

Article

## Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*: Indigenous Wisdom and Ecological Harmony

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**Abstract:** Easterin Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* is a poignant narrative where the spiritual, mythical, and ecological worlds come together to narrate the journey of Pele across these worlds. Pele is a frame narrator in the novel who relates the physical world to the mystical world. The narrative, rich in Naga history and myths, highlights the man-nature relationship and simultaneously advocates for ecological sustainability. The paper explores how, through her poetic storytelling, Kire blends the themes of man-nature interconnectedness, folklore, and contemporary environmental concerns. Through the canon of indigenous myths and folklores, Kire challenges the anthropocentric view often seen in the Western perspective. The paper analyzes how ancient knowledge and wisdom are still relevant to the modern digitized world, how this wisdom is inherently restorative, and provides solutions for post-traditional problems. Using the theoretical framework of Wild Systems Theory (WST), a cognitive and philosophical theory, the paper delves into how living organisms (in this case, human beings) are self-sustaining systems placed in an energetically charged natural context. *Son of the Thundercloud* subverts the order of global and indigenous, natural and spiritual, and man-made. He tries to bridge the gaps through a re-imagined connection of environmental and spiritual harmony.

**Keywords:** Indigenous wisdom; Environmental Consciousness; Wild System Theory; Environmental Stewardship; Embeddedness; Nested hierarchies

## Introduction

*Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), a novel by Easterine Kire, takes you on a mythical journey through the lush world of Nagaland, where nature, ancient wisdom, and modernity are intricately interwoven and presented. The story is not about the search for a destination for a directionless man; rather, it is about his journey through which he learns vital life lessons. It is a story of a man, three sisters who are hundreds of years old, and the society. His experiences and interactions are actually the lessons for him and for us. These lessons enlighten us about the sanctity and relevance of ancient wisdom in the modern chaotic world. The novel compels us to think about every connotation of progress. It makes us question our choices and our greed for more. It also shows the repercussions of our actions on nature and, consequently, on us.

*Son of the Thundercloud* is a story of Pelevotso, the little one, the name given by his prophetic grandmother. She wanted him to go out on different journeys as she had envisioned greatness for her grandson, but the parents did not let him go out of his own village, Nialhuo. Pele lives in the village with his family till the time terrible famine strikes. Left as a lone survivor in his family, he sets out on a road to nowhere. "He did not know what he wanted; except hunger, thirst, and physical pain, he felt nothing. The journey could take him anywhere, or nowhere" (Kire 17). During the course of wanderings, he comes across barrenness, death, ruin, and directions to the Village of Weaver. It is on his pursuit of this village that he meets three sisters, Kethonuo, Siedze, and Mesanuo, who are hundreds of years old. The youngest one, Mesanuo, is known as 'tiger widow' and is the one who gives birth to the son of the thundercloud, Rhaliuetuo. However, the story is not about Rhaliuetuo; it is about Pele and his quest. True to his name, he remains loyal to his loved ones till the end.

*Son of the Thundercloud* is abundant with Naga myths, folklore, and taboos. However, Kire presents them as age-old natural wisdom that can be a panacea for the modern artificial ills. The narrative resonates with Stuart Cooke's argument that Indigenous knowledge systems should be viewed "not as part of a reactionary anti-modern form of Romanticism, but as an alternative, syncretic understanding of the contemporary, in which the past is partner to the present in the formation of future possibility" (Cooke, 2018). In *Son of the Thundercloud*, every single element of the story is a character in itself that symbolically contributes to the construction of the human narrative. Nature does not function just as a scenic background. However, it is a character, in its different elements like rain, thunder, barrenness, that reminds us that instead of having an anthropocentric view, we should have an eco-centric perspective. Our race can survive and sustain if we are in harmonious communion with the natural world, through ancient wisdom.

The concept of time and temporality is beautifully explored in the novel. There is a thin, rather blurry line of distinction between the physical and mythical world. Pele transcends the time and boundary of the physical world. The three sisters are hundreds of years old; their village has been experiencing drought for almost seven hundred years. Kethonuo and Siedze are the only inhabitants of the village Noune. Their frail appearance gives them a semblance of spirits. The widespread barrenness, death, ruins,

and decay not only tell about the measure of time, but also represent the temporality of life. It not only indicates the cyclical nature of life but also shows that death is important for growth and regeneration. "There is another thing about life... People grow up, grow old, and die so that new people can take their place. Moreover, before they die, they are meant to do some things. That is the reason why we are here in the first place." (Kire 27) Kire has beautifully crafted a meta-narrative in which ancient tribal knowledge and wisdom are conveyed in oral tradition, in the form of folklores, myths, and legends. The knowledge has been either relayed from generation to generation or gained through experiences. The wisdom of three sisters becomes the treasure trove of knowledge for Pele, a contemporary being, and guides him through the challenges of life, world, and environment. The knowledge is not disseminated through words only; it is also imparted through practices- farming practices, community practices, and survival practices. These practices embody patience, skills, and symbiotic association between man and man and man and nature. These traditional customs underscore the sharp contrast to aggressive industrial and technological approaches.

### Methodology

#### Wild Systems Theory (WST)

When we analyze *Son of the Thundercloud* from a Wild Systems Theory (WST) perspective, we uncover new layers in Kire's representation of ecological interconnection. Jordan and Day evolved this theory that posits the interconnection of living systems and the environment and focuses on the adaptive nature of organisms, which enables them to sustain in different contexts. The novel focuses on the intertwining of the systems of human experiences, natural processes, and religious beliefs.

The emergent phenomena portrayed in this novel clearly illustrate the principles of self-organization and dynamic equilibrium, which are the main principles in Wild Systems Theory. Adaptive cycles echo what theorists term 'self-sustaining systems' (Jordan & Day, 2014, p. 12).

So, when the sisters talk about their fields "speaking" to them, it is not some fantasy or poetic imagination. This interaction reflects the interconnectedness between nature and living systems. Kire takes us back to traditional wisdom, the ways of 'reading' the land is by taking the cues from the land, by understanding the nature and needs of the land, its constitution, and all the micro-organisms sustaining it. It is akin to the study of biosphere and ecosphere in the scientific world. We find that there are multiple independent living systems in the environment- humans, micro-organisms, animals, etc. In spite of being independent living systems that in themselves can be wild and chaotic, these systems depend on their environment for sustenance. The idea of adaptive cycles, Wild System Theory's focal point, illustrates Kire's narrative structure beautifully. The novel's repeating cycles of destruction and creation reflect what theorists refer to as the "self-sustaining system" of complex systems—growth, conservation, release, and reorganization. For example, the transformation of barren landscapes into fertile fields illustrates how disturbance and renewal are vital to system function. This perspective challenges linear narratives of environmental decline and

offers more sophisticated frameworks for ecosystem management. Kire ideates 'the cross-scale interactions' into the narrative. Within the framework of WST, 'cross-scale interaction' refers to the processes occurring at different levels of organization. All living systems are inherently nested and self-sustaining, existing within layers of larger contexts (Jordan 455). In the novel, farming activities can be viewed as a more complex result of different farming practices, and in turn, affect a broader geographic area. The sisters actively farm their fields with traditional farming skills. However, in doing so, they are part of a complex system ranging from microscopic soil health to regional and global weather systems. This type of complex system thinking and traditional practices is rooted in deep time wisdom.

The book manifests the social-ecological interactions and what Wild System Theory calls "nested hierarchies." Farming and ecosystem functions demonstrate smaller systems existing within larger systems in which all levels interact. This understanding of nested relationships is an alternative to minimalist approaches to environments and calls for a more inclusive and multi-layered approach to conservation. Both Wild System Theory and traditional ecological knowledge share the idea of resilience. The novel, however, approaches it differently. The sisters' agricultural techniques epitomize "general resilience" as defined by theorists. They seek to maintain function within a broad range of conditions. Their agricultural approach ensures resilience rather than adaptation to a particular set of conditions, enhancing systems' ability to cope with unanticipated changes and disruptions. This understanding of resilience is crucial for discussions on climate adaptation and change.

Another feature of WST is the idea of 'edge effect', which primarily refers to the concept of 'embeddedness' and 'nested systems'. This idea originated from ecology and emphasizes the emergent properties at system boundaries. The boundary or the edge between nested scales or systems- such as forest and field, individual and social, can be an interface of high intensity of diversity and interactions, which consequently generate adaptive complexity and meaningful engagement with the world (Jordan 454-456). In *Son of the Thundercloud*, Kire blends the mythic time (supernatural elements like the age of the three sisters, waiting for rain for seven hundred years, son of the thundercloud) with modern reality (Pele's journey and contemporary journey); the intersection of life and death at the house of Mesanuo. These thresholds resonate with the ideas of cyclical, renewal, and continuity of life, hope, and values. This edge effect is evident in Pele's identity formation. His experiences and passages through different worlds and cultures shape and reshape the idea of community values and morals.

The novel's treatment of 'feedback loops' in traditional practices is consistent with modern system dynamics ideas (Coates et al., 2006, p. 385). Traditional farming methods like crop rotation and selective harvesting show a keen understanding of what Wild Systems Theory calls feedback mechanisms—how parts of a system affect each other to stay stable. This old knowledge of system regulation often leads to sustainable results through methods that modern science is just starting to grasp. It is also important how the novel depicts what Wild Systems Theory (WST) posits as 'multi-scale stable states', which systems aim to reach. The changes in landscapes under traditional

management show how human actions can steer systems toward preferred stable states while respecting natural tendencies and limits. This grasp of systems is insightful for restoration ecology and sustainable resource use. The novel and theory both skillfully address how disturbance contributes to system renewal. Traditional views of fire and floods as vital for ecosystem health mirror theoretical ideas about disturbance patterns in complex systems. This similarity implies relevant points for current environmental management and restoration methods.

### Indigenous Wisdom and Environmental Stewardship in Practice

In *Son of the Thundercloud*, Kire's portrayal of indigenous knowledge goes beyond surface romanticism, offering practical insights into sustainable living, significant to modern environmental issues. The novel illustrates how traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations of Naga people, provides real solutions for living in harmony with nature. Kire embodies these ideas in her characters' daily lives and practices. Traditional agricultural knowledge in the novel warrants attention for its composite understanding of local ecosystems. The three sisters' farming shows detailed awareness of soil biology, weather, and plant relationships that modern agronomy is only beginning to grasp. Their decisions about when to plant or harvest are not mere superstition but responses to environmental cues. Booth (1999, p. 94) suggests that environmental spirituality, rooted in eco-feminist and bioregional traditions, strengthens human-nature relationships. The sisters' companion planting reveals ecological knowledge predating modern discoveries about allelopathy, often missed by industrial agriculture.

The sisters' water management exemplifies practical wisdom embedded in traditional practices. Their methods for soil moisture conservation, including planting patterns and soil preparation, show hydrological understanding developed through observation. These practices conserve water, maintain soil structure, and promote microbial activity. The novel conveys how traditional methods yield environmental benefits, unlike the single-problem focus of modern agriculture. Beyond agriculture, Kire's novel studies indigenous knowledge systems' approach to ecosystem handling. The characters' grasp of forest ecology goes beyond resource extraction to include relationships between species, seasonal changes, and human needs. Their selective harvesting and forest regeneration reflect forestry, which conservation biology sees as useful for maintaining biodiversity while meeting human needs. The novel's treatment of weather prediction and climate adaptation is important. The characters' ability to interpret weather through environmental signs shows understanding grounded in local conditions. Their methods of adapting farming to changing weather offer insights for adaptation strategies.

This traditional weather wisdom often proves more precise for local conditions than regional weather forecasts. The novel shows the transmission of environmental knowledge between generations. The teaching involves developing a way of seeing and understanding environmental relationships. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, characters are guided to observe, interpret, and respond to environmental changes. This teaching reflects ecological understanding rooted in direct experience, relational awareness, and



storytelling. Hitzhusen and Tucker (2013, p. 370) claim that such experiential learning is vital to fostering environmental education and stewardship.

The spiritual aspects of environmental care in the narrative show how old ways combine useful and holy parts of life. Performing rituals before planting is not for show; it has sacred significance. It is a way to show respect for nature. It signifies how symbiotic association with nature can be maintained, how resources can be used in measured ways, and most importantly, how to strike a balance between systems while deriving energy from the environment. The tale depicts how spiritual ways translate into cultural ways to protect the environment. They put ecological knowledge in ways that connect with how people think and act in groups. The story highlights the continuity and relevance of old wisdom in the modern world. Traditional knowledge does not become redundant; rather, it customizes itself with changing time and needs and stays relevant. Kire emphasizes the fact that the old knowledge system has always been resolution-centric. The way people talk about different needs for water, land, and forests shows complex ways in society for using resources in a way that lasts. These old governing systems use community agreement and watch the environment over time.

Kire's work also explains how old knowledge systems deal with large-scale ecological happenings. People's understanding of how water flows and how landscapes connect shows ecological thought that goes past fake borders set by how land is handled now. Their ways of keeping sacred areas and protecting certain parts of the landscape show complex ways to protect ecosystems. Modern environmental science is starting to see these ways as useful. The role of women as keepers of environmental knowledge gets special attention in the story. The three sisters know more than just farming. They also have a complex understanding of celestial bodies, medicinal plants, keeping food good, saving seeds, and how ecosystems relate. The story looks at old ways of handling pests. It shows advanced ecological understanding. How people deal with crop pests and keep ecological balance shows detailed knowledge of how predators and prey relate. It also shows natural ways to control pests. These old ways often control pests while keeping the ecosystem well. They give good lessons for modern organic farming and pest management that combine different ways. The spiritual aspects of environmental care in the story show how old ways combine useful and holy parts of life.

### **Traditional Knowledge and Modern Challenges**

The novel examines modern ideas of progress, echoing Thong's (2014) analysis of Naga worldviews. Instead of just stating the importance of older ways, it illustrates how the knowledge held by indigenous communities may provide solutions to current environmental issues. Through the daily lives of the characters – how they care for their fields, interpret weather patterns, and tend to the land – we understand that what some dismiss may help us create a more viable future. The novel's depiction of agricultural biodiversity provides relevant points for today's food security problems. The sisters' habit of keeping different crop types displays a good grasp of risk management that farming is starting to rediscover. Their ways of saving seeds and breeding show not just preservation of culture but useful plans for keeping variety in genetics—a key point as

climate change puts farming systems at risk everywhere. The classic grasp of how crops and the environment relate gives useful lessons for creating strong farming systems able to adjust to changing conditions. Water control appears as another spot where classic savvy gives key ideas for present issues. The novel shows complex classic systems for saving and giving out water that mix real-world use with fairness in society. These old ways to control water often get lasting results through ways that modern systems struggle to copy. The characters know about how water flows in areas and water cycles, showing an understanding of the environment that could advise current work to solve the lack of water and pollution. The novel's study of old ways of controlling forests shows mainly related ideas for today's protection efforts. The characters deal with forest keeping, showing a good sense of how systems in nature work, which modern forestry finds useful. Their ways of picking trees, helping forests grow back, and keeping holy areas give useful models for lasting forest control that balance what people need with a healthy environment.

The part of old knowledge in keeping variety in nature is well told in the novel. Old habits often guard species at risk and keep habitats linked better than set programs for protection. The characters get how species work together and what habitats they must have, showing knowledge of nature that could help current protection work. Their ways of keeping holy spots and guarding key species reveal smart plans to keep nature varied, which modern science increasingly says is true. The characters' ways to keep nature in line and stop farming bugs show a deep sense of how things in nature relate, which could advise modern bug control plans. Their use of planting things together, timing, and normal hunter ways gives real choices to bug control that uses many chemicals. Old medicine and plant study shows key thoughts for modern health care and saving things. The characters' knowledge of healing plants mixes a good sense of what plants give with ways to pick them that keep them around. This old study of plants as medicine gives useful supplies for modern medicine while showing lasting ways to control nature's supplies. The novel tells of old ways of teaching knowledge. The ways characters learn, adjust, and pass on knowledge of nature show deep ways to teach that could help modern learning about the environment. Their ways of mixing real doing with word of mouth give useful models to grow a sense of nature and care for the environment by doing things. The novel shows how old groups keep a detailed sense of danger in the setting and plan to control risk. The characters can read warning signs and act to dangers to the setting, showing real knowledge that could help modern plans to get ready for disasters.

## Conclusion

*Son of the Thundercloud* does not just tell a story; it gives a different way of thinking about how people can rebuild their relationship with nature. Kire uses indigenous knowledge, symbolic stories, and awareness of the environment to create a story that speaks of old truths and current problems. The novel proposes that to fix our current environmental crisis, we need to change how we see and relate to nature, not just use technology. Kire gives real insights for protecting the environment and preserving culture. By showing how traditional ecological knowledge works in everyday

life, Kire gives a working example of how to use indigenous knowledge for current environmental management. For example, the sisters' farming methods give examples of how old methods can lead to lasting results while keeping culture alive.

Unlike many current ideas that separate spiritual and material things, Kire shows how traditional cultures keep them together to achieve ecological and social benefits. The characters' mixing of practical knowledge with spiritual understanding gives lessons for creating complete ways of handling the environment that involve both feeling and thinking. The novel's look at strength and adaptation gives important ideas for dealing with climate change. As Mahony (2005, p. 155) says, "healing the earth means healing spiritual wounds". Understanding of environmental patterns and ways to adapt, created through generations of watching carefully, gives practical advice for creating climate adaptation approaches that work with nature. Their ways of keeping the system strong by spreading out risk suggest important ways for planning climate adaptation. The symbolic depth of Kire's story gives lessons for environmental communication and support. By basing environmental messages on symbols and stories from traditional culture, the novel shows how environmental communication can better involve human emotions and values. Within the framework of WST, the novel shows how different traditional cultural practices often act as ways to protect the environment. If we understand the dynamics of multi-scale interactions between the systems-organism to social to cultural- and combine the knowledge of it, we can create a conducive environmental management. If we have to resolve the current environmental crisis and protect the environment, we need to go back to the basics of our indigenous knowledge system and understand the communication of physical and spiritual aspects of human-nature relationships. Kire gives instances where practical experiences are combined with cultural knowledge to create awareness about the environment and its sustainability.

*Son of the Thundercloud* reminds us that environmental protection is not just about keeping nature safe; it is about growing relationships between people and nature that support life. Through its rich story and deep ecological ideas, the novel points toward a more lasting and spiritually satisfying way of living that respects old knowledge and current needs. As we face growing environmental problems in the twenty-first century, Kire's novel gives practical advice and spiritual motivation for rebuilding lasting human-nature relationships. Its combination of traditional knowledge with current concerns suggests good ways to create environmental solutions that are ecologically sound and culturally right.

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