity and the nature. Similarly, the novel *Bitter Worm Wood* showed the deep connection of Naga culture and tradition rooted in Nature and ecology. Since their lives were revolved around nature, they considered nature as their sacred place. The nature saved and helped them to survive as well as made them suffer. The idea was very clearly crafted in the book *Bitter Worm Wood*. In the beginning of the novel the father of the protagonist Mose was going in pursuit of tree to celebrate a local feast.

Luo-o now spent more time with the men of his age-group. They were planning a festival to celebrate a new gate for a clan. This would be a whole tree, ritually selected and cut and dragged from the forest with a great deal of ceremony. "The seer has shown us the exact tree", he explained to his wife and mother. "It is deep in the forest but there are no other big trees nearby so it will be easy to enough to find it. (20)

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The people knew that it would be a perilous and precarious journey to walk for two days into the forest to search for a big tree. The people considered that those areas which used to be called a living place for the unclean spirits and wild animals. However the hazardous journey was started after a stern warning from his mother and seer. Luo went along with twenty members of his clan unfortunately “Luo had been crushed by the tree when they were felling it. He died instantly. The tree was abandoned, even though it had been ritually selected, because it was taboo to use it after it had claimed a life”. (21)

The particular incident exposed widely the human nature relationship. He searched for the big tree in order to invoke the blessings from nature. They thought that it was through nature God would shower his blessings on people. Though the sudden death troubled the family members and the clan but they managed to mollify the situation that he was one with the nature.

Secondly, the Nagas never preferred to go out of their place to do any other work. They worked hard always in their fields. They always depended on nature and the natural resources. The primary occupation of the Naga people was cultivation, weaving, hunting, fishing, making necklace, wood carving, basket making and cane work. The author narrated a conversation in such a way to understand their hard work in the paddy field.

They had a good harvest that year. Mose diligently counted 33 tins of paddy. “It’s the work you put in. that’s why we have a bigger harvest, said Vilau. “Really Mother? Have you never harvested so much before?” only when your father was alive. We easily got 45 or 48 tins then, sometimes even 50. you are bringing in a man’s share. (41)

These powerful lines depicted the glories of nature and the hard work of Naga People. The lines tried to show how the nature played a vital and vibrant role in the life of Naga people. The hard work in the paddy field and mountains inspired and motivated them to feel the presence and providence of nature. M Horam penned clearly about life of early tribals which was centred round the soil, the ancestral fields, sowing and harvesting. Village feasts were celebrated by the agricultural calendar and the seasons. Most of their religious ceremonies and festivals were directly connected with the fields. Gods and spirits were revered carefully so as not to bring disease and curse and to bless the village with good harvest. Significantly they never forgot to teach the techniques to work in the paddy field to their younger generations. The author also elaborately wrote it. “Mose was using a smaller hoe than his mother’s. Vilau taught him to dig in patches. That way, he could see how much work he had done in the course of the day”. (33) The qualities such as hard work and respecting the nature slowly faded away from them. As the days were going sudden and drastic changes occurred due to the development of science of technology

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and the transition from traditional to modern way of life. The historians called it an age of transition. The transition paved the way for a massive transformation in their economic, political, social and in the religious field.

Moreover, the constant wars, unstable political situations, poor economy made a negative impact among the Nagas. These events really disturbed the sacredness of the place and the environment. The disturbance of nature and environment, continuous wars, laying new roads and intrusion of technical and developmental activities caused water scarcity, frequent landslides, and deforestation and heavy floods. Thus the people struggled a lot to maintain the peace and harmony of the nature. For the Nagas the land, hills and rivers are the sacred places. These places effusively provided spiritual values, culture, tradition and identity. The disorderliness and furious disturbance of nature due to incessant wars profusely affected their identity, culture, tradition.

For instance, it was a place which faced several wars from the time of its inception. Since the flora and fauna of the Nagaland and its surrounding area are popular and attractive the intruders invaded the place several times. Thus good number of people lost their lives. For instance from 1956 to 2018 more than 100000 were killed, the hills and villages were burnt into ashes for some political reasons. Good numbers of people died out of starvation. The innocent women and young girls started to sell their flesh for survival. Whenever the nature was disturbed the Nagas were affected very badly because they lived with the nature. The protagonist of the novel Mose ran for life number of times leaving his home and field. When his innocent grandmother was succumbed to build wounds he was forced to join underground groups to fight against Indian army. They stayed in forest for several months and survived eating only the herbs and greens in the forest. More than seventy years they had been rigorously fighting with Indian army. In all the battle the Nagas posted a facile victory over the Indian army because the nature was in favour of Nagas. The author brilliantly narrated the novel in such a way to know the reasons for deforestation, eco-terrorism and contamination.

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