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DEVASTATING EFFECTS AND REPERCUSSIONS OF WAR: A STUDY OF EASTERINE KIRE'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

War, an enemy of progress, outwardly results the total devastation of the structure of human lives and properties. In general, the impact of war is wide spread and long-lasting. Men involved in war besides the citizens suffer a great deal. In case of women and children one can envisage many discernable atrocities. The effects of war include physical and psychological scars on children, on women, and a decrease in population. Other consequences other than death are disability, malnutrition, damage or loss of infrastructure amenities, economic decline, mental illness, and mistrust among dissenting citizens. People's lives and every day activities are at stake. This paper highlights the impact of war and its consequences on the lives of Naga People in the select works of Easterine Kire. The present paper particularly centres around the brutalities of the war and post war situations as well as struggles of Naga men, women and children.

Keywords: War, effects, devastation, impact, consequences, brutalities of war on Naga men, women and children.

Easterine Kire, the first and the most prolific writer of Nagaland, is also a novelist and short story writer. She has many awards under her belt. Her novel *Bitter Warm Wood* was short listed for the Hindu prize in 2013, another novel *When The River Sleeps* won the Hindu prize in 2015. In 2018, her novel *The son of The Thunderland* brought her Bal Sahitya Puraskar. Besides the Tata literature live Book of the year 2007, she was awarded the Governor's medal for excellence in Naga literature in 2011.

Easterine Kire's writings depict not only an enchanting and vibrant Naga culture which is evident from the oral and historical narratives of Nagaland that has always fascinated the outside world, but also bespeak of the experiences and the struggles faced by the Naga people. Kire was deeply concerned with the writings about the sufferings undergone by the native people of Nagaland. The stress of living during the fierce war between Indian Army and Naga people was personally felt by the writer.

During the British rule, the Nagas saw two wars. The impact of World War-I was great. During the Second World War, Kohima became the main land of the war. It was the battle of Kohima, where the Japanese dominated Burma and infiltrated the territory of Kohima. As a result, the Kohima people witnessed the brutalities of Japanese army.

After the two great wars, the Nagas fought with the Indian Government for the status of an Independent Nation. Thus the Nagas underwent a lot of struggles and sufferings during the war times.

In her maiden novel, *Sky is My Father*, Kire portrayed the legendary battle between the little warrior village of Khonoma and Britain in the 19th century during 1832-1880. The Angami warriors of Khonoma were deeply connected to their land who clashed with the British a number of times, stirring other villages to join them. Despite being outnumbered and ill equipped, Khonoma bravely held out the longest resistance against the British eventually leading to a verbal peace treaty in 1880.

Vipiano's warrior husband gets killed by the white men's soldier while riding a neighbouring village. Men of Khonoma were known for their, valour and bravery in war. And so, many women were widowed early by the love of war among men. Her heart constricted every time she saw a warrior's burial house. She felt the pain of her husband's death. Being a single parent, she becomes a stern mother, wise teacher and strong woman who all alone brings up her two young boys into well able-bodied men, imbibed in them a set of customs and morals of the Naga people. Her elder son Levi, eighteen year old boy, who triumphed many a battle sports, also an avid wrestler gets captured by a British soldier when Khonoma people go on a raid to nearby village. Vipiano mourns Levi's absence every day, hopelessly thinking that she would never see him again. After six years of imprisonment Levi returns home. Vipiano shouts with joy and rushes to him to caress his head. Then

"...tears streamed down her face and she alternated between weeping and smiling, so happy was she at her son's return". Pg: 47

Lato, the younger son witnesses how his mother had struggled to bring up her sons as a young widow, and saw her spending sleepless nights after the demise of their father. So, Lato refuses to marry in order to take care of his mother.

Her another novel, *Mari (2010)* is an engrossing tale of World War-II and its aftermath effects in the Naga Hills. In the beginning of the novel, the author gives the following note:

"Remarkable thing about the Second World War is still referred to as The War by the Nagas, it completely altered the lives of Naga people in and around Kohima."

For author, it's almost equivalent to the big bang, the beginning of all life. Kire calls the battle of Kohima 'The Stalingrad of the East'.

The protagonist Mari witnesses the horrors of the war and shares her experiences. It's about the journey of her growth from a naive girl into a matured woman, set in the midst of violence of forgotten battle of Kohima. Her family gets dispersed, and they are forced to leave their village home. As the town was no longer safe for the civilians Mari expresses,

"...except the army jeeps that drive past in a tearing hurry, there was no sign of life in Kohima. There were some stray dogs on the streets. That was all. The few who remained behind were in the process of either leaving or packing to leave."

Pg : 62,63

Through the weeks of the war, the young girl along with her younger sisters, moves from one hiding place to another to escape the Japanese soldiers. Facing shortage on food, they forage for herbs in the forest and hide themselves in cattle sheds. During those long nights they have become accustomed to the intermittent sounds of rifle shots and exploding grenades. The sounds of intense gunfire terrify them leading to sleepless nights for them.

Being townies, it was difficult for Mari and her sisters to stay in sheds, huts and running through the forests. One moonless scary night, they heard the sound of a tiger growling outside. Mari pretended that she was sleeping. In reality she could smell the tiger's presence all night. Some times while walking on the jungle paths, they came across wounded army. Some soldiers

had their arms in slings, some others with blood soaked bandages. At times Mari felt nauseated at the sight of fresh blood on wounded soldiers. Immensely exhausted from the lack of food and proper sleep, all they wanted was war to come to an end.

Throughout this difficult time, Mari longs for her fiancé Victor who is fighting in Kohima against the Japanese. He is shot dead by the sniper just a day before the siege of Kohima is lifted. At some point, she wanted to die with Vic. But a great love will choose life in spite of terrible pain. She resolves to carry and take care of Victor's child as a token of their love. At the age of 18, she becomes mother. By the end of March, 1944, Kohima was like a ghost town. She could not believe Kohima becoming the carnage of human destruction. Mari's house was badly damaged by bombing. They found unexploded mortar shells, used cartridges and other unused ammunition in and around their house. They spent hours collecting bullets in their lands. Mari with heavy heart expresses,

"Seeing Kohima burn was a great shock to all of us. It was paradoxical that a village that had offered refuge to others, should now be worrying about seeking refuge itself."
Pg : 74

After a few months, Dickie a British soldier comes into Mari's life, and fathers her second child. After India became Independent. Dic was ordered to leave for England. Dic put forth two choices before Mari either to accompany him to England along with her two daughters or to stay with her parents. Mari felt that she was too young to leave her parents, so decided to stay with her parents. Later, joins a Nursing college and becomes a nurse. She marries Pat and lives with him for forty two years.

"Mari is not just Mari's story. It's the story of Kohima and its people. The Kohima war cemetery is one example of it. The following is the inscription on the war memorial of the 2nd division of the Kohima war cemetery :

When you go home, tell them of us and say for your tomorrow, we gave our today"
Author's note

Kire's recent novel, *A Respectable Woman* (2019) sensitively gauges the psychological impact of war on people. This novel is intertwined with the bitter memories of the World War- II, and transformation of Kohima through the stories of mother and her daughter respectively.

Mother Azuo, a school teacher, at the very outset narrates to her eighteen year old daughter Kevinuo about the horrible and terrible experiences of war that she and her members of family have undergone. Azuo paints a poignant picture of the lives devastated and the efforts taken by their community to recover to normalcy from the ruins.

"When we returned after the war, nothing was left standing. The place was unrecognizable. There was tin strewn on the ground, and a few burnt planks were all that left of our house. We cried when we saw the total destruction the war had brought. In reality no house had escaped bombing."
Pg: 9

Azuo's brother, Amo who joined the British army to fight against the Japanese, had a war wound. It was a splinter, very close to his heart. Doctors were unable to operate the wound as it was too dangerous. After the splinter gets punctured, Amo dies at the age of 39. Their mother Atsa, heart broken by son's death, dies in a few years. A year later Atsa's husband dies too. Then Azuo mourns,

"...It was like the very life of the house had come to an end." Pg : 45

Azuo's generation had seen the devastation of war, lost everything, homes, loved ones almost overnight. Azuo describes to Kevinuo,

“...During the war, our skies were filled with all sorts of planes, some would drop rations, some dropped leaflets, and some bombed the areas where the Japanese were reported to be camping...There were many bodies of dead soldiers when we returned as the army had not been able to clear them all. People found dead Japanese soldiers in the fields.”

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After the war the British laid roads, built hospitals, missionary schools and churches. The impact of post-colonialism started to stretch its claws on the living style of Kohima people. Moreover, the fresh tension prevails as the Naga underground starts to fight against Indian government for separate nation. Amidst all this, Kevinuo becomes a school teacher, adopts an orphan, remains unmarried and becomes a respectable woman.

In the first novel, *Sky is My Father*, prior to the oral treaty between the British and the village people, the whole village of Khonoma is burnt by the British. But the villagers rebuilt the village within a span of a year. In other two novels, both set in Kohima, the post-war Kohima takes after necropolis, yet the town soon transforms into a modern town. By analyzing the above three novels of Kire, we can understand that the spirit of Naga people is much greater than the agony left by wars. The people of Nagaland chose love and life in spite of pain and loss, by rising above the obstacles of war.

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