



## Resonances of Class Struggle: A Marxist analysis of Easterine Kire's Selected Poems

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Marxist criticism to the poetry of Easterine Kire, a distinguished poet from Northeast India, to examine the socio-economic dynamics of class, power, and ideology. Focusing on four of Kire's poems—Trumpet in Tunnel, Månestråle (Moonbeam), Forgotten, and Diamonds—the study explores themes of exploitation, alienation, and commodification inherent in capitalist societies. Despite Kire's non-explicit engagement with Marxist theory, her work profoundly critiques the dehumanizing effects of capitalism and emphasizes the fleeting nature of beauty and love within such a system. By analyzing Kire's rich use of imagery and language, the paper highlights the socio-economic conditions depicted in her work, merging oral traditions and historical contexts from Nagaland. Specific attention is given to "Forgotten" and "Diamonds," with the former addressing the erasure of working-class histories, and the latter critiquing capitalist exploitation using diamond imagery. This study underscores the importance of Marxist literary criticism in uncovering deeper social implications and the under-representation of Northeastern Indian writers in literary scholarship.

### Keywords:

Marxist criticism, Class struggle, Easterine Kire, Naga literature, Resistance poetry.

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## INTRODUCTION



Image1- Esterine Kire

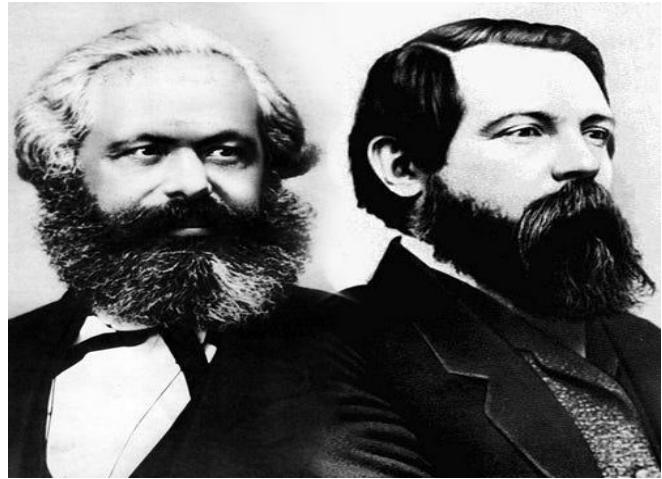


Image2- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

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Marxism is a system of beliefs that views human history as a continual struggle between different social classes. The focus is on examining the dynamics and contradictions within the capitalist system and showing how the working class can overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society without classes. The success or failure of Marxism depends on its ability to understand and inspire change today (Birchall, 1977).

In the study of literature, Marxist criticism offers a profound lens through which to explore the dynamics of class, power, and ideology within texts (Eagleton, 2002 & Williams, 1977). Marxist theoretical framework, grounded in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, emphasizes the ways in which literature both reflects and reinforces the economic and social conditions of its time (Marx & Engels, 1978). Marxist literary theory posits that all cultural productions, including poetry, are influenced by the material conditions of the society in which they are created ("Literary Theory | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," n.d.). The Marxist perspective on literature emphasizes the



connection between art and the societal environment that gives rise to it. This focus on the 'material' extends to more than just art, it also applies to human beings and their emotional state. (Dunne, 2023). As such, literature can serve as both a reflection of societal structures and a vehicle for critiquing those structures.

The foundation of Marxist literary analysis lies in real-world contexts. Literature cannot exist without subjectivity. Literary works are crafted based on human experiences and all other aspects of human perception. In the realm of existence, history, culture, and politics are all contained within the vast and volatile entity known as time. It is impossible for any literary text or writer to escape from these categories (Khobragade, 2021).

The Northeast has a relatively under-represented story in the collective psyche of the rest of India. Aside from Danny Denzongpa and the film Dil Se, there has been little representation of the Northeast other than random persons dressed in tribal clothing doing the 'Unity in Diversity' dance (Samyukta Poetry, 2020). The northeast region of India has traditionally been labelled as the edge, while the rest of the country is widely recognized as the core. Therefore, Indian mainstream writers have not adequately represented writers from geographically isolated regions. Despite not having a significant history, English writing in northeast India has seen success due to the region's writers' perseverance, allowing them to establish themselves in Indian English literature (Saikia, 2017).

Poetry originating from the North-east region of India arguably showcases the most consistent and idealized portrayals of the environment and natural world within the Indian English writing tradition. Despite highlighting local customs and regional myths, nature remains a central theme in every poet's work. This poetry is filled with abundant scenery, folklore, and emotional connections to the land, evoking the tradition of



English nature poetry by John Dyer, John Clare, George Crabbe, and James Thomson. This landscape poetry captures an aesthetic that has long assisted poets and painters in depicting the natural beauty: the picturesque (Nayar, 2008).

Easterine Kire, a poet and writer, has written extensively on her people, the Nagas. Kire mostly writes about the Angami Nagas in her fiction, which is heavily based on real-life incidents (Ralte, 2021). Kire's writings have been translated into German, Croatian, Uzbek, Norwegian, and Nepali. She received the Governor's Medal for Excellence in Naga Literature in 2011 and the 'Free Word' medal from Catalan PEN, Barcelona, in 2013. Reading Kire's poems makes one feel as if time has stood still. She evokes a sense of waiting. Her topics include a bird crashing down a chimney and memories carried by the body (Samyukta Poetry, 2020). Kire has expressed her thoughts on the overlooked and mostly forgotten effects of the Second World War on the Nagas. In many of her fictional and non-fictional works, she has also discussed the current situation in Nagaland (Chettri, 2019).

Kire's creations are mesmerizing due to their fusion of oral traditions and historical records from Nagaland, attracting foreigners intrigued by the area's diverse cultural history. Kire employs creative vision to depict fundamental realities through thorough exploration of life encounters influenced by cultural values. Her stories embody the essence of tradition through storytelling, dance, mythology, and legends, emphasizing the deeply rooted beliefs, customs, and interconnectedness with nature that make up this cultural setting. Essentially, Kire's art delves into the vibrancy and dynamic nature found within the cultural environment she eloquently portrays (Roy, 2020).

Kire's poetry works provide a rich corpus for Marxist analysis. Her work often delves into themes of memory, identity, and the human experience, all within the context of the socio-political realities of her environment. While her poetry may not explicitly



engage with Marxist theory, a close reading reveals underlying concerns about exploitation, alienation, and the commodification of human life—central themes in Marxist discourse.

This paper seeks to explore four of Kire's poems—Trumpet in Tunnel, Månestråle (Moonbeam), Forgotten, and Diamonds—through the lens of Marxist criticism. Each of these poems, in its unique way, offers insight into the ways in which individuals and communities are shaped by, and respond to, the forces of capitalism and economic inequality.

In Trumpet in Tunnel, the poem's stark imagery and raw language evoke a world of struggle and primal existence, echoing the Marxist concept of alienation. The dissonant sounds and harsh environment described in the poem can be seen as metaphors for the alienating effects of labour under capitalism, where individuals are reduced to mere cogs in a machine, disconnected from the products of their work and from their own humanity.

Månestråle (Moonbeam), while seemingly more romantic and ethereal, also contains layers of Marxist critique. The transient beauty of the moonbeam, skipping through the city streets and alleys, can be interpreted as a symbol of the fleeting nature of beauty and happiness in a capitalist society. The poem subtly critiques the commodification of love and human connection, suggesting that these experiences are often superficial and transitory in a world dominated by materialism and economic disparity.

Forgotten deals directly with the themes of memory and loss, focusing on a figure who has been submerged and forgotten, much like the working class in capitalist society. The poem reflects on the dehumanization and erasure of those who labour under oppressive conditions, and the speaker's attempts to remember and revive the



"forgotten love" serve as a metaphor for the need to recognize and honour the contributions of the proletariat.

Finally, Diamonds offers a direct critique of the exploitation inherent in the production of luxury goods. Through vivid imagery of the harsh conditions faced by workers and the cold, sharp nature of the diamonds themselves, Kire exposes the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. The poem challenges the reader to consider the human cost of the glittering symbols of wealth and status that are prized in capitalist society.

By examining these poems through a Marxist lens, this paper aims to uncover the ways in which Kire's work engages with issues of class, exploitation, and alienation. It will explore how her poetry not only reflects the socio-economic conditions of her time but also critiques the inequalities and injustices inherent in those conditions. Through this analysis, the paper will demonstrate how Marxist criticism can provide valuable insights into the deeper meanings and social implications of literary texts, offering a richer understanding of both the literature itself and the world it portrays.

### **1.Trumpet in Tunnel**

Sound  
not light  
  
magnified  
brutally  
like when man  
first created music  
out of raw sounds like that  
  
primitive  
backward sounds



those hewn out innards  
of earth  
spewing forth  
broken chords  
choking  
like a man's rasping sound  
trying  
to get out  
through unsmooth passages  
a hacking  
a racking  
throat  
oesophagus.

- (Collective, n.d.)

This poem's imagery of "primitive" and "backward sounds" and the comparison to the "first created music" can be interpreted as a critique of industrialization and the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. The "brutally magnified" sound, likened to a man's struggle through "unsmooth passages," symbolizes the alienation and exploitation of the working class. The raw, harsh sounds reflect the brutal conditions faced by labourers in industrial settings, where their humanity is stripped away, leaving them struggling to express themselves in a world dominated by machinery and capital.

The poem opens with the lines "Sound / not light," immediately drawing attention to the primacy of sound over light. In a Marxist context, this could symbolize the overwhelming presence of industrial noise, the machinery of capitalism, which drowns out the "light"—the possibility of enlightenment or liberation for the proletariat. The



absence of light suggests a world devoid of hope or progress, dominated by the relentless noise of capitalist production.

The subsequent lines, "magnified/ brutally," reinforce this notion of oppressive industrialization. The sound is "magnified brutally," much like the way the capitalist system magnifies the hardships of the working class, intensifying their struggles and amplifying the dehumanizing effects of their labour. This brutal magnification can be seen as a reflection of the capitalist tendency to extract maximum productivity from workers, often at the cost of their well-being.

The poem continues with "like when man / first created music / out of raw sounds like that." Here, Kire may be referencing the origins of human creativity, which in a Marxist reading, have been co-opted and commodified by capitalist society. What was once a pure, communal expression of humanity—music—has been distorted into a raw, industrial noise, a product of the capitalist mode of production that alienates workers from their creative potential.

As the poem progresses, the "primitive / backward sounds" evoke the regression of society under capitalism. Rather than advancing human civilization, capitalism drives it backward, reducing the richness of human experience to "backward sounds," a metaphor for the dehumanization and alienation experienced by workers. These sounds are "hewn out innards / of earth," imagery that starkly represents the exploitation of natural resources, akin to the exploitation of labour. The earth is violently "hewn" apart to extract wealth, just as workers are exploited for their labour in the capitalist system.

The "broken chords" that "spew forth" from the earth symbolize the fragmented lives of the proletariat, who are subjected to the chaos and dissonance of capitalist society. The





music that once symbolized human connection and creativity is now reduced to a cacophony of "broken chords," a reflection of the disintegration of community and solidarity under capitalism.

The imagery of "choking / like a man's rasping sound" conveys the suffocating conditions of the working class, who struggle to find a voice or escape the oppressive system. The "unsmooth passages" through which this sound tries to escape symbolize the barriers and obstacles that the proletariat faces in their quest for liberation. The "hacking" and "racking" of the "throat / esophagus" further emphasize the physical and emotional toll that capitalism takes on workers, reducing them to mere vessels of labour, struggling to express their suffering.

## **2.Månestråle** (Moonbeam)

Rounded flakes of moon  
falling thickly  
and landing like snow in the valley  
ringed moon

I know you think of the moon's light as constant  
but tonight it is a sprite  
skipping into the city streets  
and every dark alley  
skipping

Have you heard this moon song before, my love?  
this unguarded melody of silver gray  
I see the moon's beams in your hair  
listen to my heart leap



leaping  
And your eyes, ah dear love  
there's such a light there  
dare I try to recapture it in song  
and word  
and picture  
by light of this moon?  
move with me  
move towards  
movements  
that  
flicker.

- (Collective, n.d.)

"Månestråle" uses the imagery of moonlight to create a romantic and ephemeral atmosphere, but a Marxist reading could focus on the underlying class implications. The moonlight, described as a "sprite" skipping through city streets and dark alleys, could be seen as a metaphor for the fleeting nature of beauty and love in a world governed by materialism. The romanticism of the moon contrasts with the harsh realities of life in the city, where socio-economic disparities are highlighted. The poem may suggest that moments of beauty and connection are rare and fleeting in a society dominated by capitalist values.

The poem begins with "Rounded flakes of moon / falling thickly / and landing like snow in the valley." Here, the moonlight is depicted as something soft and pure, yet transient, akin to snowflakes that momentarily transform the landscape but eventually melt away. In a Marxist context, this imagery can be seen as symbolic of the fleeting pleasures and



aesthetic experiences available to the working class under capitalism. The beauty of the moonlight, like snow, is temporary, a momentary escape from the harsh realities of economic exploitation and social struggle. The "ringed moon" further suggests a sense of entrapment or containment, as even the beauty of the moon is circumscribed by the limitations imposed by capitalist society.

The speaker's acknowledgment that "you think of the moon's light as constant / but tonight it is a sprite" introduces the idea of change and instability. In capitalist societies, the perception of stability and constancy is often an illusion; economic and social conditions are in constant flux, affecting the lives and relationships of individuals. The moonlight, once thought of as constant, now "skips" into the city streets and "every dark alley." This movement of the moonlight into the urban environment can be interpreted as a metaphor for the way capitalism infiltrates every aspect of life, including the most private and intimate spaces. The "dark alley" represents the underbelly of the city, where poverty and inequality are most visible, yet even here, the moonlight—symbolizing hope, beauty, or perhaps love—attempts to penetrate.

The poem's central question, "Have you heard this moon song before, my love?" speaks to the universality of certain human experiences, yet the "unguarded melody of silver gray" suggests that these experiences are tinged with melancholy and are not immune to the corrupting influence of the capitalist system. The moonbeam's presence in the beloved's hair, and the speaker's heart "leaping," evoke a moment of romantic connection that is nonetheless ephemeral, much like the temporary joys permitted by capitalism to keep the proletariat subdued.

As the poem progresses, the speaker contemplates whether they can "recapture" the light in their lover's eyes "in song / and word / and picture." This attempt to immortalize or commodify the beauty of the moment reflects the capitalist tendency to



commodify art and human experiences. However, the speaker is aware of the futility of this attempt, as the moonlight is ultimately something that "flickers," never fully stable or graspable, just as true fulfillment remains elusive in a capitalist society.

### 3. Forgotten

There he lies  
lift him up  
with care  
he is my love  
my forgotten love  
my beloved  
he has lain so long  
at the bottom of the sea  
be gentle with him  
my forgotten love.

Will you please play  
a soft song to draw him up by

There is seaweed in his hair  
and sea water in his clothes  
that drips back into the sea

Play a song like a boat retreating  
so he will know he is remembered by me

That curve of cheek I loved  
that line of neck I admired



I would say that easily  
if I were a lover like any other  
and point it out to you

But no  
it is not like that

Have you ever known what it is  
to love by hearing and not by touch  
to have sound in your ears  
as some have blood in their veins  
heart stirrings  
at the stringing of a chord  
the euphony

So loved him I,  
like an epiphany in my soul  
sea drawn, seaward bound  
while the sea-mist was rising  
thinner than sound

And now  
I know  
I must return him to the sea  
Play on while the sea receives him  
more wife than I  
more lover than I ever will be  
my love



my forgotten love.

- (Collective, n.d.)

This poem deals with themes of loss, memory, and the passage of time, but a Marxist analysis would focus on the relationship between the individual and the collective. The speaker's lament for a "forgotten love" could be interpreted as a metaphor for the erasure of working-class struggles and histories in capitalist societies. The imagery of the beloved lying "at the bottom of the sea" evokes the idea of forgotten or submerged narratives—those of the marginalized and oppressed, whose stories are often buried by dominant capitalist discourses. The sea, which ultimately reclaims the beloved, may symbolize the collective force of history that eventually overcomes individual suffering.

The opening lines, "There he lies / lift him up / with care," suggest a reverence for the forgotten figure, who represents a lost or neglected part of society. This figure has "lain so long / at the bottom of the sea," symbolizing how the working class, or the marginalized, are often relegated to the depths of society, their existence and contributions forgotten by those in power. The sea, in this context, can be seen as the vast, overwhelming force of capitalist society that submerges and obscures the proletariat.

The plea to "be gentle with him / my forgotten love" underscores the fragility of this figure, who has been battered by the forces of capitalism. The poem asks for a "soft song to draw him up by," indicating a desire to resurrect and remember the contributions of the working class, who are often dehumanized and silenced in capitalist narratives. This act of remembrance is portrayed as a delicate and necessary process, one that requires care and attention, much like the way Marxist theory calls for the recognition and elevation of the proletariat's role in society.



The imagery of "seaweed in his hair / and sea water in his clothes" further emphasizes the extent to which this figure has been consumed and marked by the capitalist system. The seaweed and water are remnants of the oppressive environment in which he has been submerged, suggesting that even in death or obscurity, the working class bears the marks of their exploitation. The sea, as a symbol of capitalism, continues to cling to the figure, reflecting the pervasive and inescapable nature of capitalist oppression.

As the poem progresses, the speaker reflects on their love for this forgotten figure, noting the "curve of cheek" and "line of neck" they once admired. However, the speaker quickly distinguishes their love as different, saying, "But no / it is not like that." This distinction can be read as a critique of how capitalist society often commodifies love and beauty, reducing relationships to mere transactions. The speaker's love is not based on physicality or possession but on a deeper, more spiritual connection, which contrasts with the superficial values promoted by capitalism.

The poem's exploration of "loving by hearing and not by touch" speaks to the idea of alienation, a key concept in Marxist theory. The working class, alienated from the products of their labor and from each other, experiences love and connection in fragmented, incomplete ways. The speaker's love, which is likened to "an epiphany in my soul," is profound yet distant, much like the way the proletariat may feel a deep connection to their class consciousness, even if they are physically and emotionally distanced from one another.

The final lines, "I must return him to the sea," signal a resignation to the inevitable forces of capitalism, where the proletariat, even in death, must be returned to the oppressive system that defined their existence. The sea is described as "more wife than I / more lover than I ever will be," highlighting the overwhelming power of capitalism to



dominate and consume, leaving personal relationships and individual identities secondary.

#### **4. Diamonds**

I don't like diamonds

Øystein

something hard about diamonds

something cold

razored stalactites.

I think of the men

who ripped out the stone

from cold

dark earth entrails

their hands grimy

with unnecessary soil.

I think of the men

who grind the stone

the harshness

of that sound

rock against stone

sharp

shrill

shriek

shattering the quiet

in taut lines





I never liked it  
when my daughter dropped  
the crystal bowl  
so it sharded  
into a million diamonds  
glittering  
in corners of the room  
awaiting their turn  
to be swept up

Crystal diamonds  
that cut my finger  
when I thought  
I had picked up  
the last  
gleaming  
never liked  
diamonds  
no  
never.

- (Collective, n.d.)

"Diamonds" offers a more direct critique of capitalist exploitation. The poem's speaker expresses a disdain for diamonds, associating them with "something hard" and "something cold." This reaction is tied to the awareness of the harsh labour conditions involved in mining and shaping diamonds—men who "ripped out the stone" from the earth, whose hands are "grimy with unnecessary soil," and the "harshness" of grinding



the stone. The poem highlights the exploitation and alienation of workers in the diamond industry, who toil under brutal conditions to produce luxury goods for the wealthy. The final image of the speaker cutting their finger on a shard of glass further emphasizes the hidden costs of luxury—blood and suffering that underpin capitalist wealth.

The poem begins with the speaker's personal aversion to diamonds, described as "something hard about diamonds / something cold." In Marxist terms, this hardness and coldness can symbolize the unforgiving nature of capitalist society, where human labour and suffering are often hidden beneath the surface of luxury goods like diamonds. The physical characteristics of the diamonds—hard and cold—also metaphorically reflect the rigid, unyielding structure of capitalism, which prioritizes profit over human well-being.

The description of diamonds as "razored stalactites" conjures an image of sharp, dangerous objects formed over time, much like the wealth accumulated through the exploitation of labour. Stalactites, which hang from cave ceilings, suggest something natural yet menacing, paralleling the way capitalism extracts value from natural resources while inflicting harm on those who labour to produce them.

Kire then shifts focus to the "men / who ripped out the stone / from cold / dark earth entrails," directly addressing the labourers who extract diamonds from the earth. The imagery of "ripped out" conveys violence, emphasizing the brutal conditions under which these workers labour. The "cold / dark earth entrails" represent the unyielding and often dangerous environments in which these workers toil, further underscoring the exploitative nature of their work. The men's hands, "grimy with unnecessary soil," reflect the physical toll of their labour, as well as the idea that this labour is deemed "unnecessary" by the capitalist system, which values only the end product—the



diamond—while disregarding the human cost of its production.

The poem continues with a reflection on the men who "grind the stone," a process described with "the harshness / of that sound / rock against stone." This harsh, grating sound symbolizes the dehumanizing and alienating nature of labour in capitalist production. The workers are reduced to mere cogs in the machine, grinding away at the stone, their labour devalued, and their humanity ignored. The "sharp / shrill / shriek" that "shatter[s] the quiet" reflects the disruption and violence inherent in the capitalist process, where the pursuit of profit overrides peace and tranquility, leaving behind only "taut lines" of tension and stress.

The poem then shifts to a domestic scene where the speaker recalls their daughter dropping a crystal bowl, which shatters into "a million diamonds." This moment serves as a metaphor for the commodification and fragmentation of value in capitalist society. The crystal, once whole and valuable, becomes fragmented into countless "diamonds," each glittering and waiting to be "swept up." This act of sweeping up the fragments can be seen as a commentary on how capitalism commodifies even the smallest shards of value, turning everything into a product for consumption.

The final lines, where the speaker reflects on how "Crystal diamonds / cut my finger / when I thought / I had picked up / the last," emphasize the personal cost and danger involved in interacting with these commodified objects. The diamonds, which are supposed to be symbols of wealth and beauty, instead cause pain and injury, much like how the pursuit of wealth in capitalist society often leads to suffering and exploitation.

## **SUMMARY**

This research paper analyzes four poems by Easterine Kire using the Marxist approaches, examining class struggle, exploitation, and alienation. It emphasizes the importance of Marxist criticism in literary studies and the under-representation of



Northeast Indian literature. Kire's background and literary contributions are overviewed before delving into the analysis of "Trumpet in Tunnel" and "Månestråle (Moonbeam)," which critique industrialization and the transient nature of beauty under capitalism. "Forgotten" and "Diamonds" are interpreted as reflections on loss, memory, and labour exploitation. Through these analyses, the paper demonstrates how Marxist criticism reveals deeper social implications in literature.

### **FUTURE WORK**

Future work on exploring Easterine Kire's poetry through Marxist analysis could benefit from examining a broader corpus of her oeuvre, thereby providing a more extensive understanding of her engagement with Marxist themes across different contexts and literary forms. In particular, incorporating more of her poetry and potentially even her prose could yield deeper insights into the consistent representation of class struggle, labour exploitation, and socio-economic inequalities. Additionally, placing Kire's work within the historical and cultural context of Northeast India could illuminate the specific regional dynamics that shape her narrative and thematic concerns. This contextual analysis might also uncover the nuanced ways in which local histories and cultural realities intersect with broader capitalist critiques. Regarding limitations, the current focus on a singular literary theory, such as Marxism, may restrict the interpretive scope. Employing other theoretical frameworks, such as postcolonial criticism or feminist theory, could enrich the analysis and provide a multi-faceted understanding of Kire's work. Moreover, the paper does not delve into how Kire's poetry is received within Marxist literary circles, which could offer an additional layer of understanding regarding her impact and the resonance of her themes in broader critical landscapes.



## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations in the research paper exploring Marxist analysis of Easterine Kire's poetry are pivotal in ensuring respectful and accurate representation of the cultural and socio-economic conditions of the Nagas. It is essential to approach the community's cultural background and experiences with sensitivity and respect, avoiding any form of cultural appropriation or misrepresentation. Researchers must give due credit to sources and acknowledge the cultural significance of the literature studied. The analysis should aim for honesty and fairness in representing the perspectives and experiences of the community, being careful not to manipulate the poet's intended messages. Moreover, the depiction of working-class struggles and the critique of capitalist exploitation necessitate a commitment to ethical reflections on social justice, ensuring that the analysis highlights the human costs and seeks to contribute to broader conversations around equity and ethical economic practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the application of Marxist literary criticism to Easterine Kire's poetry illuminates the profound societal implications embedded within her works. Through a meticulous analysis of her poems "Trumpet in Tunnel" and "Månestråle (Moonbeam)," the critique sheds light on the harsh realities and dehumanizing effects of capitalism on the working class. Kire's poetry not only underscores the struggles and exploitation faced by the proletariat but also calls for a heightened recognition of their indispensable role in society. This study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of Kire's literary endeavours but also highlights the relevance and urgency of addressing the persistent issues of class disparity and economic injustice. Future explorations of Kire's work through this critical lens can further enrich our comprehension of the intersection between literature and material conditions,



particularly within the underrepresented context of Northeast India.

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