

INSURGENCY IN NORTHEAST INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERATURE: A STUDY ON THE SHORT STORIES OF TEMSULA AO

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Abstract:

The northeast is surely one of the hotspots of insurgency in post-colonial India. No other place in the entire South Asia is pregnant with so many insurgent groups as the northeast. It is observed that lack of socio-economic development is the root cause for social upheaval and insurgency in the region. However, one of the most vital impacts of insurgency and similar social issues is the influence that they exert on literature. Literature, as a mode of expression, gives authentic presentation of contemporary situation. It is worth mentioning here that huge numbers of books and essays have been written on the problem of insurgency by various northeastern writers. Thus, the insurgency problem of northeast has led to creation of various literary works in different languages. Temsula Ao of Nagaland is one such writer who has contributed books, essays, short stories on insurgency in northeast and its impact on the lives of common people of this region.

Key words: Insurgency, separatist, ravage, identity, root, turmoil, manifestation.

Introduction:

The insurgency problem in northeast India has led to the creation of some substantial literary works in different language. Especially, many books or essays in English have been penned by writers from both India and abroad. It is to be noted here that literature from northeast India has earned its popularity mostly due to its authentic representation of various socio-political problems and violence that are typical to northeast. Writers like Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire from Nagaland and Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh have delineated some burning socio-political issues of their respective societies. Young writers like Aruni Kashyap, Jahnavi Baruah and Siddhartha Sarma have also dealt with some vital issues of this region. It is observed that almost all the writers from northeast, in some way or other, have dealt with the theme of insurgency in their literary works. Temsula Ao, a well known short story writer, poet and novelist hailing from Nagaland has very deftly incorporated into her writing various aspects relating to the issue of insurgency in northeast and especially, in Nagaland.

Objective of The Study:

Apart from the social issues such as identity crisis, search for roots, self assertion, and ecological degradation, the issue of insurgency has strong presence in the writings of the Indian English writers from northeast India. Temsula Ao is one such writer who has dealt with the problem of insurgency and other related issues in her writings very honestly and authentically. This paper aims to explore the theme of insurgency and its impact in some of her short stories.

Methodology:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the select short stories of Temsula Ao. The secondary sources are books and articles written by the critics, reviewers etc on Ao's works. Since insurgency is one of the problems of postcolonial societies, books and reviews on postcolonial perspectives will also be consulted in writing the paper.

Analysis:

One of the thrust areas of Northeast Indian literature is insurgency and its impacts on society. Temsula Ao is, a renowned short story writer and poet from Nagaland, has used the theme of insurgency in a very dedicated manner in order to reveal the sufferings of the people of Nagaland. Set in the chaotically violent situation resulting from Naga insurgency, Ao's famous book *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* is a collection of ten short stories describing the fear-ridden everyday life of Naga men, women and

children. The stories in the collection contain authentic description of Naga Separatist Movement. The writer presents a true picture of the violence, bloodshed emanating from the Naga struggle for independence from India. The book not only describes the horrors of that struggle but also throws some light on perilous conditions of the Nagas caused by the clash between the Naga rebels and Indian administration. It is quite evident from the descriptions in the stories that the common Nagas got entangled directly or indirectly in the deadly clashes that took place between the members of Naga separatist movement and the Indian soldiers. As a result, they had to live in a state of fear and anxiety combined with multiple threats both from Indian army and Naga rebels.

The first story in this collection is *The Jungle Major* which delineates the life and struggle of a man named Punaba. It is described in the story that Punaba joined the Naga underground militants and had to undergo immense hardships. He also engaged himself in insurgent activities for which he had to escape from Indian soldiers. However, he was saved by his intelligent wife Khatila who, by her presence of mind was able to release her husband from the custody of Indian soldiers. Another story in the same collection *Soaba* is a story of a mentally retarded young boy called Imtimoa who is killed by Imlichuba, a servant of Indian army. The story gives a clear picture of terror and uncertainties in the life of Naga people. Many of them were forced to leave their homes, schools, and jobs in order to join the underground Naga army. Moreover, some Naga villagers were dislocated and shifted to other places for the convenience of the Indian army. They had to undergo immense physical and mental sufferings as they were forced to leave their ancestral places and live in an unfamiliar environment for survival. During that traumatic time, the Indian army constituted groups known as 'flying squad' and provided the members guns and vehicles. These groups assisted Indian army in going to remote places in search of Naga insurgent groups. Imlichuba was the leader of such a group who used his power to harass the common people. Even the mentally retarded boy Imtimoa was not spared from such act of violence.

The plight of innocent Naga villagers due to insurgency related violence is quite adroitly depicted by Temsula Ao in her short story *The Curfew Man*. It is a tale of a retired police constable Satemba who also happened to be an expert football player. It is because of his talent in football he was appointed as a police personnel though he could not study beyond matriculation. Unfortunately, Satemba broke his knee cap while playing a game and became handicapped. Therefore, he along with his wife Jentilla went back to their village to a new life of farming. However, their new venture failed and they finally came to Mokokchung where Satemba was hired by the Sub-Divisional officer as a government informer. In the meantime, Jentilla got the job of a housemaid in the SDO's house. Since they had no other source of income, Satemba was compelled to continue his duty as an informer. His life became more risky as he had to cope with dangers from both Naga insurgents and the Indian army. He knew it well that refusing to work for the government will cost his wife's job and continuing his job will invite extreme punishment from the underground members of the Naga organizations. Finding no other way, Satemba disfigured his other 'good leg'. The story exposes the horrors of Naga struggle for freedom by showing the inhuman atrocities meted out to the innocent Naga people both by Indian administration and Naga rebels. Caught in the furies, attacks and counter-attacks between the Indian army and Naga underground members, the peace loving innocent Nagas lost their life, property and most importantly their peace of mind.

Another act of inhuman cruelty of Indian army is exposed in the short story *The Last Song*. Here the writer depicts the miserable life of a young female Naga singer Apenyo. The story narrates on one hand, the festivities on the occasion of dedication of a new church building and on the other, the consequent violence and bloodshed taking place in the building. The Indian soldiers attacked the gathering and killed many of them because the villagers were allegedly paying taxes to the underground insurgent groups. The pastor and the gaonburas were arrested, tied down and taken away to army headquarter. When Apenyo objected to army's cruelty, she was raped by the army captain. The soldiers even raped Apenyo's mother when she tried to remove the captain from the top of Apenyo's body. The captain then ordered the army jawans to open fire on the villagers who came to rescue the mother daughter duo and who were also the witness to the heinous act.

Apart from the violence emanating from the clashes between the Naga rebels and the Indian army, the Temsula Ao's also throws some light on the differences of opinion and clashes among the members of the underground insurgent groups. Her another story *Shadows* exposes the internal clashes among the members in the underground camps which sometimes led to brutal killings. It is observed that Imli, a college student, takes the membership of underground Naga army. When the moment came for selecting the cadres to send to China for training, Imli's name was included not because he was selected by the group leader Hoito but due to the timely presence of Imli's father who was the second highest boss in the headquarters. As Hoito

had some grudges against Imli's father, he killed Imli in a cold blooded manner. This shows the dark reality of the rebel camps where killings of fellow members was regular occurrence.

Conclusion:

Insurgency has been a long standing social problem in the northeastern states. The different states in this region, especially, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, and Sikkim have been experiencing insurgency, clashes, killings, and all sorts of violence for decades. The writers of this region have taken it as a vocation to bring to surface the hidden chapters of the bloody battle between the Indian army and the insurgent groups belonging to various northeastern states and its bitter consequences experienced by common people. The entire region has been infested with the problem of terrorism and counter-terrorism which the writers of this region reflect in their various literary works. The sensitive writers of northeast depict their perceptions of the traumatic experiences of the people living amidst terror, fear, and a state of hopelessness. Tamsula Ao is one such writer who has adroitly reflected the issues related to insurgency and its impact on the lives of common people. Her short stories portray the authentic picture of the conflict ridden Naga society in which the people lived under the fear of turmoil and war as the manifestation of Naga insurgency which have ravaged the land for decades.

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