

**Dissecting The Naga Life Through The Texture Of The Novel A  
Respectable Woman By Easterine Kire**

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**Abstract**

This present article aims historical aspects of Naga life through the novel A Respectable Woman. It is a coming of age story rendered through three sections. Kire tries to trace the history of the past and the present Nagaland. The story is set on the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of Kohima during second world war and the post world war traumatic years. While probing into the history of Nagaland, one can find that they were an isolated group for centuries and they began to contact the outside world only in the second half of the 19th century, due to positive influence of the British administrators and American Missionaries.

**Keywords:** Easterine Kire, Nagaland, A Respectable Woman

Dissecting the Naga life through the texture of the novel

A Respectable Woman by EasterineKire

EasterineKireIralu is a versatile Naga poet ,novelist, short story writer, a folklorist and as performer, who currently lives in Northern Norway. Majority of her writings concentrate on the live realities of Nagaland. The immense love for her native land and culture is clearly depicted in her writings. In a conversation with Babli Malic, she once reveled her responsibility as a writer from Nagaland.

“ I am inspired, not influenced, to write my life and the people who I meet in life...I feel responsible only to a certain extent.”(EasterineKire: In conversation with BabliMallick 2)

Kire became an acclaimed writer through her writings such as “A Naga Village Remembered(2003)” “A Terrible Matriarchy”(2013) “Mari”(2010) “Bitter Wormwood”(2011) “Don’t Run My Love”(2017) and“ A Respectable Woman”(2019) . Many of her books are translated to Nepali, Croatian, Uzbek, German and Norwegian languages .Within a short span Kire received many prestigious awards such as Free word Prize(2013), Hindu Literary Prize(2015), Tata Book of the Year Award(2017), and Balsahithya Puraskar (2018) . Her writing style always expresses a strong political awareness by addressing issues such as identity and ethnicity .

This present article aims historical aspects of Naga life through the novel A Respectable Woman. This historical novel is intertwined with the memories of war and the transformation of Kohima through the stories of two women. The novel portrays the life of Naga people during pre and post-World War second . It is a coming of age story rendered through three sections. Kire tries to trace the history of the past and the present

Nagaland. The story is set on the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of Kohima during second world war and the post world war traumatic years.

While probing into the history of Nagaland, one can find that they were an isolated group for centuries and they began to contact the outside world only in the second half of the 19th century, due to positive influence of the British administrators and American Missionaries. Nagaland witnessed two world wars during the British rule. Other than this, the battle of Kohima and the Japanese invasion of Kohima during the second world war created great unrest in her hilltops.

The Japanese invasion of India via the Naga hills was a tumultuous time in both the Northern Angami villages and the Southern Angami villages, where they experienced occupation, bombing starvation and displacement on a scale they had never known before.(Walking the Road less Road 217)

Many villages were bombed and many had to evacuate their homes. Frequent wars made the land at the verge of total disruption and it disturbed the normal flow of life. The cap town Kohima was notorious as a ripe ground for battling even from its olden days.

Easterine Kire's latest novel *A Respectable Women* is set at Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. This stirring novel provides a clear picture of Nagaland to the readers. All the characters of this novel belong to the Angami tribe. The novel also displaces the superstitious belief of the Nagas about the spirits of the dead soldiers frequently haunting the plains and the hills of Nagaland. The author also very skillfully highlights the revolt

bravely put forth by the naga activist against the liquor prohibition act. All the above incidents are intertwined with the lives of two women, Khonuo and Kevinuo.

Gliding through the faint memories of Nagaland, Kevinuo's mother Khonuo, begins the story in second person narration. The narrator's growth, marriages, unexpected deaths, changes in the society, all are set against the backdrop of Nagaland's socio-political history. Through this novel, Kire blends history and memory to portray the story of a family and of a land.

The first section of the novel reveals the aftermath of World War II and through the faint memory of Khonuo. And the second part deals with the narrator's life story starting with her birth then education, friendship, family, society, unexpected deaths etc. The third half of the novel telling about the challenge she takes in her life.

Right from the opening, the author very adeptly delineates the bitter memories of post-world war Kohima. Even though there were war and other atrocities, the British government always tried to protect the Naga people and their land. Before the outbreak of the war itself, the British government had placed them on the safe side. And once the war is over, they keep to provide them with all their necessities such as rebuilding their roofs, hospitals, schools, shops, and roads. When India got independence in 1947, Britishers were forced to get away from India. At that moment many of Nagas felt orphaned, because the British government had aided and abetted them that much, for their betterment.

“it was a strange feeling. Many of our people had not known any government other than the British, so when they left our hills, many people felt orphaned.... ‘our parents are living us’. It was said with sadness and a sense of helplessness.”(57 A Respectable Woman)

The Simon Commission that took place on 10th January 1929 clearly states that, ‘the Nagas be under the control of the British and be excluded from proposed changes to the Indian Constitution.’(Walking the Road less Road 238) They were not at all ready to join the Indian union.

Although India got independence in 1947, Nagaland was not at all a separate state. So their leaders protested against Indian government and refused to join the Indian union. As a result many Nagas joined the Naga army to fight against the Indian government. As far as the Nagas are concerned, that period was a period of terror, bloodshed and violence.

The long history of brutal military occupation has been traced as one of the major factors behind feelings of emasculation and frustration experienced by a section of males in Nagaland.( 180 A Respectable Woman)

Through that brutality many parents lost their children, many children lost their parents, and many young ladies became widows.

The novel also highlights the birth and the early development of the narrator, Kevinuo. The little Kevinuo lives in a politically and socially changed Nagaland, where she learns how modernity and developments like schools, colleges, hospitals, etc dripped

into her soil. By the arrival of radio broadcasting, the world came in people's homes. The advent of electricity began to illuminate their lives. Soon there came alcohol as an evil eye. It cramped the society's peace and prosperity. The heart wrenching story of Kevinuo's friend's family life, untimely deaths of youngsters, and the bitter story of a notorious drunkard Vilhoulie explains the apt evidence of alcohol addiction.

The novel throws light on the reason why this particular title has been taken. This is a story of a woman who challenges the traditional notions of Angami society. They considered women are meant to be quiet in the home for taking care of her husband and children. Even though he is a person who drinks too much and beat her all the time, she is obliged to suffer and whom were considered as a respectable woman. And through adopting her friend's daughter Uvi she proves to the society that, a lady can also bring up a child even outside marriage.

A Respectable women is a book that touches on different phases of Naga History. It weaves together the stories of two generations with Nagaland's un written history. Through this novel, Kire addresses important factors that helped their city grow into a modern version.

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