

## Treatment Of Marginalized In The Selected Short-Stories Of Temsula Ao

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**Abstract:** The marginalized people of Northeast region are facing the tag of inferior rank not only once but in two different ways. Firstly, for living in the north-eastern region of India which is never been equal to the other parts of the country. Secondly, they are going through the domination in their own states for being the marginalized in terms of social norms for women, for being less educated, for being less in number or for being migrated from various places and so on. Treatment of these subaltern women can be traced in the short-story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from War Zone* by Temsula Ao particularly in the short stories like- *The Night* and *The Pot Maker*. In her writings, dominating theme of discussion is the less privileged group of people in the region. People suffering from identity crisis like women and tribes. These groups can be termed as the subalterns or the marginalized a term bears the meaning of 'inferior rank' which was first adopted by Antonio Gramsci.

**Key words:** Northeast, domination, patriarchy, marginalized and subaltern.

**Introduction:** The term "Northeast" stand for that part of the nation which has a large number of diversity in cultural practice and tradition among the region itself and has a distinct identity throughout the nation. Like the other parts of the country as far East, middle East and others, the Northeast India reflects an identity of external self as if it is not a part of the country. Many scholars holds a belief that these eight states of Northeast are diverse in culture, ethnicity and physical appearance to such extent that they themselves do not understand each other's tongue. Hence it is hard to hold them together along with the other states in terms of the political affairs and social practice. These states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and the latest one is Sikkim are not easy to present in a collective form.

English language flourished in the region due to the British colonization. The Christian missionaries played more significant role than the British administration in popularizing English in the North-eastern region as stated by Mitra Phukan in her article "Writing in English in India's Northeast; relevance, importance and place". Most of these contemporary writers had their education in Christian Missionaries and English being their first language they find it convenient to write and express their thoughts in English. This recent genre of English

became their common link to hold them together apart from their distinct culture, ethnicity and local languages. The global readership is also one thing that connect them together as the writers from this region writing in their mother tongue had limited reader confined mostly to their states only or limited in two or three states. The English writers of this area enjoyed a large number of readers and considered to be contributing in the mainstream Indian writing in English and that certainly helped to bring out the voices of the dominated and marginalised groups. The objective of this paper is to explore the treatment of the marginalized groups like women and tribes through two different fictional works in English from Northeast India and relevant non-fictional works from the region.

### **Methodology**

In view objectives of the study, analytical and descriptive methods would be used while studying the texts. The study will include an exploration of evidences of marginalisation in the works of Temsula Ao, a contemporary fiction writer from the Northeast. The study of these short-stories would further be aided by various non fictional works produced in this region and studies made on the Northeast.

### **Discussion:**

Post-colonial writers like Temsula Ao, Eistearene Kire, who are from Nagaland presented a glimpse of the subalterns in their fictional writings. Through various stories of long narrative and through the short-stories, these writers tried to reconstruct and represent the facts mingled with fictional and imaginary stories.

Temsula Ao, a poet, short story writer, was also awarded Sahitya Akademi Award for her short story collection. Most of her works deal with the issues of ethnicity, culture, and the lives of subalterns. The collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* demonstrate the events relating Naga tribes in its true tone. Stories like from the collection, traces the unheard voices of the natives

Temsula Ao, caricatured the misery of Naga tribe and the domination over 'women' in her short-story collection, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. This collection primarily shows the domination of women under social norms and patriarchal practices.

Society is a construct of both men and women together, both of these hands have given equal contribution and worked together to be together. But, 'men', the stronger group made their move to dominate and use the other group that is the 'women' according to their needs, and gradually the whole society has turned into a patriarchal one. Where women are taught to keep silent and follow the orders executed by the so called 'first sex', the superior being. Strength, braveness, stability, are the qualities attached to the men and weak, fluid, emotion is belonging to women. Society teaches the girl child to be submissive and never rise their voice against the men, the women are to be confined with the works of household and prepare themselves to give the best service to the men. Faults and follies of men are termed as crime whereas mistakes of women are called 'sin'.

One of the most heinous sin categorized by men is ‘adultery’. Although, adultery is a process of contribution from both the sides but it is the woman who bears the pain, shame and the tag of adulterous because of the womb a lady carries, where the fruit of adultery grows. Men can deny the accusation and live their normal life but a woman has to give birth, brought the child up and live with the child for rest of her life. Even after going through all these pain and sufferings, they had to run for a name for their children, a name that gives identity to the father who devoid his duty to be with his child. The name of the father can decide the fate of the child even before its birth and the status of a woman as a wife also decided by the name of her husband. In case of adultery the major members of the clans of Naga community organizes meeting for the judgement where they decide what could be done to the woman who lost her purity and bearing a bastard in her womb. Temsula Ao in her short story *The Night* presented a scenario of such incidents through the story of Imnala.

Imnala was a beautiful girl of her village and had many suitors of different clans around the village but she was impressed by the love, care, and the gifts brought to her by the engineer boy who courted her and get intimated with his marvelous words. He persuaded her to appear over to his parent’s house, where he was living all alone and they made passionate love there for my consecutive days. Ao narrates:

“Completely bowled over by the man’s ardour and pledges of eternal love, she became his willing lover and on the pretext of going to a friend’s hopuse, she spent those heavenly hours with the man she loved and who, she thought, loved her in return.”  
(Ao, 45)

When Imnala showed her resistance of getting pregnant, the engineer boy assured her that he is going to marry her very soon but suddenly he disappeared from the village with an excuse of getting something very important to take care of. But he never returned and the village people brought a news that “Imnala’s suitor had joined Naga underground army and had gone to China for training”, (Ao, 45) it was quite sure that he is not going to return very soon. The news appeared like a thunderclap to the girl because she knew her life is going to take a twist drastically as she is carrying a child in her womb given by her engineer suitor. Later, she gave birth to a girl child, whom the whole society considers as a bastard and the man who refused to give name the child was equally responsible for the mishap, walked away freely while the mother had to bear all the shame and the responsibility of the child.

Imnala’s fate did not spare her even after such devastated period. After years of her life of solitude, a ray of hope and glimpse of love reappeared with a man, who works with her father. The man named Repalemba, generally called Alemba, works as a contractor had brought a lot of profit to Imnala’s father. During the course of their work Alemba had to visit their house frequently and on his every visit he brought gifts for Imnala. As the man was married and bear two children and a wife, no one doubted him with his intentions towards Imnala. On one of such visits, he took the opportunity of having Imnala alone in the house and “they made love for the first time on her sick bed” (Ao, 50). The occasion brought misfortune to the family as she became pregnant once again. Ao observes:

“Imnala became pregnant out of wedlock for the second time. The village was agog with the news and tongues began to wag: ‘What can you expect from a girl like

this? The old man's greed has landed him with a second bastard grandchild' ..... She too is greedy, you know what I mean?" (Ao, 50)

In the Naga villages the men are embedded with the duties of battlefield and the safety of the village and villagers, therefore, they failed to ensure the financial and economic status of the family. At this point the responsibility of the family slips onto the shoulder of the women of the family. But the job opportunities are very less for them and the available jobs are of very low in payment and of much more hard labour than the outcome. Most of the jobs are attached to the household premise and deals with the things and utensils of daily use. In the patriarchal society, where men are busy with the battlefields women are forced to look after the crops and maintain their grain fields.

Although most of the works encircling economic condition of the family are dealt by women, but the job selection and teaching criteria are always set up by the men only. They men decided which family would carry forward the long traditional job and teach their future generations about the same. The patriarchy decides that the job of the family is hereditary, and no one is permitted to go beyond the ensured traditional job of long generation. Primarily the job like making pot, weaving cloths, making bamboo utensils, woodcrafts are done by the families having no land to cultivate or having less amount of land to cultivate. Some of the families have their vast area of land for cropping and they can grow different products and sell them in the market or barter them with the homemade utensils by the others. Temsula Ao in her short story *The Pot Maker* picturized the condition of women in regards with their traditional job and their values.

In the story a woman named Arenla was one of the best potters of the village and her pot making has a wide range of popularity not only inside the village but also in the neighboring villages. The earthen pots are so famous that people from far of villages and people of different tribes come to their village in order to buy the pots and sometime to exchange them with the items produced in the fields like, chillies, dried fish, a wooden stool and even a 'dao' (Ao, 58). Arenla's great skill of making pots is a gaining of traditional art, passing from generation to generation and it the villagers consider it as her duty to teach and pass the skill of pottery to her daughter, Santila. Although the community got independent after 1947 along with the other parts of the country but the domination of patriarchy extended its tail even in the contemporary world. According to the council the skills of one generation must pass to the next without any improvisation or change because these skills define the village prestige and status and it is their duty to maintain that hierarchy among the others.

Every mother wants her child to have a better future with less difficulty and more value. Every mother tries her best to make the fate and fortune of her child better than what she had or desired for her entire life. In the story although Santila had all the right to be a potter and learn the skills from her mother, but Arenla, the mother knew the laboriousness of making pots, she knew the difficulty of digging the clay from the hillside, she has experienced the aches of the heavy load of muds on her back while carrying them all the way to the village from the hillside, she felt the unbearable numbness on her one hand and the pain of tapping spatula on the other. Sometimes all the struggle goes into vain because of a shower of rain which can

destroy all the pots at once and firing the pots is another troublesome task as the over firing and under firing can destroy the entire batch of the pots.

Considering all these pains and the job of lesser value the mother wants her daughter to move out of the traditional and generational skill and learn something of higher value and of lesser difficulty, a job which can be done without depending upon the season. The mother wants Sentila to learn weaving and denies to teach anything about the skill relating mud and pots, she declares:

“I shall not teach her this craft which has brought no joy to me and only pittance for my troubles.” (Ao, 58)

But the girl was indifference to weaving, she wants to be the best potter of the village and she was so much resolute to learn the skill from her heart. In order to learn the skill she goes to far off places to other women of same profession as her mother was reluctant to teach her anything about making pots. Sentila was given a task to look after her baby brother, but her obsession was so strong that she would take brother along, taking his meal for the day to the women to see and learn the skill of making pots. Gradually the matter spread over the village and became a part of gossip for the villagers. The denial of the mother reached the ears of the village council, as a result the Sentila’s father, Mesoba was summoned before the village council and asked him to deliver the explanations of the over spread gossip. Ao narrates:

“why his daughter was making these regular trips to the old pot makers’ shed to learn the craft and most important of all, why was Arenla refusing to pass on the skill to her daughter.” (Ao, 60-61)

In the patriarchal society the women are not even have the freedom to choose their passion or any different job apart from the long traditional and generation assigned job. If any one tries to do so the council would impose fine upon them for going against the tradition. The council decides that it is the duty of the mother to pass the long tradition to their new generation and they believed it to be the collective good and has to be done for the sake of entire village. In the story the council warned Mesoba, the father as:

“to remind his wife that it was her duty to teach her daughter the skill that has handed down from generation to generation for the good of the entire village. They also told him that skills such as pot making, which not only catered to the needs of the people but also symbolized to the tradition and history of the people did not ‘belong’ to any individual.” (Ao, 62)

**Conclusion:** Temsula Ao’s representation marginalized group definitely unveil the miser treatment of women in a society that has assigned a life inferior to men. Although the stories revolve around the incidents of Nagaland but they certainly have a greater role in the society because the relevance of these stories can be found throughout the Northeast region. Moreover, these stories are the unheard voices of the subaltern from each corner of the globe.

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