

## Chapter II

### **Milieu: Towards the Centre of Valued Identity**

This is our home, do you understand? We cannot abandon it and try to live in another place. Our umbilical cords are buried here, and we would always be restless if we tried to settle elsewhere.

–Easterine Kire, *When the River Sleeps*

Place or landscape writing in literature holds a very significant ground. Place stages a highly essential part in identifying the distinctiveness of the inhabitants. This is made possible through the understanding of setting and space. Peter Brown and Michael Irwin in their *Literature and Place, 1800—2000* clearly talk about the early stage of development of place-criticism and state how setting can itself be taken as the opportunity for “exploration of various aspects of identity, whether personal, social, or national” (15). The identity of an individual, be it the generational old family roots or the present social state of living, all are conditioned by the living space. Moreover, an individual’s discovery of the self is always in connection to the place of his living. However, while talking about place it becomes imperative to consider nature because these two interchangeably set an impression on the cultural maquillage of the self.

Nature writing is a way to understand and bring to light the inseparability that exists between nature and humanity affecting human in all their varied aspects viz., biological, psychological, spiritual, and cultural. Barry Lopez in his essay “A Literature of Place” which was presented in March 1996 at the Salamanca Writers Festival in Hobart, Tasmania emphasized on the ways by which human imagination gets shaped by the surrounding environment. He stated

that the “visual landscape, of course, or the depth, elevation, and hues of a cityscape play a part here, as does the way sunlight everywhere etches lines to accentuate forms” (Lopez).

This equally equates to the theory of Naturalism when Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro in the book *Naturalism* (2008) state, “[E]verything that exists is a part of nature and that there is no reality beyond or outside of nature” (6). An individual’s existence is within his surrounding which is the only reality to him. It is the reality of the effect of his environment that shapes him. This is carried further to Emile Zola’s theorizing of Naturalism in literature about which he postulated how human behavior and attitude, to the greatest extent, is the outcome of the heredity of existence and the environmental factors that surround. It is in Philip Fisher’s 1985 work *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* where he clearly brings to focus the role played by varied environments in shaping one’s social behavior for “any city gives a map of the psyche, a quantitative account of the strength and complexity of the system of human(s)” (134). This states well that the conditions of the social environment are unfalteringly essential in determining the behavior and desires of humans. One’s milieu is a driving factor in the total makeup of the human survival. Then comes the question: “What does milieu stand for?”

In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, French critic, Hippolyte Taine considered any work of art to be the outcome of three conditioning factors viz., “race, milieu, and moment” stating that a man’s milieu is “the circumstances or the environment that modify the inherited racial disposition” (Taine). A person’s milieu has a very profound effect in shaping the behavioral qualities while living in that location. The natural world that surrounds the breathing souls has always been seen to be the greatest gift that is fully loaded with values to sustain a purposive living as was embraced in the ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. Every little thing which makes this nature has value that backs up a purpose. For instance, the roots of trees have the

value of trapping and sending water to the rivers and oceans, rain flows through the river to fulfil the purpose of human sustenance which depends on water, etc. Likewise, the sun must shine to keep the cycle of rain alive. Kire's novel *Son of the Thundercloud* portrays the nurturing nature of the river which is acknowledged as 'our mother' when she states, "No one comes back from the river empty-handed. There was food in the river, and so the villagers called it 'our mother'" (Kire 54). Similarly, plants' nature is to grow for the purpose of nourishing men, and the nature of rain is to moisten the earth by its fall to replenish the river thereby adding life to the earth.

With the setting in of scientific and technological advancement, modern science brought along with it a drastic challenge and change in the earlier understood value laden quality of the natural world. The way in which human environment was progressing in a balanced manner, with no variations and threats, was given a setback with the mechanical inventions. This same setback the book *Naturalism* expresses:

Baron d'Holbach (eighteenth century) conjectured that we are machines. Baruch Spinoza (seventeenth century) celebrated "nature" as central top philosophy – his key principle was *natura naturans*, "nature naturing" – with human beings, like all reality, subject to and completely determined by exceptionless, impersonal laws. David Hume (eighteenth century) proposed that the natural world cares nothing for human beings, and John Stuart Mill (nineteenth century) more aggressively compared "Nature" to a sociopathic murderer, a force that cruelly destroys its members without conscience, purpose, or consciousness. (Goetz and Taliaferro 5)

It cannot be denied that Naturalism and Realism are not independent of each other when they bring to the forefront the true visualizing of the social reality faced by the inhabitants, in the wake of the growing civilization of modernity and affluence, but there lie copious differences

between Realism and Naturalism. Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine in their book *Naturalism* comment, “Realism is like the 1789 Revolution in Literature while Naturalism corresponds to the 1793 Reign of Terror” (8). The effect of the social, biological, and genetic milieu brought literary Naturalism of Emile Zola which drew its mimesis from the nineteenth century scientific discovery and its cruel stand on the human conditions being affected by the milieu of their existence.

The innovational Industrial Revolution, of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, brought with it vast technological advancement due to the discoveries in science. On one hand, towns started to grow with the living standard on the rise, factories were getting established at an unprecedented rate, the standard of living and the cost of existence grew drastically but this, on the other hand, negatively led to the expansion of slums and shantytowns, and the exploitation of the lower classes, precisely the working-class population. These scientific discoveries and their effects brought an upheaval in the minds of man to reassess himself of what he was made to be and what he has been changed to in the due course of these discoveries. The condition of man deteriorated because he was no longer considered as the Divine’s creation, made in the image of God, to bring to the world goodness and optimism, but was rather degraded to that pitiable level, a little above animal, for whom birth and survival was nothing more than a struggle, of “a bitter and chunky pill to swallow, let alone to digest” (Furst and Skrine 16). The Industrial Revolution again started to adversely affect the natural greenery of the physical landscape.

Affected by this deplorability, came a group of Literary Naturalist writers who took an exhaustive observation of the scientific certainty of “heredity, milieu and moment” (Furst and Skrine 71), the social realities, thus shaping the behavior of man. John Steinbeck and Easterine

Kire are the two Naturalist writers whose observation of the living status of the indigenes bring to light the effect one's milieu have on the conduct and attitude of the individual.

## **Naturalism and Milieu**

John Steinbeck had a lot of concern for the land, particularly the Salinas Valley of Monterey County, California. Steinbeck observed his environmental surroundings through his scientific bent of mind, and thus incorporated the same in his fictional works whereby his fiction had the ecology of his living space, considering the conditioning of man based on his own milieu, one of the principal aspects of Naturalism in literature. He portrayed the social and the economic issues that led to the degradation of man providing a metaphorical underpinning. Steinbeck's Naturalism focused on the hampering of the surrounding earth by man due to his greed as Carrington in his article "The Anthropocene epoch: scientists declare dawn of human-influenced age" in *The Guardian* quoted Prof Chris Rapley. Rapley exclaims, "[T]he Anthropocene marks a new period in which our collective activities dominate the planetary machinery" (qtd. in "The Anthropocene epoch" Carrington). This corresponds to Naturalism which sees how the affluent selves were only concerned with the self's selfish obsession dominating the so-called other humanity, men of lower status. The subjugating group of humankind started, for their gains, to subdue the subjugated race, in the way man dominates nature for his needs thereby showcasing an anthropocentric attitude. Steinbeck observed the stark exploitation done by that section of society who spoke of the gratification of the individual self, one's desires above others, self-ambitions, and the individual's self destiny. Sunita Jain in her introduction to *John Steinbeck's Concept of Man: A Critical Study to His Novels* expresses Steinbeck's literary naturalistic outlook as she says, "...Steinbeck shows man caught up in the

process of living, trying to rise above an individuality which prevents him from becoming a group animal, and trying, as a group animal, to retain his individuality” (1).

Steinbeck, through his fictional works, portray his dislike for the harsh living conditions of the proletarian population. He wrote *Of Mice and Men* to depict the lives of the workers who were the victims of the imbalance in the social hierarchy where the powerless workers suffered trouble at the hands of the dominating elites. The social milieu resulted in the control of the hands, the workers, leaving them with a life of loneliness, anger, and sheer hopelessness to rise to the state of human. The effect of milieu in conditioning man is depicted in Steinbeck’s 1937 masterpiece *Of Mice and Men*. Steinbeck opens his 1937 play/novelette, *Of Mice and Men*, few miles south of Soledad beautifully portraying the valley as he states:

A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees—willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter’s flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 3)

The narrative is of two very good friends, George Milton and Lennie Small, who suddenly appeared from the state highway’s direction. George with his short physique and slender strong hands was the patron of Lennie who was shapelessly huge in his physique and with a retarded mental state. They had fled from their earlier location, the ranch in Weed, and were heading to a ranch owned by Curley’s father to earn money and let the dream of buying their own land come

true. On their run from Weed they were late to arrive at the ranch and so the boss, out of frustration, blurted out his anger at other workers. As they reached the ranch, they were placed in a dormitory with the most deplorable state of living. They started their work and were to buck barley, accepting the fact that they would be spending the rest of their life bucking barley. Lennie had a sharp dislike for the place but George had no other option but, for both of them, to stay back. George and Slim, another worker, discussed about Lennie, who George described as the most innocent being on earth who had no selfishness in him rather his trust in George was more than his trust in himself. Curley's wife was one of the vilest characters, so presented, who never left a chance to draw the attention of men towards her in the absence of her husband. Curley came in looking for her. Not finding Slim, who had been out for some time, Curley suspected Slim and rushed out to find and fight Slim.

Meanwhile, in the bunk house, George talked about the fulfillment of his American dream by getting themselves a big stake that belonged to Andy Cushman. Candy offered to help them with his savings to buy the land with a request to go away with George and Lennie. Crooks, the negro stable buck, was the most permanent worker on the ranch because he was crippled. He only loved to stay aloof from all others. However, Lennie goes into Crooks' bunk one day. As Lennie, Candy, and Crooks started talking about their dream to shift to their own farmland, Curley's wife came in and tried to play along with them. They got raged about her being in that barn when no other men, especially her husband Curley, were around. Meanwhile, Lennie lost his puppy to death. Curley's wife again came to him and started narrating about her life. She told him how she had to finally end up marrying Curley even though she was not fond of him. Trying to entice Lennie, she asked him to run his hands over her hair. Lennie's weakness for soft things made him do that, and while caressing her hair his hands messed her hair and she started to yell.

Lennie, out of fear, covered her mouth and the more she made her movements the more he pressed harder. Unknowingly, out of fear, he broke her neck. Curley's wife died. Lennie hid her body with hay but Candy witnessed that and called George. As they started devising a plan to hide Lennie from Curley, Curley took his shotgun and started his search for Lennie. Obeying George's command to hide in the brush, whenever a situation arose and had to hide from Curley, he kept waiting in the hideout for George to come because he knew no matter what happened George would never be leaving Lennie. George appeared from behind and shot Lennie. Steinbeck, through this, brings to light the deplorable state of living as he writes:

“Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to.” (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 15)

The workers were aware that no matter how much they tried their state would always remain the same. Rising to a higher level would always remain a dream. Lennie and George had dreamt of their own land where they would be the master not serving under anyone but the condition of living never got it to a fulfillment,

“We gotta get a big stake together.” ... “Got a little win'mill. Got a little shack on it, an' a chicken run. Got a kitchen, orchard, cherries, apples, peaches, 'cots, nuts, got a few berries. They's a place for alfalfa and plenty water to flood it. They's a pig pen—” ... We wouldn't have to buck no barley eleven hours a day... “An' it'd be our own, an' nobody could can us. If we don't like a guy we can say, ‘Get the hell out,’ and by God he's got to



do it. An' if a fren' come along, why we'd have an extra bunk, an' we'd say, 'Why don't you spen' the night?' an' by God he would... . (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 56–58)

The wealthy owners knew only of self-gain. While they lived in airy big rooms, the workers were dumped in the dark dingy dormitories. The bunk house used to be a small rectangular building which housed more than half of the working populace. There was not even a passageway for two men to cross by at ease, it was nothing more than a “hell hole” (Jain 40). The bunk rooms appeared as if they were stables with straws spread all over and the workers had to live amongst the straws. Industrialism had adversely affected the living state whereby restful sleep, after a day's hard labor, was deprived to the workers. Steinbeck presents this dilapidated state of living by visualizing the ill treatment, degrading men to the level of an animal when he talks about the bunk room of Crooks, the Negro stable buck, where

On the wall by the window there were pegs on which hung broken harness in process of being mended; strips of new leather; and under the window itself a little bench for leather- working tools, curved knives and needles and balls of linen thread and a small hand riveter. (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 66)

The workers had to adjust to the situation because they knew that if they denied obedience to this state of living, they would otherwise have to die of starvation. No amount of disliking the living was being paid any heed by the rich owners. Lennie's dislike for the ranch and the bunk house was not paid any attention to.

Focussing on those sections who try with all their might to be in terms with the social milieu, Literary Naturalism, however, brings to notice the quest to survive in the people which ultimately leads them to the rank of being the marginalized in the social setup. Man starts to

dominate other men based on the stratum of their living. Steinbeck in his work of fiction titled *The Pastures of Heaven* gives a picture of the dominance of the milieu on normal human beings who must surrender to the norms thrown upon them. They are to conform to the codes imposed on them thereby leaving them with no room for denial. The free will to survive gets affected by the dominating self-seeking will of the top-tier social hierarchy. In *Of Mice and Men*, Candy's free will was caged. His state of being a physically challenged person robbed him of a life which he wished to live on his own terms. With no other option in hand, he only must live at the mercy of the ranch owners. The ranch owner took undue advantage of Candy's physical state and instead of looking after him with extra concern, because Candy had lost his right hand while working for the owner in the ranch, the owner rather gave him a cut down in his wage of just two hundred and fifty dollars for the job of swamping. This shows the lack of feelings the capitalists bore in their hearts for the workers.

Candy's state of not being given any freedom speaks about the existence of a causal effect in all the activities that take place between the human world and the surrounding environment. His desire to go away with George and Lennie was the effect of the environment, his milieu, that caused the apprehension of survival. There was a thought deep down that he should have been terminated once he stopped being of use to the owners just what had happened to his dog who was terminated because of it being of no use, anymore, to anyone in the ranch, as Candy recalls, "When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me" (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 60). The effect of the social milieu of being a worker robbed a man of his freedom to live a normal satisfactory life. The article "Tenents of Naturalism" by Tom Clark published on the webpage [naturalism.org](http://naturalism.org) discusses about this relation that affects human life and behavior forwarding:

From a naturalistic perspective, there are no causally privileged agents, nothing that causes without being caused in turn. Human beings act the way they do because of the various influences that shape them, whether these be biological or social, genetic, or environmental. We do not have the capacity to act outside the causal connections that link us in every respect to the rest of the world. This means we do not have what many people think of as free will, being able to cause our behavior without our being fully caused in turn. (Clark)

The same imposed norms Steinbeck brought out in *Of Mice and Men* as he talks about the treatment meted out to the colored. Crooks was the black stable buck who was the most permanent in the ranch due to him being crippled. He used to stay aloof and on his own. This was not because of him being crippled but because of his color. Suddenly, one day, Lennie stood out in the doorway to Crooks' bunk. Crooks noticing him there, chides him to leave the room. Lennie's innocent mentally ill mind however stayed on to know the reason behind Crooks staying all alone and never mingling with other workers. Lennie, on repeatedly asking Crooks the reason behind him never mingling with other ranch workers, Crooks replies, "I'm black" (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 68). Crooks had a lot of resentment against the others who used to treat him lowly owing to his physical appearance. He was never acceptable in the bunk house, never shown respect as the others used to get. Their leisure activity of relaxing themselves by playing cards was never offered to Crooks because of his color. He was a stinking animal let alone in his own bunk house.

The social milieu that made a man also made him a marginalized. Men were against men. No one could let the other rise. The rich were against the poor. Curley, the thin young son of the boss, disliked big guys. This was the irony of living. Lennie, the big guy, was nothing more than

a dust particle in front of the masters. Curley punching the huge Lennie left the innocent man with blood cuts that made him bleat with terror, George asking Lennie to hide himself from Curley saying, “Hide till I come for you. Don’t let nobody see you. Hide in the brush by the river. Stay that over.” (Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* 32), and many more spoke of the unwilling conformity to the prosperous strata of society. This harsh treatment was rendering the subjugated blue-collar population as misfits adding gloomy rage inside them.

Steinbeck’s Naturalism brought to light the worldview, through *Of Mice and Men*, the feebleness of the labouring class of California, the solitude, the fury, the cessation of the marginalized class, and the internal conflict arising out of the external living milieu. The shattering of dreams, being the unwanted, led to pessimistic mindset. Susan Shillinglaw in her Introduction to *Of Mice and Men* quotes some lines from a poem by Robert Burns. These lines equate to the deplorable domination of the weak just the way the unfortunate field mouse’s home was flattened by a plow. Susan Shillinglaw echoes:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,

In proving foresight may be vain:

The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men

Gang aft a-gley

Am’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain

For promised joy. (*Of Mice and Men* xxi)

Easterine Kire’s works show the inseparability of connection between people and the natural world. Her people always carry deep reverence for their place because they know how

the land is the source of their survival. Giving accounts of the mutual relationship with the land, she scripted accounts of the deplorable state of living the local inhabitants had to face during the wake of war which engulfed the hills of Kohima. The displacement suffered by the people, only because of some power-mongers who entered the valley, draws her closer to the theory of Literary Naturalism making her a Naturalist writer. Some of her works like *A Respectable Woman*, *Bitter Wormwood*, *Walking the Roadless Road*, give a thorough historical account of the days of war and invasion. *Mari* (2010) is one such work. Kire recalls:

For Mari and others of her generation, World War II and the Japanese invasion of our lands was the most momentous period of their lives. Everything happened at the same time. Growing up, falling in love, war, homelessness, starvation, death and parting and, finally peace. All my oral narrators told me this about the war: ‘It altered our lives completely’” (Kire, *Mari* viii).

Easterine Kire writes these lines in her note at the beginning of her novel *Mari* expressing the suffering the inhabitants had to undergo. Kire gathers the story of Kohima during those war years from her aunt Mari, Khrielievü Mari O’Leary, who was her mother’s elder sister after her brother Samuel and before another sister Zhabu. Kire’s mother was the youngest and Mari sorrowfully retells the story of the separation of the four siblings from their parents as well as amongst themselves when in 1944 the Japanese invasion began with the Japanese entering India through the Naga Hills. Kire beautifully picturises the physical milieu of Kohima, however with a forewarning of the impending damages and changes to be borne by the natives owing to the power-hungry domineering group of invaders. She begins by saying:

Kohima. It is dusk now. I can hear cicada’s plaintive cries. The birds have stopped their chirping and there is silence all around. My window overlooks the woods below our

house. The orange glow of the setting sun is subdued, the grey of twilight quickly overtaking it...I am constantly aware that this may not last much longer, considering how quickly people are building houses everywhere around me. (Kire, *Mari* 1)

By the beginning of 1942, war-like situation was highly evident in Kohima. Aircrafts like the Dakota were seen covering Kohima's sky and the British army entering in their convoys. Sound of gunfire began in the later part of the year. The Japanese invasion of Burma and the coming in of the Burmese refugees, looked after by the British, led to the approaching of war-like situation. Aviiü, or Mari, joined Kasano and two others for the construction of road and it was then she met Victor and he called her Mari, and so the name. They confessed each other of their love and this was even favored by Mari's parents. Both got engaged for marriage. March 1944, was when war was inevitable. Mari's sisters were transported to Chieswema while Victor had come to stay at Mari's house. Japanese invasion happened and there were gunshots everywhere. Victor came and took Mari, Jimmy, and others to Chieswema with some supplies of tin food and clothes. They parted. They could see Kohima ablaze. The group of women with Jimmy were hiding in the woods in the cowshed. Slowly their supplies were getting exhausted. They had to face the Japanese soldier, the tiger, and all the fearful things in the woods. They had to escape to a safer place and finally, with the help of Marina, they reached Jotsoma which was a safer place under British protection.

As Jimmy had gone to gather information he came back and told Mari about Victor's death. They had no other way but to go to Shillong and meet Mari's father. The war was over with the British forces bombarding the surrounding areas to let the Japanese starve. Japanese troops started to retreat and the war was officially declared to be over. Bob told Mari how gallantly Victor had fought the enemy and how deeply he loved Mari. They saw his grave in the

Garrison Hill. Mari, who was pregnant with Victor's child, chose life and gave birth to their daughter Marion or Neilano or Neiläü. Kohima was slowly coming back to life with the reopening of trading shops, schools, etc. Some British soldiers stayed back to re-establish the administration. Mari's life carried on as she became a nurse after getting the degree from Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, and started working at Assam Oil Company in Digboi, Assam. She married Patrick O'Leary and lived with him, both carefully raising Marion and Lily.

Khonoma village has been the setting of most of Kire's novel. Her deep connection to her land gets to the limelight as she presents the account of the natural milieu of the place, as notes Achingliu Kamei in Veio Pou's *Keeper of Stories: Critical Readings of Easterine Kire's Novels*, "the vast expanse of the sky, the wilderness, the winding rivers, birds, and fauna all share sacred space in the scheme of things with humans" (206).

Place stages a vital role in shaping the character of the individuals living in that climatic or spatial environment. An individual's existence is conditioned by the surrounding bringing either a similarity or a contrast with this outer nature. This is like what Leonard Lutwack expresses in his 1984 book titled *The Role of Place in Literature* when he states that "setting in fiction is intimately related to character ... because it functions as the detailed and continuous environment in which character is formed and to which character reacts over a long period of time" (17). An individual's way of living and outlook towards the space and people outside his environment is all shaped by his own environment, his own place.

Kire, blending the environment and the historical facts of her region brings to light the blunt suffering faced by the people, the story of being displaced, the story of fear and of misery. The dark clouds of pessimistic hopelessness hovering over the people resonates with the

Naturalism of Emile Zola who showed the deplorable human condition because of the milieu of their existence.

War has never brought any good to anyone. Maybe for the ones who master the machine, war or invasions bring an expansion of their sovereignty but what is growth if it is at the cost of taking away innocent lives? Displacement of people accompanied by anguish began when in March 1944 the Japanese invasion of Kohima began rendering a paranormal image to Kohima. The streets turned empty. The livelihood of people suffered. The first pain of displacement was seen when people, the shopkeepers whose households ran because of selling goods to the locals, had to run away for their lives leaving behind their homes and hearth. Kire recalls the same when the plainsmen, who had opened shops in Kohima for their living, had to escape down to Dimapur and the regions beyond because there were no buyers of their products in the wake of war. Displacement was not only seen amongst the non-local traders and businessmen, but even the locals had to escape to safer places like, “Tsiesema, Rükhroma and other northern villages where they could live in relative safety” (Kire, *Mari* 46).

Pain of separation was not only for the vendors, but the war generated milieu also led to the displacement of family members who went different ways to find and seek safety for the other members of the family. Two of Mari’s sisters, Zhabu and Aneiü, were taken to Chieswema to their uncle’s house while Mari and Sam had to take a different hideout. Because of the self-interested intention of some people who brought the invasion to Kohima, parents, siblings, relatives, who used to live together as one, now had to go their own way unaware of whether they will ever be able to meet again. Many a times in the quest to survive one must go through the rough times of hiding in the most dangerous dilapidated environment with hunger written all over the face, supplies diminishing every single day, and the distrust of not being able to make it



to life throbbing the soul to bleed. The Japanese invasion with the consequent atrocities on the locals brought to the inhabitants a mind filled with gloom. Fearing the British bombing in the village of Chieswema, as the Japanese were stationed in the village, they— Mari, her aunt and her daughter, Jimmy, Mari's two sisters, and Vikieü and her baby— set out for safety to the forest. The woods served as home to them but it was more of suffering. The cowshed at Tsiekhou Woods served to be their home, but not a single day passed, while in this hideout, of the thoughts of impending fears. There was fear of being surrounded by the man-eating tiger as its growling could be heard at close quarters making them shiver to their bones, then there was the hunger for survival with shortage of food supplies to survive the long days and nights along with the fear of being bombed to death from any side as "...the overwhelming presence of the Japanese attracted fire from British bombers" (Kire, *Mari* 65). These social conditions of living to survive were causing disastrous effects on human life.

Achingliu Kamei in her work "An Ecocritical Study of Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* and *Son of the Thundercloud*" mentions about *Mari* saying, "*Mari* tells the displacement story of Kohima and its people during the Second World War" (204). Kire's sensitivity to the strain modernization has brought to the natural world, the industrialization demands of the West affecting the living space of the nature-rooted East, and the self-seeking Western ideologies of gain followed by war and the invasions terribly affected the indigenous inhabitants. Kire's Naturalistic tendency brought to the forefront the negativity that housed inside people's hearts. The suffering meted to the people, by the powerful class as they occupied the local milieu, adversely affected the behavioral patterns of the people. This Naturalist inclination of Kire is rightly quoted by Robert Lyman, a military historian, in the back cover of *Mari* by Easterine Kire as he states:

Easterine Kire brings to life for the first time the authentic voice of the Naga people amidst the horror of the war that overwhelmed their mountaintop home in 1944. It is a voice which has for too long been silent. In her vibrant telling of the story, Easterine shows just what is meant for Nagas to be refugees in their own homeland, their homes and livelihoods around them crushed by the weight of conflict and bloodshed, their families split up and separated forever. (Lyman)

Literary Naturalists thus present an upsetting view of the conditions of living where one's environment greatly affects the behavioral living of the people. A realistic depiction of urban lifestyle and social class, with the higher strata exploiting the lower strata, brings forth doubt leading to detachment. Literary Naturalism, thus, focuses on the miseries of the marginalized people of the society.

## **Deep Ecology and the Living Milieu**

Place is that nonhuman living structure that endows the inhabitants with their identity considering it from the perspective of Deep Ecology. Arne Naess after getting an understanding of nature in the writings of Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold searched for a deeper meaning of nature, and in his search he “thought that this deeper approach resulted from a more sensitive openness to ourselves and nonhuman life around us. The essence of deep ecology is to keep asking more searching questions about human life, society, and Nature as in the Western philosophical tradition of Socrates” (Devall and Sessions 65). This brings forth the basic ground on which Deep Ecology stands. Deep Ecology is far more than just trying to study the environmental problems and comprehending the protection. It is not the factual science behind

the degradation of nature. Rather it is the deeper study of self and the earth. It is earth mindfulness. But what makes this earth that humans must have conscious wisdom?

When the earth with all the living and the non-living matter was created there was no discrimination based on superiority or inferiority. All were equal partners in this web of life. However, the technological greed to be masters of the world led to the stark differences between the living and the non-living life forms. The growing supremacy started the Western initiation of the techno-industrial holders coming up with the notion of ascendancy i.e., the powerful dominating the powerless, the rich and wealthy controlling the poor, the affluent West governing the not so well-off cultures of the farther opposite end of the world, and the same supremacy was witnessed with the human world subduing the nonhuman nature. This superiority was only man-made for self-gratification which was a serious threat to the lesser-life. Bill Devall and George Sessions took upon themselves the task to challenge the danger and reiterated the danger and the means to come out of this danger, in their book *Deep Ecology: Living As if Nature Mattered*, where they exclaim:

Ecological consciousness and deep ecology are in sharp contrast with the dominant worldview of technocratic-industrial societies which regards humans as isolated and fundamentally separate from the rest of Nature, as superior to, and in charge of, the rest of creation...Deep ecological consciousness allows us to see through these erroneous and dangerous illusions. (65–66)

Bringing forth the knowledge of what position we have in the Earth, it surmises that human is just a part of the whole, the organic whole, the earth. It is only when the human world starts valuing the inherent values of the nonhuman world, life on earth can flourish. All the entities have value and this value gives each one of us our identity. One must have self-realization which

does not favor the social self which makes us a servant to the socially acclaimed groups. One starts to act according to how others wish us to act. This leads to what is called the sybaritic fulfillment. Ego plays its role in this fulfillment. Deep Ecology's self-realization is to see oneself equal with the nonhumans where no one is dominating the other. "A nurturing nondominating society can help in the "real work" of becoming a whole person. The "real work" can be summarized symbolically as the realization of "self-in-Self" where "Self" stands for organic wholeness. (Devall and Sessions 67), a wholeness of one being equal to the other.

John Muir taking his deep ecological approach further started to look at landscape not just as it appeared to be but as something more meaningful, more valuable. In his quest for deeper understanding, he realized that the rocks, pines, rivers, and all that existed need to be seen as interlaced entities, not detached. Deep Ecology studies wilderness or the wildness of a place, as discussed by Bill Devall and George Sessions in their work *Deep Ecology: Living As if Nature Mattered*,

as a process of 1) developing a sense of place, 2) redefining the heroic person from conqueror of land to the person fully experiencing the natural place, 3) cultivating the virtue of modesty and humility and 4) realizing how the mountains and rivers, fish and bears are continuing their own actualizing processes. (110)

Place thus holds a position which is of immense significance. Just the way living with the human and the nonhuman entities gives one his or her identity, likewise a place is also that nonhuman entity which provides identity or uniqueness to an individual. Place is always a feeling, the driving force behind one's attachment to this non-living entity towards which we are drawn time and again. Our survival is directed to this piece of living space, the milieu of our existence, with which are all our days and nights tied together. Alan Gussow in his 1971 book *A*

*Sense of Place* claims this attachment stating that "... it is always places we have known—and recall. We are homesick for places, we are reminded of places, it is the sounds and smells and sights of places which haunts us and against which we often measure our present" (Devall and Sessions 111). Hence, it can be inferred that one of the most essential elements of Deep Ecology is to teach about the importance of place, the milieu of living, as having value like all the other entities. Barry Lopez during his presentation at the Salamanca Writers Festival in Hobart, Tasmania in March 1996 spoke about how his intimacy with the California valley made him write stories. The solace gave him the identity of being a writer. It was the value inherent in California that comforted. It made him discover himself.

Owing to the industrial progress, the world saw a lot of mayhem being meted on the lesser have-not classes of people, sometimes owing to exploitation, sometimes to the wars and invasions, stating in an easier word due to the "technocratic-industrial societies" (65) as mentioned by Bill Devall and George Sessions in their *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*. Harsh circumstances always lead to suffering of dislodgment from the family, the dwelling, the comfort of home, from the identity of belongingness. Just the way Allan Gussow expresses about one's bonding to his place, likewise Easterine Kire writes in her book, *When the River Sleeps*,

This is our home, do you understand? We cannot abandon it and try to live in another place. Our umbilical cords are buried here, and we would always be restless if we tried to settle elsewhere. (87)

Whatever be the situation of hatred, blood, fights, or displacement, the inhabitants cannot be away from their place. Even being displaced they come back to restart and restore their life.

Nothing can keep the inhabitants away from their living milieu of existence where they were born, and where they grew. The place-attachment can never be overruled.

K. Sreenivasan in his study of “Steinbeck’s Celebration of Democracy” in R. K. Sharma’s *Indian Response to Steinbeck: Essays Presented to Warren French* argues that Steinbeck “had concerned himself with only one kind of war viz. that against poverty and disease” (219). Steinbeck professed about the blessing of the greatest potential a human was born with, and that was to lend support to the ones who were suffering in deprivation, and were ignorant of this potentiality. Steinbeck wrote his most significant account about war and its harshness, naming it *The Moon Is Down*. This work of Steinbeck clearly exposes how war acts a barrier in progress of the ones defeated adding to anger and frustration in the hearts of the ones being persecuted. However, it is not only the persecuted who are affected, but to a far extent, even the powerful invaders get a defeat when it comes to winning the trust of the people. They get self-defeated because of their foolishness to be powered dictators. *The Moon Is Down* brings to light war folly.

Steinbeck begins his fiction, *The Moon Is Down* by furnishing how the war came to an end with the defeat of the ones defending themselves and the town. It was not late for the defeat because the ones who came to invade were with well-planned and careful strategy of defeating. The peace-loving coastal town was under the aggressive power and the invaders who, with a well-planned strategy, overpowered the defenders under the leadership of the commander Colonel Lanser. Mayor Orden was the people’s mayor because the locals had chosen him to be the one. One day Colonel Lanser visited Mayor Orden’s palace with two requests, more honestly the two requests were orders. One was to permit them to dig coal and do fishing allowing the local people to work for them and the other order was to let him and his staff stay with the family

in the palace. Reluctant as the Mayor was to these commands, masked as request, five men Colonel Lanser, Major Hunter, Captain Loft, Captain Bentick, Lieutenant Prackle, and Lieutenant Tonder occupied the upstairs of the palace and made it their headquarters. They used the name of the mayor for their functioning. Mr. George Corell, the shopkeeper was hatching a dream to be the mayor in place of Mayor Orden.

Few days later a table was set by housekeepers Joseph and Annie which would host the trial of Alexander Morden, husband of Molly Morden, on the charge of murdering Captain Bentick. Colonel Lanser wanted Mayor Orden to pronounce the sentence of Alexander being shot publicly which was denied by Mayor Orden. The trial was done with the charges read against Alexander and he was shot. Thereafter started the rage in the local people who did not stop themselves from showing their anger. Colonel Lanser ordered to search for firearms in the town without hesitating to shoot whoever was in possession of arms. The invaders started by cutting the supply of food to the inhabitants who would not obey them. The defenders were not quite still and they started making strategies of getting weapons to blow away the conquerors. As patrolling continued, two bomber planes were noticed dropping something which occurred to be the ten-inch dynamites. The soldiers were warned to stay away from there. Colonel Lanser decided to arrest Mayor Orden to stop the rebellion of the people. Mayor Orden denied any orders he would pass on to the locals to stop the agitation. Orden surrendered himself to the firing squad and there were bomb blasts heard here and there.

With *The Moon Is Down*, Steinbeck brought to the forefront his Deep Ecological perspective by using his characters as metaphors to show the sense of belongingness to the place that provided them their identity. The town was taken over by the invaders with their sophisticated sub-machine guns in their hands. The townsmen unaware of what had suddenly

happened, were in astonishment at being occupied, and were looking at the invaders. Steinbeck made Mayor Orden as one of the characters who denied submission to the commands of the invader. This was not because he was afraid of the invaders shooting him for his denial but because submission would mean losing his place, his town, not just physically but even morally to the invaders. When the Mayor was told to pass the verdict of death to Alexander Morden by Colonel Lanser, Orden's loyalty to his people and place made him refuse it. Orden, rather told the Colonel that he would pass the sentence if the invaders, who killed six men of the town, were first punished. Mayor with his patriotic nature tried to preserve the identity of his town saying:

You and your government do not understand. In all the world yours is the only government and people with a record of defeat after defeat for centuries and every time you did not understand people. (Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* 48)

People and place are synonyms and one cannot exist without the other. It is the place in which people find their identity. Preservation of the place is the prime motive of any citizen because of the value attached to it. Mayor Orden was the epitome of the hopes and aspirations of the people of the town. The people of the town were against the occupation of their land. They were aware of the dislocation they would have to face in the wake of orders. They were not ready to leave the town and run for their lives. It is never easy to abandon the space which made you, and restart and reestablish oneself in an alien land. The conquered would have never let that happen out of the attachment to their land. Mayor Orden was quite sure of this and said to Colonel Lanser that very soon the inhabitants would be destroying the enemy and rather pushing them away,



[f]ree man cannot start war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars. (Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* 111)

“Place attachment” (Chen 151) leads to steps people take to preserve their place. Some steps may go to the extent of sacrificing oneself for the cause of the place that adds value to one’s life. History is a witness of the bloodshed of the inhabitants only to protect the place of their birth and growth. Mayor Orden knew the importance that the little town had in the lives of the inhabitants. This confirms to Orden talking to the doctor about his decision to face the firing squad for the protection of his people and the place saying:

‘You know, Doctor, I am a little man and this is a little town, but there must be a spark in little men that can burst into flame. I am afraid, I am terribly afraid, and, I thought of all the things I might do to save my own life, and then that went away, and sometimes now I feel a kind of exultation, as though I were bigger and better than I am, and do you know what I have been thinking, Doctor?’ ... ‘a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether he is doing right or wrong’ (Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* 106).

Mayor Orden sacrificing himself for the place is a great show of the allegiance one has for his place. Jingfu Chen in his “Approaches Towards Studying Sense of Place” highlights on this value a place holds. It being a nonhuman entity showers on the people their distinctiveness because place adds to “one’s way of being” (Chen 147). Jingfu Chen further states:

[S]ense of place is perceived to comprise three aspects—place dependence, place attachment, and place identity. Place dependence indicates people's instrumental

connections with place. This approach is exemplified by how people rely on local facilities and social networks to arrange their everyday routines. In contrast, place attachment implies positive affective bonds between people and place. Regarding place identity, it refers to the formation of personal identity in relation to ideas, symbols, beliefs, values, sensations, behaviors, and practices integrated into the production of place.... (151)

People retaliated with sabotages because they had the means to raise protest because of the dynamites which were dropped. The locals murdered the soldiers. Hostilities and anger continued and the place was protected. Steinbeck, through this work, attaches worth to the land because it was the land that offered the people their individuality. Had the people not had an attachment to the place, they would have never retaliated to protect it letting it go into the hands of the enemy. This brings the principle of the inherent value attached to the entities a solid support. It is in place that the different entities, both the human and the nonhuman, live in mutual respect and interrelation. These entities which make the place have value which implies that the place, overall, has value rendering its inhabitants their distinctiveness. Steinbeck through this work brought to the forefront “the worth of the individual, and the power deriving from free citizens sharing common commitment” (Steinbeck 130) as was written by Donald V. Coers in his Afterword to *The Moon Is Down*.

A similar commitment is witnessed amongst the indigenous people residing in the hills of North-East India because for them their land is their heart and soul. Nagas have an unfaltering connection to their place. Anupama Chingangbam in her “An Eco-Critical Approach: A Study of Selected North East Indian Poets” expresses:

Nature is not just a source of sustenance for most of the NE states, but more of an extension of identity and roots. Thus, harm to nature immediately affects the question of identity. Nature becomes a space where an individual identifies himself. (61)

Easterine Kire in the very introduction of her novel *Bitter Wormwood* sends a cautioning to the readers as she states:

This book is not meant to be read as a history textbook... This is not about the leaders and the heroes of the Naga struggle. It is about the ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle. Because the conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims. (6)

Kire connects her works to Kohima which holds a very noteworthy room for the indigenous people residing there. A lot of upheavals were forced upon Kohima by the war, devastating the place. Strife between the Japanese and the British troops left Kohima blazing on many occasions giving it a ghost-like appearance. People were displaced, they had to escape for life. Leaving the home for survival was one of the most disturbing thoughts looming in the grief-stricken hearts of all the inhabitants, big and small alike. Kire's novel *Bitter Wormwood* is an exemplary work showing people's connection to Kohima, their homeland, their place.

It was one fine day at work, in the paddy field, when Vilaü gave birth to Moselie (Mose), hers and Luo-o's son. Grandmother Khrienuo named him immediately after she returned from the field because it was a taboo to name the child immediately. Luo-o was a proud father and they were living well until Luo-o's demise while in the forest to get the tree, as was told by the seer, befell on the family. When Mose was all set to start his schooling, war broke out in 1943 with the Japanese invasion, and the three along with other villagers had to leave their homestead

and take refuge in other villages. Coming back only after two years to start everything anew, Mose with Neituo started school. New changes were brought in the country like the coming of radio was a new development and even Vilaü and Mose got themselves a radio. By the time Mose was eleven he was a great help in the field as well as in the house helping his mother and grandmother. During that time there were waves of partition in the country and this had reached the hills too with people demanding and having talks for Naga Independence.

It was in 1950, when Mose was studying hard to get himself and his mother a happy life later when he gets a job, the rush of army trucks started to be seen in the village. The villagers were all scared and decided to send a petition to the Prime Minister demanding for free Nagaland, but things took a different turn and the army started to open gunshots killing the villagers. Policemen started to force people. There were curfews everywhere. Many women were molested and raped. As Vilaü and Khrienuo were working in their field, there was a sudden gunshot and the bullet hit Khrienuo's head killing her. The other villagers carried her lifeless body back to the village. Mose was heartbroken to see his grandmother dead. Meanwhile, there were so much of tortures being meted out to the local inhabitants, like the beating to death of the four men the army suspected to be militants, the killing of a woman and two daughters in the firing, etc., were so disturbing, Mose decided to leave school in his ninth grade and do the field so that his mother would be safe at home. Later, Mose and Neituo joined the underground activists. Nothing was peaceful in the state and all the local inhabitants were living in threat and fear.

When in 1963 statehood was given to Nagaland under the country, many opposed this decision and wished to fight. The government started to offer lands and money to those who surrendered arms and wished to live a life away from the jungle. Vilaü being unwell, with a

cancerous tumor in her stomach, made Mose and Neituo leave the fraction and be back home after seven years. Mose stayed back and married Neilhouno, the rifle-girl and they were blessed with a daughter who was named The-jangu-sanuo (Sabunuo), two years after whose birth Vilaiü died. Mose was offered a job as Lower Divisional Clerk in the Deputy Commissioner's office which he denied while Neituo started to serve as the night watchman in the Public Works Department. Fights and skirmishes continued between the Nagas and the Indian State. Bomb blasts, firing, gunshots, etc., became routine sounds. Fractional killings continued and, in the meantime, Sabunuo got married to Vilalhou. The army continued with their search operations and killings. Ceasefire was agreed upon and the armed forces were given special power under the Armed Forces Special Power Act which was a matter of sheer dislike and hatred amongst the locals. Sabunuo's son Neibou left for Delhi to study and came in acquaintance with Rakesh whose grandfather had good memories of Nagaland when he served the police between 1961 and 1962. Mose was seventy-one and was killed one day by two unidentified men.

Life was not easy for the villagers with the war clouds over them. They had to run away for their life leaving behind their home, the place of their origin and identity. Mose was five and was ready to start schooling in the coming year, 1943, as his mother and grandmother were discussing. However, the misappropriation of life made them refugees in their own land with the school being closed down the same year fearing the Japanese invasion. Running away to a new place for safety can never be a welcoming move because the feeling of oneness one develops with the milieu of origin can never be developed elsewhere. The feeling of safety and love, even the lifeless concrete wall provides, can never be found anywhere else. Mose, his mother, and his grandmother, along with the other men of their clan had to escape to the village of Rukhroma to hide in an abandoned house. The displaced villagers could have continued staying in the new

location where they slowly had established their homes being refugees, but it was not a day they did not think of going back to their own homes. They did not bother about it being destroyed by the gunshots or the shelling. All they wanted was to go back no matter what was the duration of their stay. Their place was their source of identity, the witness of they being members of their milieu. “By the time the war was over and schools reopened, Mose was seven” (Kire, *Bitter Wormwood* 24). Leaving at the age of five and coming back at seven damaged two years of learning but they were happy to be back.

Once again Mose had joined the underground activities in the year 1956 and came back when he was twenty-six years old. The internal conflicts between the local civilians and the Indian army following the demand for a free Nagaland led many youths to join secret fractions. Life was not easy in the jungles with fear impending every single hour. The civilians were all ready to bear any hardship to gain freedom for their land from external subjugation an expression of which Kire mentions:

The camp was two days’ walk from Kohima. It lay close to the Northern Angami forests. Cleverly camouflaged sheds had been built of bamboo and leaves. Piles of leaves on the floor of sheds made up sleeping quarters for the soldiers. When they lay down to sleep, Mose inhaled the strong smell of soil rising up from below them.

“This is what we wanted to do, right?” Neituo asked in the night.

“Yes, of course, we are doing the right thing,” was Mose’s reply.

“No regrets?”

“None.” (Kire, *Bitter Wormwood* 86–87)

For the commitment to their land, they were readily bearing rigorous training, bodily exhaustion, meager food supplies, deadly organisms, and fear of sudden ambush. Yet their commitment to bring freedom to their place made them undergo all suffering without hesitation. They could do all these because of the deep admiration they bore for their place which was their identity-giver.

Place thus, “serves as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from events, and establish rituals and religious arenas of action” (Stewart and Strathearn 3). People recognize themselves only in connection to their place. One identifies the other taking the name of the place the person comes from. As Yi- Fu Tuan in his *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* rightly mentioned that places are “centers of felt value” (4). Value with which the entities are revered thus make it very strong that a place is an entity of nature which is the wholeness to which the other entities belong. Human relation with the milieu is imperative to the social relations one creates with it as well as with everything else rendering the identity. John A. Agnew in his epoch-making work *Place and Politics: The Geographical Meditation of State and Society*, supporting the value attached to place as a natural entity, says that places are the “areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify” (263). The living milieu is therefore attached to the value of being an identity provider.

Analyzed from the perspective of comparative literary studies it is established that both Steinbeck and Kire, through their works studied earlier, bring to close grounds the attachment one develops with the place of his or her birth and growth. Their Naturalistic view of bringing forth the ills that the inhabitants of a place must bear due to the power-hungry few got highlighted. Both talk about the pain attached to displacement, suffering, loss of identity, and the agony of being marginalized in their land because of the social milieu created by a few men of power that condition human existence and behavior. In their works, they provided a realistic

representation of the man-made environment which surrounded the people making them insignificant in their own place. However, the attachment to the place makes these suffering indigenes endure hardships and rise back because of them being aware that the place has value inherent in it. This Deep Ecology's stance comes to light through their works. Steinbeck and Kire professed that the attachment acknowledged to a place, which gives them identity, is because of the realization of the value that is inherent in a place. This value makes the place an entity of the whole nature. It is this quest, one has towards one's own milieu of existence, which provides the feeling of rootedness and belongingness. In the absence of this sense of belonging, existence becomes an unaccomplished task. Milieu thus acts as an essential baton of identifier to one's existence beautifully coloring the physiological, sociological, and psychological appearance of the indigenes into the canvas of living.



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