

RAIN, RITUAL, AND REMEMBRANCE: ECOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY LIFE IN *SON OF THE THUNDERCLOUD*

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* through the prism of ecosophy, foregrounding the ancestral persistence of ecological wisdom embedded in Naga oral traditions. The motifs of rain, seeds, and spirit-scapes are examined as symbolic articulations of deep ecological philosophy, where nature is not merely a backdrop but also a sacred agency. Rain functions as a redeemer, seeds embody continuity and renewal, and spirit-scapes preserve the memory of ancestral endurance across famine and despair. Drawing on the concept of ecosophy, as the philosophical and spiritual harmony between humans, nature, and the supernatural, this study explores how ancestral neglect, cultural amnesia, and disrupted indigenous cosmologies leads to environmental imbalances. By foregrounding spiritual ecology, the paper moves beyond anthropocentric ecocriticism and highlights ancestral persistence as a form of ecological resistance. Drawing on Arne Naess's ecosophy T and Félix Guattari's three ecologies, the paper examines how myth, spirituality, and community survival converge to articulate an alternative ecological philosophy rooted in oral traditions.

Key words: Ecosophy; Spiritual Ecology; Ancestral Memory; Ritual Ethics

Stories have always carried the wisdom of people and their land. Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* is one such story, born from Naga oral traditions, where myth and memory come together to speak about hope in times of despair. The novella tells of Pele, a wanderer who has lost his family to famine, and his journey into a village where rain returns after years of absence. This moment is not only about survival but about the sacred bond between human life and nature.

This paper reads the novella through the lens of ecosophy, a philosophy that values the deep interconnectedness of all living beings and the natural world. The rain, the seeds of renewal, and the spirit-scapes of ancestral memory are more than symbols; they remind us that nature itself carries agency and wisdom. Listening to these stories is also listening to the voices of ancestors who teach how to live with the land. In exploring *Son of the Thundercloud*, the study shows how indigenous storytelling can guide towards ecological ethics and resilience. It is a modest attempt to bring attention to a text that has not been widely studied, and to highlight how literature can nurture both cultural memory and ecological responsibility.

Set in a Naga village suffering from prolonged drought, the novel presents environmental crisis as more than a physical condition. The absence of rain reflects the community's gradual distancing from ancestral rituals, ethical responsibilities, and spiritual practices. In this context, nature is not portrayed as a passive background but as an active participant that responds to human actions and moral neglect. The land suffers because the people have forgotten the values that once maintained harmony between humans, nature, and the ancestral spirits. Although existing studies on Easterine Kire's works have examined themes such as identity, folklore, and cultural memory, limited attention has been given to the spiritual aspects of ecology in *Son of the Thundercloud*. By reading the drought in the novel as a form of spiritual depletion rather than a purely natural disaster, this paper seeks to address the gap. The study argues that ecological restoration in the novel becomes possible only when the community acknowledges its spiritual failure and re-establishes its ethical connection with the ancestral world.

Ecosophy provides a useful framework for analyzing *Son of the Thundercloud* as it emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and spiritual dimensions of life. Arne Naess defines ecosophy as a philosophy that recognizes the intrinsic value of nature and calls for ethical responsibility toward the non-human world. This approach is particularly relevant to indigenous narratives, where ecological balance is closely tied to cultural memory and ancestral belief systems.

In Kire's novel, nature is repeatedly represented as responsive to human conduct. Early in the narrative, the land is described as having "forgotten the sound of rain" (Kire 23) a phrase that suggests an ecological condition shaped by neglect rather than chance. This brief reference illustrates the novel's alignment with ecosophical thought, in which environmental disturbance reflects ethical and relational breakdown.

Félix Guattari's concept of the three ecologies—environmental, social, and mental—further strengthens this reading. Guattari argues that ecological crises are inseparable from social disintegration and psychological alienation. In *Son of the Thundercloud*, the weakening of ritual practices and communal responsibility coincides with environmental decline, reinforcing the idea that ecological imbalance emerges from disrupted social and spiritual relations.

The Prologue of *Son of the Thundercloud* shows how human life is deeply tied to nature. The old woman becomes pregnant through a raindrop, reminding us that rain is not just water but a sacred, life-giving force. Her sorrow is healed by nature itself. The tiger, though violent, is part of destiny. Animals here are not outsiders but part of the same web of life. The storyteller's words "It happened a very long time ago. And it will happen again" (Kire 8) show that time moves in cycles, like seasons, where endings lead to new beginnings.

Pelevotso, the central character, carries a name that is deeply relevant from an ecosophical perspective, for "faithful to the end" signifies loyalty not only to human bonds but to the wider living cosmos. His name becomes a symbol of ecological ethics, reminding us that resilience and integrity must extend into harmony with plants, animals, rivers, and the unseen rhythms of the land. Alongside him, Rhalieto—the Son of the Thundercloud—embodies the elemental vitality of sky and storm, a name that resonates with the power, unpredictability, and renewal of nature itself. Together, Pelevotso and Rhalieto form a dual vision of ecosophy: one name stands for loyalty and faithfulness, while the other represents nature's elemental power and renewal.

Each village in the work embodies ecosophical meaning. Nialhuo, once fertile but now barren, reflects ecological ethics through its seed-grain taboo: "No one must eat the seed grain, for it is the life of the village" (Kire 11). This dramatizes the interdependence of human survival and ecological rhythms. Noune, where the sisters survive on hope, illustrates Guattari's mental ecology "We eat hope every day, waiting for the Son of the Thundercloud" (Kire 26). Their resilience shows how imagination sustains life when material resources fail. The ghost villages, abandoned through greed and clan wars, reveal ecological and social collapse, echoing Guattari's claim that environmental breakdown is inseparable from social disintegration. This resonates with Næss's deep ecology, affirming the intrinsic value of nature and the need for harmony. Together, these villages transform the novel into a narrative experiment in ecosophy, weaving Guattari's triadic framework with Næss's ecological ethics.

The novel repeatedly portrays nature as animate and sacred, as when the widow insists, "The soil is hungry for seed" (Kire 42). The miraculous child born under the thundercloud, "he brings the rain that will end the drought and provide food for all the villages" (Kire 38), reminding us that human destiny is inseparable from nature's rhythms. The villagers' dependence on the blessings of the land and the sky, "He will bring rain and mist that softens the soil, and the earth will sprout grain and grass again" (Kire 15), further illustrates ecosophy's emphasis on ecological interdependence. Finally, indigenous wisdom expressed in the belief that "We are children of the earth; it is our mother" resonates with Næss's call for self-realization through identification with the ecological whole. Together, these textual moments prove that Kire's narrative can be read as an ecosophical text, bridging indigenous storytelling with ecological philosophy.

The novel also foregrounds the idea that ancestral presence mediates the relationship between humans and nature. At one point, an elder observes that when people turn away from ancestral ways, "the earth also turns away from them" (Kire 15). Ancestral spirits play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance in the novel. Their silence or withdrawal reflects the breakdown of respectful coexistence between humans and nature. From an ecosophical viewpoint, the ancestors represent accumulated ecological knowledge passed down through generations. When this wisdom is ignored, nature responds with scarcity and suffering. The drought thus becomes an ethical warning rather than a natural disaster, urging the community to restore harmony through remembrance, ritual, and responsibility toward the land.

Nature emerges as a sacred presence, animated and alive, not merely a static background to human action. The river, for instance, is described as "our mother", a phrase that encapsulates the villagers' reverence for the natural world. This anthropomorphic framing reflects an ecosophical understanding of nature as kin, demanding respect and reciprocity. The novel shows that survival is possible only when people acknowledge the living force of the environment.

Hope itself becomes a form of ecological sustenance in the novel. The sisters' declaration that "every morning when we wake up, we eat hope, and so we live to see another day" (Kire 16) positions hope as nourishment equal to food. This intertwining of psychological resilience and ecological endurance resonates with ecosophy's insistence that inner and outer ecologies are inseparable. The act of "eating hope" suggests that survival in times of ecological crisis requires not only material resources but also spiritual strength.

Kire also highlights the role of indigenous taboos as ecological ethics. The statement that "it is taboo to live in a village when its food stores have been wiped out by animals and insects" (Kire 10) demonstrates how cultural practices function as safeguards for ecological balance. Far from superstition, these taboos embody ecological wisdom, ensuring that human activity remains aligned with natural cycles. Ecosophy recognizes such indigenous practices as vital forms of ecological knowledge that modern societies often overlook. The novel's imagery of regeneration further underscores its ecosophical vision. When the rains return, the headman observes "It's called birthing, headman. The earth has birthed trees, rocks, stones, and grain, just as a mother birth her offspring" (Kire 35). This metaphor situates the earth as a generative mother, emphasizing cyclical renewal and the interdependence of destruction and rebirth. Ecosophy similarly frames the earth as a living, birthing entity whose rhythms must be acknowledged for human survival.

Human destiny in the novel is inseparable from ecological processes, as seen in the prophecy of *the Son of the Thundercloud* "He will bring rain and mist that softens the soil, and the earth will sprout grain and grass again" (Kire 15). This shows how cosmic, ecological, and human futures are connected, and how human survival depends on the well-being of nature.

Kire critiques exploitation through the portrayal of the "dark ones," who "thrive on fear and greed. They build fences, they hoard and guard, they want the trees and rivers and the stars to bend to their will" (Kire 48). This passage shows how the novel criticizes human greed and domination, while instead valuing humility and respect for nature. By linking greed to ecological destruction, Kire highlights the need for humans to treat the environment with care.

This study has examined *Son of the Thundercloud* through an ecosophical framework, foregrounding cultural memory and indigenous cosmology as central to the novel's ecological vision. The analysis demonstrates that environmental crisis in the narrative is not represented merely as drought, but as a manifestation of ethical and spiritual rupture within the community. The forgetting of ancestral practices disrupts the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, rendering the land unresponsive.

In addition to ecological and cosmological dimensions, the novel's characters and village spaces play a crucial role in embodying ecosophical values. The characters are not isolated individuals but are shaped by communal responsibility and ancestral inheritance. Their responses to drought, ritual neglect, and renewal reflect the collective struggle between forgetting and remembrance. Similarly, the villages are portrayed as living cultural spaces where ecological balance, ritual practice, and social harmony once coexisted. The disruption of village life mirrors environmental imbalance, while its gradual restoration signals the recovery of ethical relationships with the land.

By integrating character development and village life into its ecosophical vision, *Son of the Thundercloud* resists anthropocentric and modernist ecological paradigms. The novel affirms an indigenous worldview in which ecological healing depends upon communal ethics, ancestral memory, and spiritual attentiveness. Above all, the text positions indigenous knowledge systems not as remnants of the past, but as vital ecological philosophies capable of addressing contemporary environmental crises.

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