

Problematization of Naga Resistance:
A Discourse of Postcolonial Trauma in Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*

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Abstract

Decolonization of Indian Subcontinent in the mid-twentieth century germinates a hope of a solution to all the colonial issue of Indian people. And this Independence has fulfilled the dreams of the people. But for a section of these people, the sense of independence remains unsolved. The North-East crisis, especially the Naga issue shows one of the unresolved phenomena left behind by the freedom struggles of mainstream India. As the Naga demands of segregation from the Indian Subcontinent and having a distinct national identity remain unfulfilled even after the Independence, there arises a big tussle between the Indian armed forces and Naga-organized militant groups. The North-East Writers strive a lot to capture the attention of the Indian authority. They put the Naga issue in their writing in hope of getting a solution to these people. Temsula Ao is one of the North-East writers who desire a solution to the cries of Naga people by detailing the crisis in her writing. The present paper carries out a critical exploration of Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* and shows how Ao produces a discourse of postcolonial trauma by problematizing the Naga crisis.

Keywords: Nagaland, Postcolonialism, Indian Army, Nationalism and Resistance.

Human beings are basically a peace-seeking entity. It's the regional conflicts and the bloodshed with violence which are the key to threat the world peace. Northeast India, more specifically Nagaland is one of the problematic zones of internal Colonialization where bloodshed and violence are the daily concern issues which are supposed to cause by the socio-political fear and terror. The problem Naga people undergo is not natural; rather it is a constructed atmosphere caused by Indian armed forces. Earl Conteh canvasses the reason of political outrage as "Class cleavages or problems of inequality continue to polarize segments of populations, and the negative effects of abject poverty, economic deprivation, unemployment or ethnic discrimination continue to widen in scope and deepen in intensity. This results in violent eruption either between incumbent regions and specific groups or between ethno-communal groups" (1). Nagaland, a very small state in India, is a land of myths, mysteries and immeasurable ancient history. The Nagas after independence give birth to an underground rebellion with a vision to proclaim autonomous authority and to reconstruct their own identity. The government makes strategies to overthrow this separatist movement which resulted in torture, rape, violence and even countless death. The literature of this region thus concerns with the problems faced by Naga people as Tilottama Misra opines "violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be never-ending one in this region and yet people have not learnt to 'live with it', as they are expected to do by the distant centres of power" (Misra).

Temsula Ao, a renowned retired professor and writer wins both Padma Shri Award (2007) and Sahitya Academy Award in 2013. She is that kind of writer whose blood is being mingled with Naga ethnicity. Neither the traditional beauty of Nature nor the romantic aspects of human life come in close distance for her writing. Survival to existence is the key concern of her writing. She outlines the real colour of human suffering vandalized by the Indian army. As Hudson opines "literature is the vital records of what men have seen in life,

what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about these aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language” (10). She was psychologically behind the bar of Naga dispute; for she was born and grown to this land and witnessed torture, rape, and cruel death of common people which cost nothing for the future generations. The British turned back to their native land after the Indian independence, but their ideology remains unclosed. It can be viewed that the Indian army fulfils that part of torture which the British could not complete during their regime. She tries to put the voice of downtrodden people who are the day and night victim under the guerilla of the Indian army. Each story from the collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) portrays the dark side of human suffering.

The Jungle Major, a very first story of the collection picturizes the violated and suppressed world of Naga people and their lifelong resistance against the brutality of Indian Army. Even though Naga belongs to within homeland India, yet it is in the crisis of nationalistic identity. Punaba the protagonist and his wife Khatila are surviving the present anti-nationalistic elements. The whole village is ready to participate in the nationalistic movement to save the sovereignty of land:

It was after a year or so of Khatila’s marriage that the entire land was caught in the new wave of patriotic fervour that swept the imagination of the people and plunged them into a struggle, which many did not even understand. (Ao 2)

Punaba survives with multiple problems when he joins hand with the underground outfit. The villagers consider the Indian Army as foreigners. The local and national leadership are also doing the same job in discriminating the Naga people. The outrage regarding the independence is supposed to happen in every section of society:

The subject of independence became public talk; young people spoke of the exploits of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of patriotic warriors to liberate their homeland from foreign rule. (Ao 15)

The author then raises an argument against the authority who is violating the Naga ethnicity day and night. The doge of torture is too intolerable for villagers and they are indirectly paying taxes to liberate their homeland as the author puts:

These were, however, troubled times for Nagas. The independence movement was gaining movement by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved, if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, the certainly by paying taxes to the underground government. (Ao 25-26)

They take a rapid destructive action against the protesting voices. They even threaten all sort of violence if the villagers hide information regarding ‘rebels’ as expressed in the line “that if they were withholding vital information about the rebels, they would come back and raze their village to the ground” (Ao 4). The authority creates the havoc on the ground that the villagers are practising the anti-national elements. They molest the women, set the houses on fire and brutally kill the innocent lives:

As had happened to other villages, their barns would have been set on fire, their houses destroyed and the people would have been taken to the grouping areas. But thanks to the audacity of Khatila’s ploy, the entire village was saved from a fire. (Ao 7)

Such kind of brutality makes this movement more sympathetic for those who were not directly involved with the underground forces and they strongly condemn the atrocities practised by the colonizer Indian forces.

Temsula Ao in her short story *A New Chapter* flashbacks the reader to the Naga general election of the 1960s. This election is much important; for it not only implies the Naga land as an integral part of Indian Territory but it brought the Naga people to the mainstream Indian politics:

Nagaland had become a state of the Indian union, the first Legislative Assembly was in place and it became apparent that Nagaland was now working its way to become a part of the much-vaunted 'mainstream' politics of the country. (Ao134)

The story itself claims its dignity as it opens up an eye on Naga nationalism which is much contrasted with Indian nationalism. Naga people view nationalism through the glance of their own culture and identity. They share the same identity which works for the enhancement of Naga community. Their struggle for identity is the long rooted history; they have been manhandled, tortured and even is shot dead on the spot. The post independent India was enough unable to decline that inhuman activity; rather it prepares a hotbed for violence, communal colour and identity problem. Sanjoy Hazarika draws a line regarding the Naga and Indian government:

India's Northeast is a misshapen strip of land, linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor just twenty kilometres wide at its slimmest which is referred to as the Chicken's Neck. The region has been the battleground for generations of sub-national identities confronting intensive nation-states and their bureaucracies as well as internecine strife. It is a battle that continues, of ideas and arms, new concepts and old traditions of power, bitterness and compassion.-(Hazarika, xvi)

The year 1947 unfolds a window for Indian people to be independent of British colonial rule. But it's uneasy to point out that the Naga people refused to be the part of Indian

Territory and struggled to resistance movement as South Asian countries resisted against British colonialism. Such conflicts between the 'natives' and a new post-colonial state resulted in a continuance of the colonial projects: Sequestering, pacifying and subjugating the Nagas. The colonial state saw the Nagas as subjects, and the Indian state was unwilling to see them differently, as its national leaders were engaged in the process of nation-building through citizenship and territorializing India's inherited frontiers. With their demand for a sovereign nation, the Nagas, therefore, appeared as reluctant citizens who were not attuned with the 'great modern desires' to forge a new post-colonial Indian nation (Kikon 85).

The author in this story framed the idea of Naga nationalism through the protagonist Nungsang who undergoes the present political scenario as the author states "Nagas were beginning to look at themselves through new prisms, some self-created and some thrust upon them" (Ao 122). The story also unveils how each and every individual life Naga people are controlled and manipulated by 'state mechanism': from the life of a protagonist who works as 'army contractor' to the 'underground leaders':

It was the mid-sixties in Nagaland and an uneasy surface calm prevailed. People were beginning to take stock of what had so suddenly overturned their quiet lives and changed every single man or woman in the land forever. Slowly and painfully Nagas were beginning to look at themselves through new prisms, some self-created and some thrust upon them. Those who survived learnt to adapt to the new trends and new lifestyles. Old loyalties became suspect as new players emerged and forged makeshift alliances in unfamiliar political spaces. (Ao 122)

How a better economic position is acquired playing the magic game of nationalism is explored through the protagonist who takes 'hornbill' as an electoral symbol. This bird

according to Naga culture symbolizes the 'sacredness' and Nungsang uses this sentiment to acquire political position: “The sight of the legendary birds stirred something elemental in their racial memory and they fancied that the birds had descended from their lofty perches in the deep and dark jungles and had come to participate in the political parade with a clear message for the people” (Ao 140).

Nungsang becomes the local MLA and started to lead a heavy luxurious life. Up and down of his life makes a space for his cousin, popularly known as pumpkin Merenla to be lost in the world of the identity crisis. Merenla had a deal with Nungsang regarding the pumpkin supplies. But Nungsang didn't handle this business; for he got a politically standard level of living and took active participation in corruption which helps to decline his faithful character. Bhandari, another businessman even don't procure the pumpkins from Merenla because of her cousin's misbehave and she suffered from great losses. She is even unable to cope with the present situation. Her identity as pumpkin seller is also on the stake, “Far greater than the financial loss was the ‘loss of face’ suffered by the widow in her community because of her cousin’s heartlessness and it was this which hurt her the most” (Ao 144).

Soaba is another story which conveys to the fore how the state applies its 'right' to dispense brutality or disciplinary measures on the Naga individuals through the dilemma of the title character, Soaba. The word 'Soaba' itself signifies 'idiot' and the story depicts how the hero progressively acclimatizes himself with the archetype identity made accessible by the state. The story depicts how the government suppresses the dissent people in the name of controlling the war between insurgents and army. And also depicts how state ‘groups’ people are always trying to settle the matter into normalization and standardization under the leadership of ‘insurgents’: “The word grouping had a much more sinister implication; it meant that whole villages would be dislodged from their ancestral sites and herded into new

ones, making it more convenient for the security forces to guard them day and night” (Ao 11).

The story opens with the argument of Naga settlement. And the title character along with the villagers is the victim of state-sponsored violence. They would like to live with their own identity and culture. Aristotle a theorist functionalizes the human existence into bare life (simple act of living) and the good life (politically qualified life): “born with the regard to life, but existing essentially with regard to good life” (Aristotle 24). The state authority essentially is the guarantor of good life by deploying the legitimization and regimentation of simple act of living. But it is the shocking to unveil that the Naga government applies the state law and order to violate the normal living of ‘savaged’ people. The story is set in a time when Naga people starts to consider the Indian army as foreigner or colonial who creates the land as havoc and the Naga extremists as patriotic: “Young people spoke of the exploits of their peer in encounters with government forces and eager to join the new band of patriotic warriors to liberate their homeland from ‘foreign rule’” (Ao 3).

Here Imlichuba, also known as ‘Boss’ is portrayed as ‘flying squad’ authority who misuses the power in relation to the common people. And Soaba is the victim. The people have to face new terminologies concerns with violence: "It was at this stage that a new vocabulary also began to creep into the everyday language of the people. Words like convoy, grouping, and curfew and ‘situation’ began to acquire sinister dimensions as a result of the conflict taking place between the government and underground armies” (Ao, 10).

Imlichuba mortifies the innocent people and also plays a dodge game of their freedom. He settles his life with drinking and parties. This lifestyle even creates a disturbance to his wife Imtila. The situation to her become intolerable and finds no peace as the author quotes “She could no longer call her home her personal domain, there was no peace and quiet for her or the children because her husband’s lackeys seemed to be everywhere, inside the

house, in the compound and some even had the audacity to enter their bedroom on the pretext of giving a message to boss” (Ao 15).

Soaba is shot dead accusing her a traitor; for she raises her voice against the state authority like Imlichuba. This tragic death is the consequence of the misuse of power. Soaba, therefore, is the voice of the marginalized Naga people who were treated with a colonial mindset. The people await of the fate of final judgement as it same as Soaba. Soaba’s death implies the colonial mindset of state government who are always planning to exploit the people of Nagaland. Thus the region itself turns out as a hub of unrest emanating from the socio-cultural and political factors giving rise to multifarious anti-nationalist elements. These elements, in addition to posing threat to the sovereignty of the Indian nation-state, make life troublesome to all people in general and also to those who are concerned with combating this development in every conceivable phase.

Temsula Ao was much more concerns with the difficulties faced by the common Naga people to mischievous activities like the curfew and the violence practised by the state-sponsored authority. *A Curfew Man* is the story concerns with the difficulties faced by the Naga during the interim period of curfew. The army men clamp the curfew to the specific zone and as a consequence the home becomes problematic. The author pens her experience of curfew time in compact words: “...the night curfew was the worst for people living in towns because soon after dark all social activities ceased, even church services or social gatherings had to be concluded ...civilians were shot dead by the patrol parties...” (Ao 34).

The army authority uses the people who are striving for bread and butter to work as spy during the curfew time. Some people choose this as their profession and some as their compulsion. Stemba the protagonist is fictionalized as a curfew victim. The author rightly describes the curfew policies of army as:

In order to detect and arrest the relatives of 'rebels' and their sympathizers, the government began to enlist recruits from the ranks of the bad elements in the towns and villages by paying them handsomely and sometimes even by threatening to reopen old criminal cases if they do not co-operate with them. These were the people who operated in the grey area between the government forces and the so-called 'freedom fighters', some by choice and others by compulsion. (Ao 35)

Stemba is the common man who strives for Naga freedom. At the same time, he has to choose the profession of spy. Here his spy is by compulsion. Because "it was certainly not the kind of job that he had ever imagined doing, but he was compelled to take it because he was discreetly reminded that his wife's job was somehow connected with the offer".(Ao 37). He himself also feels the sense of guilty on the ground that the brothers and sisters of his community are struggling day and night for Naga ethnicity, but he has to betray them only to save his wife's job. He can't compromise with the authority because they collect the information from spy and start a stream rural of torture which is intolerable to him- "the real trouble was in his heart. For the first time in two and a half years, he was beginning to question himself and his so-called 'job'." (Ao 41) A deep love for soil enables to sustain his job as the author writes, "A new curfew man would be in place by evening and the man (Satemba) with the two smashed knee-caps had already become history" (Ao 51).

Temsula narrates the story *The Last Song* with the perspective of a rape victim. Indian armed forces even throw the bullet of violence within the church. The child Apenyo has a talent of sweet, melodious and serene solo music. The villagers decide to inaugurate a new church on the eve of Christmas with the music performance of Apenyo. The people are in merry for the upcoming New Year and the celebration of the day, whereas the Indian army prepared a ground for violence, torture and even rape. Women's bodies were seemed to be the

spice of Indian army. They even treated women as scapegoats. On the day of the new Christmas year the government has decided to prevent the people from the church celebration on the false charge of anti-national activities- villagers are paying taxes to the insurgent's groups. The heinous Indian army put a special gaze to the beauty of Apenya and rapes her inhumanly, "The young captain was raping Apenyo while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn" (Ao 28).

The mother even didn't rescue from the clutch of heinous rape. And finally both the daughter and mother are killed which is later revealed by a new generation storyteller. The army group till now feel relax; they turn the peaceful atmosphere into chaos. Everyone has had fear of violence. So the villagers fear of terror activity. When British rule over India or other countries they first created a ground of terror. The consequence is that the colonized people easily obey the British law and order and then the British's dream turns into reality. Here also the Indian army is the colonizer and the Naga people are the matter of colonized. Whatever the army wish applies to the marginalized people; kick torture and even shot dead as expressed in the line, "There was chaos everywhere. Villagers trying to flee the scene were either shot at or kicked and clubbed by the soldiers who seemed to be everywhere" (Ao 28).

This story opens up a dimension of interpretation. Through the lens of Feminism, it is totally the barbaric torture on the female body not on the basis of Naga issues; rather the patriotic Indian armies are the female body seeker. And the common Naga female feel helplessness. They have been arrested and raped. It's the state and underground authority who make the land into hell. The author also highlights a point that the people who will try to resist their folk tradition are the curse to the army. She also captures the crying voice of Naga people who are totally unaware of this movement but they have to undergo the torture and loss of life. The story ends with a high alert to the Naga people about Apenyo who "sang her

last song even as one more Naga village began weeping for her ravaged and ruined children” (Ao 33).

So, it is evident from these stories that how the Independent movement which gained momentum was challenged by the government forces to incorporate Nagaland into Indian Union and retaliate the independent movement which however cost the lives of common villagers in the spiral of violence.

To conclude it can be put into the fact that the stories collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* opens up a multidimensional trauma deflated from Naga's friction against India. Jefferey C. Alexander argues 'Cultural trauma' occurs "when the members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity..." (1). The author thus picturizes the cultural conflict experienced by Naga people out of their subjection. She in the preface of the novel highlights the thematic concerns as "what the stories are trying to say is that in such conflicts, there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms. For the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life –their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul." (Ao x) Each story acts as a voice of marginalized point of view. The author also urges the reader to remember that it's the duty of literary intelligent to consider or at least realize about the plight of downtrodden people. Her writings thus filled with the issues of internal colonization and torture of the colonizer. Khanadakar Shahin Ahmed overviews the writing of Tamsula Ao as these writings "emanate from a land of turmoil and they depict the anxiety of 'otherness', the necessity of the separatist tendency, the subsequent evasion of the Naga nationalism and the emergence of a New literature" (Pathak 21).

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