



Original Article

Traditional Knowledge System and Cultural Dimensions of Sustainability in Easterine Kire's Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered

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Abstract

The word traditional knowledge system refers to community-based, cumulative bodies of wisdom passed down orally across generations, covering areas like agriculture, medicine, ecology, and spirituality. India is a vast country with varied cultural societies. Each society has a unique and peculiar culture. And each culture follows a traditional knowledge system with a sustainability dimension. Easterine Kire is the Nagaland poet and novelist. Her writings revolve around the people and environment of Nagaland. In the novel *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* Easterine Kire has presented Nagaland people and its vibrant culture. It was the first novel published by a Naga writer in English in 2003. In the novel, Kire says that if we break the taboos, we break ourselves and bring harm to ourselves. Throughout the novel, we can observe the interaction between human beings and their traditional knowledge system with a sustainability dimension in the Nagaland culture.

Keywords: traditional knowledge system, sustainability and culture.

Introduction

Traditional knowledge systems represent the accumulated wisdom, practices, beliefs, and cultural values developed by communities over generations through close interaction with their natural and social environments. These systems encompass diverse fields such as agriculture, healthcare, environmental conservation, spirituality, and social governance, serving as essential frameworks for sustainable living. In contemporary sustainability discourse, traditional knowledge has gained increasing recognition for its role in promoting ecological balance, cultural continuity, and community resilience.

Literature serves as an important medium for preserving and examining indigenous knowledge systems and their relationship with sustainability. Among contemporary Indian writers, Easterine Kire occupies a significant place for her vivid portrayal of Naga culture, history, and traditions. Her novel *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* offers a valuable insight into the cultural practices, taboos, customs, and ecological consciousness of the Naga people. Set against the backdrop of the historic village of Khonoma, the novel explores how traditional beliefs and communal practices regulate human behavior and maintain harmony between individuals, society, and nature.

This paper examines the traditional knowledge system depicted in *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and analyzes its cultural dimensions of sustainability. Through the representation of taboos, rituals, social obligations, and environmental ethics, Kire highlights the significance of indigenous knowledge in fostering social cohesion and sustainable living. The study argues that the novel not only preserves Naga cultural heritage but also demonstrates how traditional practices contribute to the well-being and sustainability of the community.

Traditional Knowledge System and Cultural Dimensions of Sustainability in Easterine Kire's Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered

The word traditional knowledge system refers to community-based, cumulative bodies of wisdom passed down orally across generations, covering areas like agriculture, medicine, ecology, and spirituality. India is a vast country with varied cultural societies. Each society has a unique and peculiar culture. And each culture follows a traditional knowledge system with a sustainability dimension. Easterine Kire is the Nagaland poet, novelist, short-story writer and a writer of children's books.

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Her novels include *Son of the Thundercloud*, *Bitter Wormwood* and *When the River Sleeps*. Easterine Kire's writings revolve around the people and environment of Nagaland. Kire's work has been translated into German, Croatian, Uzbek, Norwegian and Nepali. In 2011 she was awarded the Governor's medal for excellence in Naga literature. *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village remembered* was the first Naga novel to appear in English. In the introduction of the novel, *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* Kire says that Khonoma forms a naturally fortified place by the mountainous barrier. The people living in the Khonoma village had a deep connection with the land, their taboos and they took pride in fighting and toiling for it. The novel also centers on the battle between Britain and the little warrior village of Khonoma. In the nineteenth century, Khonoma is a little village surrounded by mountains and it is seen in the northern Angami region between Meriema and Chieswema. In the first chapter, the themes of the traditional knowledge system with a sustainability dimension are well expressed with the death of Kovi's wife. Kovi lives with his wife and a daughter in the village of Khonoma. His wife dies with the delivery of another baby. In the death of his wife, Kovi cannot express his emotions through the tears as it was taboo. "No, no mourning for a lashu death, it is taboo.... The strictest of taboos was upon the lashu death. No mourning of the dead." (Kire, 6). The word lashu refers to the death of women during delivery. And the dead women are denied funeral rites as it was the strict taboo followed by Khonoma villagers in Nagaland. Kovi and his daughter deeply grieved over the death but they cannot express their grief in public as it was taboo. In the beginning of the novel, Kelevizo alias Levi, an avid wrestler was seventeen and a half years old. He was the first son of vicha and vipiano. Levi's younger brother was lato. Levi and his age group have started to earn money or grain through the work in other people's agricultural lands. Vipiano knows that the traditional knowledge system and all the rituals have to be followed strictly by the villagers. She remembers that her father has said that if we break the taboos from our life, then we are breaking ourselves from the life. "If you break the taboos, you break yourself.... If you did not heed the taboos, you could live on unharmed for some years, but the day would soon come when the earth would open up to receive you before your time. And then, when that day struck, you went without the compassion of the village." (Kire, 14-15) Here we can understand that the people of Khonoma are carefully observing the traditional knowledge system as a part of life. The violation of the traditional knowledge system relates with the death of the individual and they do not receive compassion from the villagers. The people of Khonoma believe that in the Khunuo lievi day, that is a genna day to prevent damage to crops by animals, work should not be done throughout the village. It was their belief that if the people work on the day, their crops would be damaged by insects, birds and animals. The genna day refers to the no-work days and it was a cultural dimension of sustainability to avoid work on genna days. "No one violates a genna day; so the genna was death to those who defied it but life to those who abided by it." (Kire, 52) On the genna day, the villagers do not work in the agricultural fields and they take rest from field work. The genna day would bring death to those who defy it and it gives life to the people who abide by it. Through the cultural dimension of sustainability, we observe the social unity of people without inequalities. Kovi tells Levi that life was unpredictable and strange. So, the careful observation of the taboos would be much more important to have a long and fulfilled life. "Arrogance and pride kill. Be humble, heed the taboos and there is no reason why you should not have a full and long life." (Kire, 53) Kovi also tells that arrogance and pride are the vices of human beings and it kills us. The human beings should possess commiseration and humbleness in the mind. In analyzing the novel with the traditional knowledge system and the cultural dimension of sustainability themes, we can understand that the people of Khonoma have a social obligation towards the protection of their village. Through following a traditional knowledge system, the people take responsibility to guard their village and to earn great names for the village. Thus, we could understand that without arrogance and pride, the responsibility of manhood was to protect the social values and respect each other with cordiality. The careful observation of the traditional knowledge system and the cultural dimension of sustainability and the adherence of it would bring a sense of well-being and social integration to the society.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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