



Through the lens of Trauma: A Study of the poem ‘The Body is a Map’ by Easterine Kire

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ABSTRACT: Northeast India is recognized as one of the most culturally diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent, home to numerous ethnic groups, communities, cultures, and faiths. Despite this richness, the region is frequently associated with political instability, including communal and ethnic conflicts and insurgency. Writers from Northeast India often express profound concern for their homeland in their literary works. Among them, Easterine Kire stands out as a significant voice in Indian English literature, particularly for her portrayal of the Naga people's experiences. Her works document the myths, stories, and culture of Nagaland while also addressing the pain, suffering, and loss endured by ordinary people due to violence, conflict, and corruption. This paper examines the poem ‘The Body is a Map’ by Easterine Kire, focusing on the themes of trauma, loss, and love that are prevalent in her poetry.

KEYWORDS: War, death, trauma, poetry

I. INTRODUCTION

When verbal communication of experiences and struggles becomes challenging, individuals often turn to writing as a means of expression. Whether through brief notes or more structured compositions, poetry frequently serves as a source of solace. Poetry has existed nearly as long as human language, functioning for centuries as a vital form of communication and a means of articulating what cannot be directly spoken. Research indicates that poetry not only facilitates the expression of emotions to others but also plays a significant role in processing thoughts and regulating deeply buried emotions, thereby influencing mental health. As a result, poetry serves as a tool for externalizing unspoken thoughts and emotions.

The term trauma derives from the Greek word meaning “wound.” Initially, it referred exclusively to physical injuries, but by the late nineteenth century, its definition expanded to encompass psychological wounds and emotional

disturbances resulting from painful experiences. Contemporary understandings of trauma have evolved alongside developments in psychology, psychiatry, and literature, highlighting the recognition that catastrophic events can inflict enduring harm on both the mind and body. Trauma is described as a “deeply personal event” that overwhelms an individual's capacity to integrate emotional experiences (Giller, 1999). It can have profound effects on emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, arising from either a single incident or prolonged exposure to stress. Easterine Kire's poem ‘The Body is a Map’ powerfully illustrates how the human body retains memories, emotions, and experiences. The poem conceptualizes the body as a map marked by ‘abuse’ and ‘hurt,’ indicating that trauma leaves a lasting imprint on personal identity.

Easterine Kire is widely regarded as one of the most prominent authors and poets from Northeast India. Born on 29 March 1959 in the hills of Nagaland, she is a Naga novelist from Kohima recognized for her narratives that preserve the history and culture of her people and state. Her works frequently address themes of identity, struggle, and human relationships within traditional Naga communities.

Easterine Kire addresses significant issues affecting the Naga people and examines their impact on everyday life. Her works depict historical events such as political unrest, the brutality of war, and the daily struggles of the population. Additionally, she explores supernatural and spiritual themes in both her novels and poetry. Her writing consistently reflects a deep affection for her homeland and culture, often accompanied by nostalgia for the past. Kire's poetry collections include *The Windhover Collection* (2001), *Kelhoukevira* (1982), *Jazz Poetry and Other Poems* (2012), and *Freerain* (2025). The poem ‘The Body is a Map’ was published by *Café Dissensus* on 15 June 2017, alongside six other poems. Kire's poetry bridges oral traditions and contemporary written forms, exploring themes of



nature, Naga identity, and spirituality, and is deeply rooted in the landscape and folklore of Nagaland.

The poem 'The Body is a Map' explores the human body as a living, recording vessel of experience. Kire describes that our physical bodies are like a landscape, marked by abuse and hurt, leaving scars and wounds on the surface. Every experience, big or small, love and care leave an imprint on our bodies. The body, as a living thing, represents and remembers "every abuse / And every caress," highlighting how trauma is stored physically and emotionally. The poem also shared the traumatic experience of a community in a universal tone, implying collective trauma beyond individual stories. Trauma can be intergenerational, with bodies carrying histories of oppression, violence, or marginalization. The poem highlights how it stores the imprints of significant events, relationships, and interactions.

The poem depicts the human body as a map that reflects the Naga people's history, hardships, and traumatic experiences. It also addresses the potential for healing through acknowledgment, as indicated by the phrase "It remembers the good," which suggests that collective healing can occur by recognizing and reclaiming positive experiences. The poem posits that bodies are haunted by negative experiences but also retain positive ones, highlighting resilience and the capacity for healing. The repetition of "It carries" underscores the weight of these memories and the body's ability to bear and transcend them. This duality demonstrates how the body stores both painful and beautiful experiences, which in turn shape identity, self-perception, and relationships with the external world. The body, like that of a trauma survivor, retains memories of pain, pleasure, trauma, and love, with each memory etched into its very structure.

The poem asserts that the body is haunted by past experiences but also retains positive memories, love, and care. The lines "It is haunted/By the bad/, But it remembers/The good" suggest that recalling positive memories can facilitate healing, self-acceptance, and resilience. The repetition in the poem emphasizes the burden these memories impose on the body, which carries both pain and beauty, ultimately shaping individual identity.

Through her literary contributions, Kire has made a lasting impact on Nagaland. Her works function as a cultural bridge, connecting the past, present, and future of the Naga people. By integrating Naga folklore, traditions, and contemporary themes, she has played a vital role in

preserving and promoting the region's rich culture and heritage. Her influence fosters a sense of identity and pride among younger generations. By exploring themes such as love, sacrifice, and the breadth of Naga culture, Kire has contributed to the construction of a collective narrative for future generations.

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