

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining How Easterine Iralu's "A Naga Village Remembered" Reflects the Idea of Women and Their Status

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ABSTRACT

A Naga Village Remembered by Easterine Iralu highlights the social, cultural, and daily roles of Naga women with accuracy and detail. By engaging with Iralu, this study shows that, overall, women are key to culture, yet they still face many limits imposed by male dominance. While women in Naga communities are extremely important for agriculture, homemaking, ceremonies, and remembering their past, they do not have opportunities to participate in politics or own property. Iralu chooses not to make Naga women's experiences seem good or bad; she tells their stories calmly and truthfully. Piano and Peno demonstrate that women have responsibilities outside the home, including cultural, religious, and work-related roles. Naga women take action in different ways to influence decisions within and outside the framework of their traditional societies. The work reveals that while colonization and conflict supported patriarchal rules, they also contributed to women playing leading roles in society. In the narrative, traditions are acknowledged, yet some social norms are seriously questioned. Consequently, this analysis demonstrates how literature can save historical accounts of marginalized people and encourage people to question gender issues. By highlighting women's stories, Iralu takes a step toward changing the male-dominated way Naga history is usually shared and inspires readers to explore issues of tradition and transformation.

Keywords: Naga women, Easterine Iralu, patriarchy, gender roles, cultural resistance

FULL PAPER

Introduction

The unique social structure of the Naga people, who live in scattered tribes across Northeast India, is characterized by a lack of caste and class. Its uniqueness is due in large part to the vibrant Naga oral history and the strong community that accompanies it. Despite what it seems, the Naga culture is essentially built around a male head of family; family lines are linked to the father's side, and, for most, the family sits together in a man's village. Despite their important roles and much control in earlier times, patriarchy still prevents women from having full authority. (Ngukha, 2024), (Dhar & Nath, 2025), (Shimray, 2002)

Naga culture considers women very important and provides many meaningful opportunities for women in home life and in the community. They are called the hub of the home because they handle many of the tasks necessary for a healthy family life. Beyond the four walls of their house, they have a significant impact on the local economy and agriculture. For example, among the Angami Nagas, women make up about 75% of the agricultural workforce. This figure shows the significant role that women play in maintaining both household finances and the village economy. Their agricultural endeavors not only provide food security but also significantly strengthen the community's economic resilience. (Shimray, 2002), (T., 2015), (Express, 2014)

One reason for cultural and family preservation is that Naga women oversee important household duties. With children under their care, parents ensure cultural traditions and practices are passed down from one generation to another. To top it all off, they also spend their days farming, weaving textiles, and bringing social and cultural traditions into their daily lives. How the Naga culture treats its mothers is genuinely remarkable. Having a "mother's seat" in a house signifies just how important and respected the mother is by different tribes. The seat symbolizes the essential work women do, providing for, caring for, and maintaining the customs of their families.

Even though women contribute significantly to various kinds of work, they do not have much power in making formal decisions. In many places, social and political life is guided by old customs and authority held by men in local village councils. The main reason that women lack political and land rights is that men are in control. Women are prevented from contributing to public life and governing because they are usually denied access to these domains. Although women in Naga society do not hold formal roles, they help keep their families and communities functioning well. (Dhar & Nath, 2025), (Shimray, 2002)

It is profound to consider the role of women in *A Naga Village Remembered* by Easterine Kire. This book offers readers a glimpse into the lives of Naga women, revealing both their strength and the limitations imposed by patriarchy. Particularly during colonial upheavals and other times of social transition, it connects women's activities to larger historical and cultural shifts.

Traditionally, Naga tales have focused on males, but this book offers a more balanced view by focusing on women. Even though women in Naga culture have made strides in education, health, and the economy, they still face obstacles in politics and lack equal property rights, making this study all the more pertinent. Consequently, discussing women through the lens of Easterine Kire's work may enrich cultural understanding and literary appreciation while also contributing to discussions of gender equality, the localization of customary laws, and the protection of women's rights. (Chhabra & Modi, 2024), (Dhar & Nath, 2025)

Iralu's voice influences the depiction of women.

A trailblazing author from Kohima, Nagaland, Easterine Iralu—also known as Easterine Kire—has made significant contributions as a poet, writer, and translator. (Patton & Artium, 2018). With a doctorate in English literature, she became famous for publishing *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), the first book written by a Naga author in English. Kire's works show a deep commitment to preserving and promoting her people's traditional identity, and her literary journey is closely tied to her Naga heritage. By elevating the Naga people's literary profile, she has helped to close the gap between written and oral traditions. She is deeply committed to preserving Naga history and folklore and has translated over 200 pieces of oral poetry into English. Her goal is to ensure that her tribe's rich storytelling culture is not lost to time. In addition to her literary translations, she solidified her position as a cultural guardian by founding Bark Weaver, a publishing house that specializes in indigenous narratives and Naga folktales. (Advancingnortheast, 2022), (Barbicanpress, 2025)

Kire cares deeply about writing Naga stories, knowing that modern ways and shifting cultures can easily cause oral traditions to be lost. Because fewer people tell stories aloud now, she wants to preserve them because they are an important part of the community's history. As she explained, traditional narratives passed from mouth to mouth will soon disappear as oral storytelling gives way to written sources. This is a reason why we should save oral histories as written accounts. Because she cares deeply about her culture, her writing explores the problems the Naga people face as they navigate large-scale social and historical changes. Stories by Ghanaian writer Mawura Korsiha often center on colonialism, shifting social dynamics, and conflicts that reveal the challenges her country faces. (B.Deepa & Prof.M.Neeraj, 2023), (Randhawa, 2013), (Watinaro, 2018)

Kire has become famous for her ability to portray the everyday lives and voices of ordinary people through honest, passionate storytelling. In her work, she avoids idealizing or embellishing her subjects, instead presenting the raw and sometimes overlooked realities of Naga civilization. Her writing is both a resistance tactic and a means of cultural preservation, as it provides a platform for underrepresented groups. Through her books, poems, and translations, Kire offers readers a window into the complexities of Naga existence, shaped by tradition, adversity, and resilience. Not only are her works crucial to the preservation of Naga heritage, but they also provide broader reflections on memory, identity, and the role of narrative in sustaining cultural continuity. (Dutta, 2024), (Andrelle, 2022)

A Naga Village Remembered places special emphasis on Naga women, capturing their daily stories and highlighting what they face and what they excel at. She highlights the toughness and emotional sides of women who fight through a patriarchal system to add value and dignity to those around them. She points out that women often face obstacles in inheritance and decision-making, but she keeps her writing free of exaggeration and tells readers plainly about these matters. She points out that women do essential tasks, including fetching water, cooking meals, and rearing their children, which benefit everyone in the community. Her protagonists demonstrate self-control and decision-making skills, showing they respond effectively to situations in their culture. By applying this approach, Iralu salutes Naga women and motivates readers to consider the problems of inequality and how cultures are changing. (Malemnganbi, 2024)

Iralu's critique of gender roles and inequality is never harsh or accusatory. Instead, she adopts a subtle and reflective tone that respects the cultural complexity of her community. She neither romanticizes Naga traditions nor condemns them outright. Instead, her narrative invites thoughtful engagement, encouraging readers

to consider both the value and the limitations of tradition. Through this approach, Iralu offers a nuanced critique that recognizes the need for change while remaining rooted in the cultural and historical reality of Naga life. Her characters are shaped by tradition but are not bound by it. Through their experiences, readers are prompted to reflect on the evolving roles of women in a society caught between continuity and change. (Randhawa, 2013)

Analysis of Female Characters and Societal Roles

In her novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (also published as *Sky is My Father*), Easterine Kire provides a detailed portrait of women in the Angami Naga community in the nineteenth century. Focusing on the historic resistance by Khonoma against British forces, the novel examines the ways women participated in daily life and village traditions.

In agrarian societies, women are shown to be just as important as men in working the land. The work they do every day is vital to the community, showing that agricultural farming in Naga society is done by women and men equally. (Staff, 2021), (Kire, 2018) Female characters, such as Piano (Levi's mother) and Peno (Levi's wife), are integral to family and village life. They manage households, raise children, and participate in rituals and festivals, highlighting their role as cultural bearers and nurturers. (Maniar, 2023) Women are also involved in weaving, handicrafts, and animal rearing—skills highly valued in the community. In marriage, a woman's weaving ability is a sought-after trait, and daughters are welcomed because they can assist with household and fieldwork. During significant events, such as harvests, women perform rituals like the opening of granaries, underscoring their spiritual and practical importance.

Gender Norms and Expectations in the Text

The novel reflects the patriarchal structure of traditional Naga society, where gender roles are clearly delineated. Men dominate the public and martial spheres—engaging in warfare, holding property, and participating in village councils—while women's roles are largely confined to the domestic, agricultural, and ritual domains. ((NWU), 2018) Women are excluded from certain male-only spaces and activities, such as handling weapons or participating in the men's dormitories, which serve as centers for communal decision-making and warrior training. Inheritance and property rights are patrilineal; women do not inherit ancestral lands or property, reinforcing their secondary status within the family structure. ((NWU), 2018) Despite these restrictions, women act as mediators in marriage negotiations and play vital roles in maintaining social harmony, indicating their indirect influence in community

affairs. Social taboos and customs, including participation in festivals and observance of Genna days (when work ceases), are shared by both genders, though leadership in rituals typically remains with men. (Staff, 2021), (Maniar, 2023)

Instances of Women Asserting Autonomy or Defying Norms in a Naga Village

Direct Acts of Agency and Resistance

Naga women have consistently challenged patriarchal norms by demanding political representation, most notably through their push for the 33% reservation in municipal and town council elections. Despite strong opposition from traditional tribal bodies and even violent backlash, women organized rallies, filed legal petitions, and openly criticized both government and male-dominated organizations for suppressing their rights. (Kinimi & Gireesan, 2024), (Timesofindia, 2012)

The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) and the Joint Action Committee on Women Reservation (JACWR) have played pivotal roles in mobilizing women and asserting their demands in public and legal forums, directly confronting both state and customary authorities. (Timesofindia, 2012) Historical accounts highlight that, during periods when men were away at war, Naga women took on administrative and political responsibilities within the village, demonstrating their capacity for leadership and resilience in the face of gendered exclusions. (Imchen, 2023)

Subtle Forms of Resistance in Patriarchal Settings

Even within the constraints of patriarchal tradition, Naga women have exercised agency by participating in village development boards and managing a portion of village funds, sometimes without overt resistance from local councils. This quiet integration into decision-making spaces reflects everyday resistance. (Timesofindia, 2012)

Women's organizations have created "organic/claimed spaces"—informal networks and support systems outside formal political structures—where women share knowledge, strategize, and empower one another. These spaces provide an alternative form of agency, not always visible within official institutions but crucial for building collective strength and resilience. (Imchen, 2023) In domestic and social spheres, Naga women have asserted their autonomy by influencing household decisions, participating in agricultural labor on equal terms with men, and, historically, even defending villages during conflicts. These actions, while sometimes framed as fulfilling traditional roles, subtly challenge the boundaries of gendered expectations. (Imchen, 2023), (Kinimi & Gireesan, 2024) Some women have defied norms by forming relationships or marrying outside the community,

despite the risk of ostracism or loss of tribal status, directly confronting the social policing of women's choices. (Wilkinson, 2021)

The Interplay of War, Colonization, and Gender

Colonial encounters in A Naga Village Remembered are depicted as catalysts for profound social upheaval, directly affecting gender roles within the Naga community. The British incursion into Khonoma, as described in the novel, imposed new systems of taxation, forced labor, and military conflict, disrupting traditional ways of life. The colonial administration's policies—such as taxing an agrarian society unused to cash transactions and compelling villagers into unpaid or poorly paid labor—placed additional burdens on both men and women. However, the effects on gender dynamics were complex. (Andrelle, 2022), (Kire, 2018)

Traditionally, Naga society, while patriarchal, afforded women a significant role in community and family affairs. Both men and women engaged in ceaseless agricultural labor, and women participated in rituals, festivals, and the maintenance of social taboos. However, the onset of war and colonization began to shift these dynamics, often reinforcing patriarchal norms but also creating spaces for women's agency. (Staff, 2021), ((NWU), 2018)

Reinforcement of Traditional Roles

The narrative reveals that war and resistance against colonial forces were primarily constructed as masculine endeavors. The valorization of male warriors and the expectation that "men should always be ready for war and raids" reinforced the association of masculinity with violence and defense of the village. (Kire, 2018) Women's roles, in contrast, were often depicted as supportive—maintaining the home, working the fields, and upholding social and spiritual customs during the men's absence. These traditional divisions were sometimes heightened by the pressures of conflict, as survival and resistance demanded clear role delineations. (Staff, 2021)

Alteration and Expansion of Roles

Despite these reinforcements, conflict also expanded women's roles in subtle but significant ways. With many men away fighting or imprisoned, women often assumed increased responsibilities in agricultural production, household management, and community cohesion. (Maniar, 2023), (Staff, 2021) Historical and ethnographic studies of Naga society indicate that women, far from being passive victims, were active agents during times of conflict. They could act as peacemakers, support warriors by preparing food or even transporting supplies, and sometimes

participate in decision-making processes related to survival and resistance. (Banerjee & Dey, 2012), ((NWU), 2018)

The trauma of war—loss of loved ones, displacement, and impoverishment—also led to greater visibility of women's struggles and resilience. Women's roles as caretakers and providers became more pronounced, and their needs for protection and support were heightened in the post-conflict period. (Banerjee & Dey, 2012)

Long-Term Impacts

The colonial encounter and subsequent conflicts did not lead to immediate gender equality. Post-colonial governance often perpetuated patriarchal structures, and women continued to face marginalization in political representation and access to resources. ((NWU), 2018) However, the disruptions of war and colonization planted seeds for change. Women's expanded roles during conflict periods laid the groundwork for later demands for greater social and political participation, as seen in contemporary movements for gender equity in Naga society. ((NWU), 2018)

Table:1 Conflict and Gender Roles in Khonoma.

Aspect	Pre-Colonial/ Traditional Role	During Conflict/ Colonization	Post-Conflict/ Long- Term Impact
Men	Warriors, hunters, community leaders	Fighters, prisoners, laborers	Continued dominance, but with trauma
Women	Agricultural labor, ritual, and family care	Increased labor, caretaking, support	Greater visibility, slow empowerment
Gender Dynamics	Patriarchal, but women respected	Reinforced patriarchy, some expansion	Seeds for later gender reforms

Silences and Omissions

Many Naga village narratives, such as *A Naga Village Remembered*, fail to address women's experiences and agency adequately. Patriarchal systems and

traditional laws have historically restricted women's roles, particularly in public and political arenas, despite Naga culture often being seen as egalitarian. Many communal memories and oral histories feature a male-centric narrative that either completely ignores or marginalizes women, their contributions, and their viewpoints. The failure to include women's stories is not a coincidence; rather, it reflects societal norms that prioritize men's stories over women's, perpetuating gender inequality at home and in society at large. (Priyadharshini & Padmanabhan, 2023), (Pongener, 2012)

Women are shaped directly by narrative emphasis, including storytellers, memory keepers, and prioritized voices. Traditional Naga tales portray males as the central characters and keepers of oral history, while women's stories are either ignored or relegated to the home. Because of this narrative emphasis, the community's collective memory excludes the stories of women's work, pain, and resistance. (P & Jayakrishnan, 2024), (Priyadharshini & Padmanabhan, 2023), (Pongener, 2012)

By placing women's voices and experiences at the center, recent interventions by Naga women authors like Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao challenge these silences. By shedding light on the oppression and agency of Naga women, these works fill up important gaps left by male-dominated narratives of the past. In their works of fiction and biography, these writers reveal the contradictions within Naga culture: on the one hand, women are portrayed as decisive and resolute, while on the other, they are held back by patriarchal norms and excluded from decision-making. (Longkumer, 2019), (P & Jayakrishnan, 2024), (LIEGISE, 2021), (Priyadharshini & Padmanabhan, 2023)

Gaps Recommendations

- The lack of women's narratives in village histories points to a purposeful exclusion, mirroring the general cultural propensity to minimize the contributions of women.
- By rendering women's hardships and accomplishments invisible, narrative silences uphold patriarchal power systems.
- Rather than acting as autonomous change makers, women typically play supporting or serving roles when they do appear.
- A significant change has occurred in Nagaland with the rise of women's literature, which democratizes narrative space and enables women to express their own experiences, complaints, and goals.

Discussion

In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Iralu gracefully connects the lives of Naga women with the broader history and routines of nineteenth-century Nagaland. Rather than merely telling men's stories, Iralu introduces Piano and Peno and explores how they contribute to their households and the wider community. Belonging to groups like women's secret societies, making Twi textiles, and parenting ensure community survival and thriving. They are still not permitted to receive property or take part in public decisions. Not judgmental or entirely ideal, Iralu explains the meaning of Naga traditions and gender relations. She also shows that among the problems created by colonization—such as wars and taxes—were also ways in which women showed their strength and ability to lead. The novel ends with a note about the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA), which merges aspects of culture with fresh perspectives on gender, tradition, and change.

Conclusion

In *A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Iralu explores how Naga women play varying and sometimes limiting roles in a society that has just experienced a transition. By writing well-considered stories, Iralu shows how the women in them demonstrate emotional strength, culture, and a great deal of hard work. The novel neither praises nor blames tradition, urging readers to consider both its positive and negative sides. By including women's stories, the books reverse gender injustice in historical reporting and add to conversations on equal rights and cultural backgrounds. In the end, Iralu brings women's voices back into community memory and proves literature can inspire us and push for positive transformation.

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