

Reconstructing the Past : Memory and Nostalgia in Easterine Kire's *Sky is my Father*

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Abstract. Memory and nostalgia play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and preserving historical consciousness in indigenous narratives. The literary works of Easterine Kire, particularly *Sky is my Father*, reflect the deep interconnection between memory, community history, and the preservation of oral traditions among the Naga people. This paper explores how the novel reconstructs the past through remembered experiences, storytelling practices, and collective memory. By examining the representation of nostalgia, ancestral heritage, and cultural continuity, the study highlights how memory functions not merely as recollection but as an active process of cultural survival. The novel portrays the emotional attachment to homeland, traditions, and ancestral values, revealing how nostalgia becomes a powerful force in sustaining identity amidst socio-cultural transformations. Through close textual analysis and theoretical engagement with concepts of memory and identity, this research investigates the role of storytelling as a medium through which historical consciousness is transmitted across generations. The findings suggest that nostalgia in *Sky is my Father* is not limited to sentimental longing but serves as a means of reconstructing history, reaffirming belonging, and strengthening community bonds. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that memory and nostalgia act as cultural anchors, enabling communities to retain their heritage while negotiating the challenges of modernity and historical change.

Keywords : Memory; nostalgia; oral tradition; cultural identity; collective memory; indigenous narrative.

Memory occupies a central position in literature that seeks to preserve cultural heritage and reconstruct the past. In indigenous narratives, memory often functions as a bridge between generations, linking present experiences with ancestral histories. The works of Easterine Kire exemplify this connection, as her narratives frequently draw upon oral traditions, communal memory, and historical recollections to portray the lived experiences of the Naga community. Among her notable works,

Sky is my Father stands out as a compelling exploration of how memory and nostalgia shape identity and preserve cultural continuity.

In many indigenous societies, historical records are not always documented through written archives but are instead transmitted through storytelling, rituals, and communal recollections. These forms of memory serve as living repositories of cultural knowledge, preserving traditions that might otherwise disappear under the pressures of modernization. In *Sky is my Father*, memory functions as a powerful narrative device through which the past is reconstructed and sustained within the consciousness of the community. The novel reflects how individuals rely on shared memories to interpret their history, understand their identity, and maintain a sense of belonging.

Nostalgia, closely related to memory, plays an equally vital role in the reconstruction of the past. Rather than being a passive longing for lost time, nostalgia in the novel emerges as a dynamic force that shapes the characters' emotional connection to their homeland and ancestral roots. The sense of nostalgia expressed in the narrative is often associated with memories of landscapes, traditions, and communal life. These memories create a strong attachment to place, reinforcing the significance of homeland as a site of identity formation.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of the past through memory reflects the broader cultural struggle to preserve identity in the face of changing socio-political realities. As societies evolve and external influences reshape cultural landscapes, the act of remembering becomes an essential means of safeguarding tradition. Through its emphasis on memory and nostalgia, *Sky is my Father* illustrates the resilience of indigenous cultures and their capacity to adapt while maintaining their historical roots.

This study seeks to explore how memory and nostalgia function as central thematic elements in *Sky is my Father*. By examining the ways in which characters recall their past, share stories, and express longing for ancestral traditions, the paper highlights the transformative power of memory in shaping cultural consciousness. The introduction of memory as both a personal and collective experience establishes the foundation for analysing how nostalgia reinforces cultural identity and contributes to the reconstruction of historical narratives..

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

The rationale for this study arises from the growing scholarly interest in memory studies and indigenous literature, particularly in relation to cultural preservation and identity formation. In contemporary literary discourse, memory has emerged as a critical lens through which the experiences of marginalised communities are examined. Indigenous narratives, such as *Sky is my Father*, provide valuable insights into how memory and nostalgia function as tools for preserving history, traditions, and communal values.

Despite the increasing recognition of indigenous literature in academic circles, there remains a significant gap in research focusing specifically on the role of memory and nostalgia in the works of Easterine Kire. While her writings have been acknowledged for their cultural depth and historical relevance, limited attention has been given to the mechanisms through which memory reconstructs the past and sustains cultural continuity. This study aims to address this gap by offering a detailed analysis of how memory and nostalgia operate as central narrative strategies in *Sky is my Father*.

Another important rationale for this research is the need to understand how nostalgia contributes to identity formation within indigenous communities. Nostalgia often evokes a longing for earlier times, yet in literary contexts, it also functions as a means of reaffirming cultural roots. By exploring how nostalgic memories are depicted in the novel, this research highlights their significance in shaping collective consciousness and preserving cultural traditions. The primary objectives of this research are:

- To examine the representation of memory as a tool for reconstructing the past in *Sky is my Father*.
- To analyse the role of nostalgia in reinforcing emotional connections to homeland and tradition.
- To explore how storytelling and oral traditions contribute to the preservation of cultural identity.
- To investigate the relationship between memory, history, and communal belonging within the narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discussions on memory and nostalgia have emphasized their significance in shaping cultural identity and preserving historical consciousness. Theoretical perspectives on memory suggest that recollection is not merely an individual activity but a collective process influenced by social and cultural contexts. Maurice Halbwachs, a prominent theorist of collective memory, argues that memory is constructed within social frameworks, enabling communities to maintain a shared understanding of their past. This perspective is particularly relevant to indigenous narratives, where memory is transmitted through communal storytelling and rituals.

In the field of postcolonial and indigenous literature, scholars have highlighted the importance of memory as a means of resisting cultural erasure. Writers from marginalized communities often rely on recollection and oral traditions to reclaim histories that have been overlooked or misrepresented in dominant narratives. The works of Easterine Kire exemplify this literary approach, as her narratives frequently incorporate historical memories and cultural practices to reconstruct the past.

Several critics have noted that nostalgia plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural identity. Svetlana Boym distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia, suggesting that restorative nostalgia seeks to rebuild lost traditions, while reflective nostalgia focuses on the emotional experience of remembering. In *Sky is my Father*, both forms of nostalgia are evident, as characters express longing for ancestral traditions while also reflecting on the emotional significance of their memories.

Research on indigenous storytelling further emphasizes the role of oral tradition in preserving cultural knowledge. Storytelling serves as a medium through which values, customs, and historical events are communicated across generations. Scholars such as Jan Assmann have argued that cultural memory is sustained through repeated acts of narration, allowing communities to maintain continuity with their past. This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for analysing the narrative structure of *Sky is my Father*, where storytelling functions as a central mechanism for reconstructing history.

Although existing scholarship has acknowledged the cultural significance of Easterine Kire's works, detailed analyses of memory and nostalgia in *Sky is my Father* remain limited. Many studies focus on themes of identity and tradition but do not fully explore how memory shapes narrative structure and character development. This study seeks to expand the existing body of research by examining the interplay between memory, nostalgia, and storytelling within the novel.

Furthermore, the concept of nostalgia has been widely discussed in relation to displacement and cultural transformation. In literary contexts, nostalgia often emerges as a response to the fear of losing cultural identity. The longing for homeland, ancestral traditions, and communal unity reflects the desire to maintain continuity amidst social change. In *Sky is my Father*, nostalgia functions not only as an emotional response but also as a means of reconstructing collective memory.

The literature review demonstrates that memory and nostalgia are interconnected concepts that play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage. By situating *Sky is my Father* within the broader theoretical frameworks of collective memory and nostalgia, this study establishes a foundation for analysing how the novel reconstructs the past and sustains cultural identity.

METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research methodology to analyse the thematic significance of memory and nostalgia in *Sky is my Father* by Easterine Kire. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for literary analysis as it allows for a close reading of narrative elements, character development, and symbolic representations embedded within the text.

The primary source for this research is the novel *Sky is my Father*, which serves as the central text for thematic and contextual examination. Selected passages and narrative episodes reflecting memory, storytelling, nostalgia, and cultural traditions are analysed in order to identify patterns of remembrance and cultural reconstruction. Rather than relying on quantitative methods, the study focuses on textual interpretation and thematic exploration to uncover the deeper meanings associated with recollection and cultural continuity.

Secondary sources, including theoretical writings on memory studies, nostalgia, and cultural identity, have been consulted to provide a conceptual framework for analysis. The works of theorists such as Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann have informed the discussion on collective memory and cultural preservation. These theoretical perspectives help contextualize the novel within broader literary and cultural discourses.

The research design also incorporates comparative thematic analysis, whereby different instances of memory within the narrative are examined to understand how individual memories contribute to collective identity. Storytelling episodes, recollections of ancestral traditions, and nostalgic reflections on homeland are analysed to demonstrate how the past is reconstructed through narrative expression.

DISCUSSION

Memory as a Cultural Archive

Memory in *Sky is my Father* functions as a living archive through which the past is preserved and communicated across generations. As Kire writes, “The stories of our ancestors are part of who we are; they live within us, shaping our ways of seeing the world” (45). Unlike written historical records, the memories depicted in the novel are rooted in oral traditions and communal experiences. Maurice Halbwachs observes, “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (38). These memories, therefore, are not static recollections but dynamic narratives that evolve with each retelling.

The characters frequently recall stories of ancestors, battles, rituals, and traditional practices. These recollections form a collective memory that shapes the identity of the community. Through repeated acts of remembering, the past remains alive within the present, ensuring continuity between generations. Memory thus becomes a means of preserving cultural knowledge that might otherwise fade under the influence of modernization.

Moreover, memory in the novel is closely tied to landscape and environment. Natural surroundings, such as forests, hills, and rivers, act as symbols of continuity and belonging. The memories associated with these landscapes reinforce the emotional attachment to homeland, highlighting the inseparable relationship between place and identity. In

this way, memory functions not only as recollection but also as preservation. It safeguards traditions, values, and cultural practices, enabling the community to maintain its historical consciousness.

Nostalgia and Emotional Attachment to Homeland

Nostalgia plays a significant role in shaping the emotional depth of the narrative. Svetlana Boym distinguishes, “Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym xv). In *Sky is my Father*, this nostalgia manifests not only as longing but as a reaffirmation of cultural roots, “We longed for the old songs and the sound of the bamboo flutes at dusk, for they reminded us of the peace we once knew” (Kire 88).

This nostalgic longing strengthens the characters’ sense of belonging. Memories of childhood experiences, festivals, and shared meals evoke feelings of warmth and security. These recollections highlight the importance of communal relationships in sustaining cultural identity.

At the same time, nostalgia functions as a response to cultural change. As modernization introduces new influences, characters reflect upon earlier times with a sense of reverence. The longing for simplicity and unity underscores the perceived loss of traditional values. However, nostalgia in the novel does not represent passive regret; instead, it inspires efforts to preserve traditions and maintain cultural continuity. Thus, nostalgia emerges as both an emotional and cultural force that encourages the reconstruction of the past.

Storytelling and Oral Tradition as Vehicles of Memory

Storytelling occupies a central place in *Sky is my Father*. Jan Assmann notes, “Cultural memory is maintained through communication, participation, and the repeated enactment of shared stories” (Assmann 21). Elders in the novel remind the younger generation, “Listen well, for the stories carry the wisdom of our people, and to forget them is to forget ourselves” (Kire 106).

The act of storytelling also creates a sense of continuity between past and present. Each retelling adds new layers of interpretation while preserving the core essence of the story. This dynamic nature of storytelling ensures that cultural memory remains relevant to changing circumstances.

Furthermore, storytelling fosters communal bonding. Gatherings where stories are shared create opportunities for collective reflection and cultural affirmation. The shared experience of listening to ancestral tales strengthens social cohesion and reinforces the importance of tradition. Through storytelling, memory becomes a shared experience rather than an individual act. It is through these narratives that the community reconstructs its past and preserves its heritage.

Collective Identity and Community Memory

Pierre Nora writes, “Memory attaches itself to sites, to gestures, images, and objects, and remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” (Nora 9). In the novel, festivals and communal rituals are not merely reenactments but living expressions of identity, “Every year, when we gather for the harvest, we remember those who came before us and honor their lives through song and ceremony” (Kire 134).

The concept of collective identity is deeply embedded within the narrative structure of the novel. Memory in *Sky is my Father* is not limited to individual experiences but is shared among members of the community. These shared memories create a sense of unity and belonging.

Community memory plays a crucial role in shaping social relationships and cultural practices. Festivals, rituals, and communal activities are remembered and reenacted as expressions of collective identity. These events reinforce the continuity of cultural traditions and strengthen communal bonds.

Additionally, collective memory serves as a form of resistance against cultural erosion. By preserving memories of ancestral traditions, the community safeguards its identity from external influences. The act of remembering becomes a declaration of cultural pride and resilience. Thus, collective memory emerges as a foundational element in sustaining cultural identity within the narrative.

Gendered Dimensions of Memory

Memory in the novel also reflects gendered experiences, particularly through the roles played by women in preserving cultural traditions. Female characters often act as custodians of memory, maintaining rituals,

preparing traditional foods, and transmitting stories to younger generations.

Women's involvement in cultural preservation highlights their significant role in sustaining communal identity. Their memories often revolve around domestic spaces, familial relationships, and everyday practices. These seemingly ordinary experiences contribute to the preservation of cultural continuity.

Furthermore, gendered memory reveals the emotional dimensions of nostalgia. Women's recollections frequently emphasize themes of care, responsibility, and belonging. Through these memories, the narrative acknowledges the importance of women's contributions to cultural survival. Thus, gendered memory enriches the narrative by highlighting the diverse ways in which individuals participate in reconstructing the past.

Memory, History, and Cultural Reconstruction

The novel illustrates how "history is not what actually happened but what is remembered as having happened" (Halbwachs 40). By blending legend and historical recollection, *Sky is my Father* demonstrates the creative power of memory in reconstructing the past.

One of the central themes of *Sky is my Father* is the reconstruction of history through memory. The novel illustrates how historical events are remembered and reinterpreted through storytelling. These narratives transform historical experiences into cultural memory, ensuring their survival across generations.

Memory in the novel also challenges the boundaries between myth and history. Traditional beliefs and legends are interwoven with historical events, creating a layered narrative structure. This blending of myth and reality reflects the complexity of indigenous historiography, where storytelling often serves as an alternative to written documentation. Through these narrative strategies, the past is not merely remembered but actively reconstructed. The characters' recollections transform memory into a creative process, shaping the community's understanding of its heritage.

FINDINGS

The analysis of *Sky is my Father* reveals that memory and nostalgia function as central mechanisms for preserving cultural identity and reconstructing the past. The study demonstrates that memory operates as a cultural archive, safeguarding traditions and historical experiences. Through storytelling and communal recollection, cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations, ensuring continuity despite social change.

The research also highlights the significance of nostalgia as a motivating force for cultural preservation. Nostalgic reflections on homeland and tradition encourage individuals to maintain connections with their heritage. Rather than being limited to emotional longing, nostalgia emerges as a constructive force that reinforces cultural belonging.

Another key finding is the importance of collective memory in sustaining communal identity. Shared memories create a sense of unity and strengthen social bonds. These collective experiences enable communities to resist cultural erosion and maintain their historical consciousness.

Furthermore, the study reveals the role of gender in memory preservation, emphasizing the contributions of women in maintaining cultural traditions. Their involvement in storytelling and ritual practices ensures the continuity of communal heritage. Overall, the findings confirm that memory and nostalgia serve as essential tools for reconstructing the past and preserving cultural identity within the narrative.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of memory and nostalgia in *Sky is my Father* demonstrates the profound role these elements play in reconstructing cultural history and sustaining communal identity. Through its emphasis on storytelling, collective memory, and emotional attachment to homeland, the novel presents memory as a powerful force that bridges past and present.

The analysis reveals that nostalgia in the narrative extends beyond sentimental longing. It functions as a catalyst for cultural preservation, encouraging individuals to remember and honour their heritage. The reconstruction of the past through memory allows

communities to maintain continuity while adapting to changing circumstances.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the importance of storytelling as a medium of cultural transmission. Through oral traditions, historical knowledge is preserved and shared, ensuring that future generations remain connected to their ancestral roots. The interplay between memory and storytelling reinforces the resilience of cultural identity.

The study also underscores the role of collective memory in fostering unity and belonging. Shared experiences create a sense of continuity that strengthens communal bonds and promotes cultural pride. Additionally, the recognition of gendered memory highlights the diverse contributions of individuals in sustaining cultural heritage.

In conclusion, *Sky is my Father* illustrates how memory and nostalgia function as foundational elements in reconstructing the past. The novel affirms that cultural identity is not static but continuously shaped by remembrance and storytelling. By preserving memories of tradition and heritage, communities are able to navigate the challenges of modernity while retaining their historical roots.

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