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Title: Significance of Oral Literature – A Scrutiny with Reference to *Son of the Thundercloud*
by Easterine Kire.

Abstract:

Oral literature plays a key role in the field of literature. Stories act as a medium to pass on the wisdom of one's culture from generation to generation and from country to country. It is filled with both acknowledged and mysterious history. It can be considered as a tapestry weaved by stories, myths, beliefs and legends. And so, it is necessary to support oral literature in every culture. Nagaland is a state in India which is rich in culture and tradition. Oral literature existed in every culture as water to earth once. But, modernisation generated a famine of stories and story tellers swallowing up the wisdom of oral literature. This paper emphasises the prominence of oral literature in every culture with reference to the Novel *Son of the Thundercloud*.

Key words: Oral culture, literature, Nagaland, stories, storytellers.

Significance of Oral Literature – A Scrutiny with Reference to *Son of the Thundercloud* by
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Oral literature plays a key role in the field of literature. Stories act as a medium to pass on the wisdom of one's culture from generation to generation and from country to country. It is filled with both acknowledged and mysterious history. It can be considered as a tapestry weaved by stories, myths, beliefs and legends. And so, it is necessary to support oral literature in every culture. Nagaland is a state in India which is rich in culture and tradition.

Easterine Kire, the winner of Sahithya Akademi's Bal Sahithya Puraskar Award and The Hindu Prize for Fiction, is from Kohima. She is a Naga writer, who brings out the realities of oral tradition and storytelling. Oral literature existed in every culture as water to earth once. But, modernisation generated a famine of stories and story tellers swallowing up the wisdom of oral literature. This paper emphasises the prominence of oral literature in every culture with reference to the Novel *Son of the Thundercloud* .

Oral literature is an umbrella term which includes folktales, epic poems, spells, legends, Parables, puzzles, mantras, creation tales, myths, farces, word games, music, riddles and life histories. It is inevitable to say that oral literature plays a significant role in every culture. The historical and cultural reminiscences of a community is conserved through oral literature. There is revitalisation of storytelling techniques in the North East India by the writers like Easterine Kire, Mayangnokcha Ao, Temsula Ao, Anungla Zoe Longkumar, Avinuo Kire, Vishu Rita Krocha. In the culture of Nagaland, before print literature, storytelling culture is the one that has been dominating pervading the life of the Indigenous people.

The Canadian Encyclopedia suggests that "the term *oral literature* is sometimes used interchangeably with *folklore*, but it usually has a broader focus. The expression is self-contradictory: literature, strictly speaking, is that which is written down; but the term is used here to emphasize the imaginative creativity and conventional structures that mark oral discourse too. (Defenitions)

Zeliang tribes give much prominence to gesticulation, music and dance. So, they amalgamated these with their story telling technique. When there is a conversation about the Naga literature; the folk tales, conflict tales or war tales emanate in mind. "Oral narratives are intricately intertwined with the lives of the tribal people that help in transferring the community's cultural ethos and historical past to the succeeding generation" (Priyadharshini). The Nagaland tribal culture possesses a number of mythical and folklore stories which acts as a bridge that connects the present world to the past. They are rich with stories, legends and fables. According to Avinuo kire who is a writer as well as a teacher from Kohima, "Nagas are highly oral indigenous society and the older generation who lived the oral tradition are natural born story tellers" (Surbhi). These stories act as a part of their culture and it also expresses the identity of these people.

Kire, in her literary works, articulates the reputation of oral literature. At present, she lives in the Northern Norway but her writings represent the lived reality of the Nagaland people. In an interview, she has recorded the importance of the written form of oral literature

of the people of Nagaland. According to her, oral literature or oral narratives has a major role in her culture. As the storytelling technique is moving towards extinct, oral narratives might be lost. So, when the oral narratives take a written form, it would help the younger generation of the Naga people to know how wealthy their culture is. The words of Kire are as follows. “I kept writing because, I felt we needed to create written Naga literature. We have so many oral narratives but with oral dying out, it’s all going to be lost” (qtd in Sharma). Kire, while communicating with the researcher via email, states that she would be very grateful to the story tellers. She added that, the fundamental for the plots of her novels is the stories told by the story tellers. She expresses her gratitude towards them.

The writers of the indigenous culture spread over the technique of incorporating the words that are orally used by the people. The readers who are not much aware of the social background can also easily understand the literary text with the help of such oral words.

Wolfgang Hochbruk points out that in texts written by writer belonging to Indigenous communities there is a strong impression that the continuation of the traditional orality is desired by the text. For instance, in the novel, Kire employs scenes and passage which make use of materials from the oral tradition in such a way that makes the orality of the material easily recognizable even by members of those communities who do not have any intimate knowledge of the societies depicted in the text. (qtd. in Sharma)

The stories told by the old people to the younger generation act as a mode of passing the traditions and culture of the Nagaland to the hands of future. “Talking about the importance of stories the Nigerian storytellers Ben Okri has stated; “Stories can be either bacteria or light; they can infect a system or illuminate a world” (Okri 1997: 47). Stories in the context of the Naga society are those which have been transferred orally through generations” (Sharma). The stories which spread the evil qualities must not be reinvigorated. But the stories that create the enlightenment in the hearts must be treasured. Such stories must be sown in every hearts.

Kire’s novel *Son of the Thundercloud* is based on an oral story told by the ancient story tellers. It is about a lone sojourner named Pelvesto who has lost all his relatives to the forbidding famine, travels crossing various lands and finally reaches the mystic land which is near to the village of weavers. This village is considered as a safe heaven. Even in the abysmal famine, the people in the village of weavers could find some food and survived. The stories heard by Pelvesto on his journey generate a spiritual awakening in his heart. He recognises the tie between nature and human as well as the significance of hope in one’s life

through these stories. The beauty of their culture has been clearly expounded through the stories Pelvesto heard on his way to the village of weavers. This novel is based on a particular legend that, “One afternoon, a raindrop fell on her from the sky. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son...” (Kire 39). Mesanuo who has lost her husband and seven sons to a tiger, lived as a tiger widow. One day a raindrop fell on her and she gave birth to Rhalie who killed the Tiger. Pelvesto is the one who guided Rhalie and taught the method of using the spear to him. The whole novel revolves around the legend of the son of the thundercloud. It is a story that has been spread orally among the people for years. The people believe in this story that when their saviour comes, they will be free of all their troubles.

Kire through this novel clearly explicates that due to the murder of the story tellers, the people have lost their hope in themselves. She expresses that, the famine represented in the novel is about the famine of stories. It is from the stories told by the two sisters, Pelvesto acquired knowledge. Until the birth of Rhalie, no one believed on the prophecy and the people lost hope except the two sisters who lived on hope. When Kire considers the famine as the famine of stories, the birth of Rhalie can be considered as the re-birth of the oral literature in the form of written literature or the re-birth of the stories. The words of Kire are as follows, “I’m talking about the famine of stories and songs. They killed all the storytellers who tried to tell them about the Son of the Thundercloud. They killed hope” (48).

Kire also states that in ancient days, the story tellers would move from one region to other spreading their culture and wisdom to various places. They also spread hope and happiness in the mind of every people which helps the people to overcome every situation. Through the moral stories, they purify the mind of the people. Through the stories of the brave men, they strengthen the heart of the people. Through the religious stories, the soul has been purified. Stories chase away the evils.

‘Dead, Killed, all killed by the dark ones, those who did not want them to transform people’s minds with their stories’... ‘Because the people sought to be free whenever they heard the stories. Free of fear, free of shame and constant desire. Without the stories, people believed they were destined to suffer, and they allowed the dark ones to enslave their minds and fill them with fear and sorrow and despair until they died’.
(63)

Kire expresses her anger against the ones who prevent the story tellers from telling the stories. Stories act as a best medium to pour wisdom on one’s mind. It is a fact that, one can understand anything when it has been expressed through stories. As oral literature degrades, the story telling also lost its popularity. This in turn loses the hope in the hearts of every

human being. Modernisation, in a way, acts as a demon that repels people from the world of stories. Telling stories of our ancestors would inspire them to live life to the fullest. In modern days, everyone is busy that they borrow time from the next day. No one has time to listen to the stories and to tell stories to their children. Another downside for the deterioration of the oral literature is that unlike ancient days, these days the children are away from their grandparents who are the major sources of the stories. This leads to the famine of stories among the younger generation.

Oral literature is filled with the wisdom of one's culture and tradition. It acts as the hormone that stimulates the growth of every culture and to spread its branch upon the world. The children would gain knowledge about their culture and tradition through the stories that have been showered upon them by their parents and grandparents. It is obligatory that there must be a renaissance of the oral literature in the form of written literature or any other genres. So that, the future generations would be wise enough to live their life blissfully.

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