

THE INTRICACY OF VIOLENCE AND PEACE IN *MARI* BY EASTERINE KIRE

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ABSTRACT

Literature has its own way of expressing the culture and the society its suffering and its abundance in natural wealth. Trauma is often considered as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. It is often defined by the long term reactions. When a culture or a society in terms of experiencing traumatic events can be called as cultural trauma. The traumatising events interact with human nature and when the basic human needs of love, security, order and connection are destabilised for the people, they get traumatised. The novel *Mari* by Easterine Kire talks about the naked reality of the war that is fought in Kohima in particular and Nagaland in general. Though the Nagas were not directly associated with the war but the most affected were these people. They were victimised, marginalised and the people were used for the selfish purpose in the pre and the post war situation. Though they recover from the past events, the memory of the past bring them the suffering of the trauma.

Literature and Trauma

English literature in its essence, a unique branch of arts developed for the sake and the life of the humans. Literature has the concept of defining its own credibility through ages. It requires time, culture, society and the whole of the world to run its errands. It comprises of the life and activities of the entire world. Language and literature helps in bringing the people of all variations together under one roof. It has the capacity of creating influence in the readers which help in explore the culture, practices and its history too.

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Trauma as defined by the American Sociologist, Erikson in 1995, says that it is a blow that creates feelings and behaviour which can destroy the basic line of the community by destroying the social bonds which brings a sense of fear and depression among the people. Cultural trauma is an emotional and cognitive process which focuses on the narratives that specify the victim, committer, the relationship between them, and their suffering.

The Literature of the Northeast

The northeast region of India after independence had only three states - Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur and the other three states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam were separated with years. North eastern is a region of rich natural wealth and culture. This is a meeting place of different types of tribes and ethnic groups with various types of tradition, culture, language, religion and dialects. The region is also considered as the

melting pot where the yellow and the brown race meet together.

In the last two decades, the literature of this region has gained importance. The group of writers are mostly unsatisfied with the entropy of corrupt society. The writing in English in those regions started in the eighties and the nineties of the twentieth century and the writers that they are writing now are the first generation writers. The writings mainly focuses on the core issues faced by the people and they have a sense of alienation. Racial, Linguistic and cultural conflicts are found ravaging in those region. The most common issues covered by the writers of those region are identity crisis, the insurgency, the search for roots, claims for the political space, ecological concern and also the self-assertion. The writings of this region are acquiring its lime light and is becoming a central topic to be discussed by the chieftains.

Tilottoma Misra in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays* says that the seven states always have an awareness of the cultural loss and the recovery followed by the loss. Each and every community and the tribal group through their linguistic talent, oral tradition and written communication communicated in its own unique way. Some of the important writers of the north-eastern region are Temsula Ao, Parishmita Deb Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, Dr. Mamani Roysom Goswami, Lummer Dei, Mamang Dai, Nayakanta Baruah, Pijush Routh, Niranjana Chakma, Easterine Kire, etc.

About the Author - Easterine Kire

The researcher has chosen the author Easterine Kire Iralu from Nagaland, born on March 29, 1959. She was appointed as the editor in the State Government of Nagaland's Directorate of Information and Publicity for two years. After two years she joined as a professor in Kohima College, Shillong. Her first collection of poems, *Kelhoukevira* which was the first to be published in English by a Naga poet. In 2003, she wrote a book in

collaboration with an Australian co-author named Ernie Wombat. The book introduces Nagaland to the readers through the eyes of an animal.

Kire published her first novel *A Naga Village Remembered* in 2003. Her second novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy* in the year 2007. Then her novels were *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2013), *When the River Sleeps* (2015), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *Don't Run my Love* (2017), *Life on Hold* and *Walking the Roadless Road* (2019).

Mari - A Gentle Love Story

The novel *Mari* (2010) is a gentle love story which is happening in the midst of violence. It is the story of a young girl caught in the midst of the battle where her family is dispersed and is been forced to the village. It was a battle that ended the Japanese invasion of India during the World War II. It started from April 4 of 1944 and ended in June 22 of the same year. Separated from her parents she has the responsibility of taking care of her siblings.

Mari and her four sisters had to move from one hide to another to escape the soldiers. They fed on green plants and sheltered in cattle sheds. Throughout the war she was longing for her fiancé, a British sergeant who is been fighting in the midst of the fight in Kohima and is been shot dead just before the day of the siege for the village was released. Finally the sisters reach the village and the things started to change. It is a story not only of Mari but of Kohima and its people.

Easterin Kire's novel *Mari* gives a detailed description of life and the people of Kohima before, during and after the World War II. Khrielieviu Mari O'Leary, the eldest sister of the author's mother narrates the story. The novel expresses the difficulties faced by the people of the region. The life of the Nagas was completed in one line by the author as "Growing up, falling in love, war, homelessness, starvation, death and parting and finally, peace" (10). The people of the region have very little memory of how did they have their life before the war.

The author says that "Reminiscing about the war years is very common with a certain generation in Kohima Indeed, it was such for those who lived through it for Kohima was never the same again" (11). Though the state had development with the building of roads and houses, the people faced depression and fear whenever they heard any sound of helicopters or jeep of soldiers. The army of the British entered the state in the middle of 1942. Dimapur-Kohima highway were used for the movement of British army convoys.

The beginning of fear as referred by the narrator, "The thing that alarmed us most was the occasional sound of distant gunfire at the end of 1942" (34). The school students were announced holiday and were taught with safety measures about digging trenches and what to do if they been caught in the middle of the war. As Nagas watched the increase in number of soldiers and the army camps, they had their first encounter how a war will be.

The narrator falls in love with a British army soldier and her longing for her love and crossing every single day whenever they hear about war. The lover taking her to army camps and the description of the camps and the lives of the soldiers tells about how cruel was the war and the consequences they face. Mari narrates her longing to meet her lover and the gap she needs to wait to look into the eyes of him with love. She tells about the fear if she would meet him after knowing that he has gone to fight against the troops of Japanese. Her wait may take a week, a month or no particular time period too.

War Kindles Identity Quest

The customs and the many of the myths the community people follow were stopped. The myths, tradition, rituals and the formal ceremonies took a change of course during the war. The war is the most important reason for the people of that culture to search for their identity. The couple Mari and her lover Victor were waiting for their marriage to be held at the church. The war time explained by the author as,

By the end of the March, Kohima was like a ghost town The traders at Kohima, who were mostly plainsmen, had fled to Dimapur and beyond, having sold their shops or closed down their shutters in the general panic that had seized the town The local people escaped to the Angami villages in the north,

to Chieswema, Rukhroma and other northern villages where they could live in relative safety. (62)

The fear they experience when they have a look at the aeroplanes flying above their heads is narrated as, "There were three aeroplanes but they were flying too high for us to see which side they belonged to. But the whine of aircraft directly above our heads brought home the truth that Kohima was too exposed to shelling from either side" (69). The whole of Kohima was shattered in war when they looked at the village from distance and they found that Kohima was filled with thick, black smoke.

Seeing Kohima burn was a great shock to all of us and showed how vulnerable the British forces were. Now the villagers of Chieswema were trying to decide where they could go to seek refuge. It was paradoxical that a village that had offered refuge to others, should now be worrying about seeking refuge itself. (74)

The Fear of Life

The people of the region experienced fear and they moved away from the village and they found shelter in the forest with very less food or sometimes taking tree leaves and plants as food and sometimes the animals. They were afraid of the animals during sleep. They used moon light to look in the dark to find way. The men took turns to keep an eye on the animals when the women were asleep. It was for months they had to be away at the forest to get shelter.

In the dry months of March and April, up until early May, very few edible herbs are to be found in the woods. There are no fruits in this season either, no fish in the dry or partially dry streams. We were hungry and lonely. The cold at night added to our woes. (84)

They were frightened by the look at the Japanese soldiers because as Mari says "We had also heard stories of women molested by them, which were spoken of in whispers among the elders, because rape was considered the most heinous of crimes and we had known very little of it before the Japanese came" (87). As Mari says the human life was taken for granted. They were killed from time to time. The family felt almost numb to the sounds of the bullet. "Bullets flew over our heads and all around us. But we had reached a stage where there was such ennui in all of us, we didn't really seem to care whether we died of a Japanese bullet or a British bullet" (100). As they walk through the jungle path they find dead bodies of the soldiers.

Mari and her emaciated sisters returned to Kohima, to find their house but they found only three wooden posts being left standing in their house. The dead bodies were also found in the streets and the British soldiers were busy burying them. Though the village and the state was stuck with cultural traumatic events, they had their resilience to build back their lives and be happy with what they have in hands. Mari's words shows the resilient spirit of the village people,

We witnessed the amazingly resilient spirit of our people in those days. The building of houses became a communal activity never thought our land would recover from the toll the war had taken on it The Angami spirit was a resilient one. People observed long months of mourning for their dead but got on with the business of life determinedly But after the period of mourning was over, further grieving was discouraged After a great calamity, our people always tried their best to keep their spirits up. That was the way of our people. (124-128)

CONCLUSION

The novel *Mari* is much more than the battle of Kohima, it is a tale of young mother who dares to live for the sake of her child whereas she lost her fiancé in the war and the novel is the first ever account of an insider. Even though Easterine Kire is not a historian, she did not miss to mention any historical facts. She mixes history and human emotions in her narrative. Kire portrays the naked reality of the war that is fought in Kohima in particular and Nagaland in general. Though the Nagas were not directly associated with the war but the most affected were these people. They were victimised, marginalised and the people were used for the selfish purpose in the pre and the post war situation. Though they recover from the past events, the memory of the past bring them the suffering of the trauma.

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