

'MISMATCHED COUPLE' AND 'THE SECRET OF OUT LOST YOUTH' IN THE SELECTED STORIES OF TEMSULA AO

Dr. Champak Kumar Bharali

Assistant Professor,

Department of Humanities, Jorhat Engineering College

Email - bharalick@gmail.com

Abstract: *The purpose of the paper is to deal with two vital sub topics of Temsula Ao's two stories 'The Jungle Major' and 'An Old Man Remembers'. The stories 'The Jungle Major' and 'An Old Man Remembers' are selected from her story book 'These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone'. This book is an interesting collection of short stories written by educationist, academician, poet, story writer Temsula Ao. There are ten short stories in this collection which mainly deal with political violence and social realities of Nagaland. Nagaland is one of the important hilly states of Northeast India, bounded by the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh to the northeast, Manipur to the south, Assam to the west and northwest and the country Myanmar to the east. The land witnessed war, violence and bloodshed for a couple of years during its struggle for independence from the mainland. Over ground and underground conflict prevailed in this land for a long period of time, where every people had to live his/her life in the midst tension and uncertainty. Her stories' have their genesis in this troubled time; these are the stories of struggle of Naga people and their self-determination. Besides over ground- underground political conflict; traditional and simple way of living style of the people of Nagaland is vividly depicted in the stories of this collection. Through the analysis of two stories, it is sought to highlight how Naga struggle affected common people's simple lifestyle and how they survived amid of hard times.*

Key Words: *political violence, social realities, conflicts.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Temsula Ao was born in the month of October 1945 at Jorhat district of Assam. She lost both her parents at the early age of her life. Recollecting her early childhood, Temsula Ao writes "There is no sequential ordering in these early memories and the kaleidoscopic recollections highlight only the defining moments of a childhood marred by early tragedy in the untimely death of the two most important persons in life of any child, its parents". She and her five sibling were left to fend for themselves and spend hard times in playing truant and running wild. She learnt to deal with bleak and uncertain future only when she was sent to an English Medium School. She was matriculated from Ridgeway Girls' High School, of Golaghat district, Assam and received her B.A with distinction from Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung, Nagaland and she completed her M.A in English from Gauhati University. After completion of her post Graduation, Temsula Ao received her post Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and PhD from NEHU. In 2007, Temsula Ao was awarded prestigious Padma Shri Award and in 2009 she received Governors' Gold Medal from the Government of Meghalaya. Prestigious Sahitya Academi Award was conferred to her in 2013. Her works have been translated into different languages such as German, French, Assamese, Bengali, Hindi etc. Temsula Ao has published two short story collections- These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone and Laburnum for my Head. The collection These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone consists of ten short stories which deal with insurgency in Nagaland. In an analysis of her stories, it is found that she is neither condemning nor justifying the socio-political situation of Nagaland but doing something beyond that.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Ray, P.P(2016) in the research paper writes Temsula Ao along with Easterine Kire have vividly depicted the lives of Naga people in the midst of terror stricken Nagaland. She has mentioned how Temsula Ao's creative writings work as a supplement of unfolded historical facts of Nagaland. Naga insurgency was the first of its kind to challenge the concept of the 'idea of India'. Ao has depicted the ongoing conflict of 1950s and 1960s between two forces in her "These Hills Called Home". Assaults on humanity and onslaught left in the mind of indigenous people. Ao's stories are the vital document of sufferings of Naga people who were the archetypal victim of the war of that land.

Devi, K.G and Laishram.S (2016) in their research paper mentioned that in the stories "These Hills Called Home" the writer has delineated the picture of Naga people who were trapped in the midst of violence and conflict. The stories of Temsula Ao deal with the conflict of Nagaland and its consequence, Naga people were shocked by the of ongoing brutality of Indian army upon the people of then contemporary society. Temsula Ao has narrated political instability and

chaos in a storytelling manner which have reflected untold story of the land. The traditional life of Nagaland was worse affected by this political conflict.

3. METHODOLOGY:

Purely secondary data have been used to prepare this paper. Secondary sources in form of books, articles, references, journals and newspapers are collected from different sources and studied thoroughly to prepare this paper.

4. ANALYSIS OF TWO SELECTED STORIES:

The short story collection “These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone” consist of ten short stories namely-The Jungle Major, Soaba, The Last Song, The Curfew Man, The Night, The Pot Maker, Shadows, An Old Man Remembers, The Journey and A New Chapter. Back ground of all these stories is the historic Naga movement. The characters of these stories are simple easy going village folk of Nagaland. The simple easy going villager had their happy life unless affected by the political conflict between the over ground and underground rivals. The writer herself mentioned about the stories that, “These stories however, are not about ‘historical facts’; nor are they about condemnation, justice or justification of the events which regard trough the land like a wildfire half a century ago. On the contrary, 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” The two stories which are selected here are The Jungle Major and The Old Man Remembers; the story The Jungle Major centers round one married couple namely Khatila and Punaba whom the villagers termed as ‘mismatched couple’. Though the background of the story is war affected Naga society, its sub-topic presents the picture how war had an impact on the personal life of a simple easy going couple. On the other hand the protagonist of the story The Old Man Remembers is Sashi who has described the story of his life to his grandson, named Moalmba. The old man Sashi recalls his days how he and the people of his generation had to sacrifice their youth for the conflict which took place between Indian army and Naga rebel. During his time young people like him and his friends joined underground Naga rebellion and lost the most tender age of their lives. Though the background of the story is war zone, yet lives of common people are vividly depicted in this story.

5. THE JUNGLE MAJOR: A STORY OF ‘MISMATCHED COUPLE’:

People were shocked to hear the marriage between Punaba and Khatila because the groom Punaba was totally undersized. He was ‘short, dark’ fellow with ‘buck teeth’ was just a truck driver who knew only about some machines and was employed by a rich man of the town to drive his vehicles. Punaba studied up to class five and he could speak Hindi and smidgen English which he learnt in his journey to the town. On the other hand, the bride Khatila was ‘tall, slim and possessed charming smile’. So far as her family background is concerned, she was from a very good family of Nagaland which belonged to a major clan. Her two brothers were studying engineering and medical respectively. It is mentioned that “When their marriage was first announced in the village, people stopped in their tracks, gaped in wonder at the sheer improbability of this match and tsk, tsked some with disbelief and some in utter disgust at the thought. The girl’s father was soundly berated by his clansman, who said he was lowering the prestige of their clan by agreeing to the match. Why was he condemning his beautiful daughter to life with such a man, they wanted to know”. However the marriage between Punaba and Khatila took place despite of all odds and they had a very happy married life and totally absorbed in their household activities unless unstable socio-political condition had a direct impact upon their happy life. Punaba used to go to the town Mokochung as his regular visit to give the daily collection to his boss which he collected from the nearby villages and thus earned his living, Khatila used to take care of her kitchen garden. One day, Punaba did not come back from his regular trip, it was quite unusual for Khatila, but she was not worried about it. After one month of Punaba’s absence when people asked Khatila, then she simply replied that, he was busy plying his business in the town. Finally the message came from the town that Punaba joined the underground naga army. Khatila was regularly receiving messages from Punaba and thus she knew what was happening in the underground outfit. Even she learnt that by dint of Punaba’s leadership quality he was promoted to the rank of captain within three years of his service to the underground outfit. Gradually government received the news of Punaba’s joining in the underground force. Indian army started their frequent visit to the village in search of information about Punaba. Along with the villagers they questioned Khatila and threatened her that if she were found withholding any information then they would punish Khatila in ‘a very special way. Even the officer paying a lascivious look to her said ‘We know how to deal with women like you’. Thus, government forces misbehaved and verbally assaulted Khatila a lot. Punaba made some secret visits to his wife Khatila and once when he visited his wife after a gap of five months and was sleeping at home till morning, the Indian army cordoned off the entire village. Punaba heard someone calling ‘Sir, sir wake up, they are almost here, our sentries fell asleep. Run away sir’ the couple was at loss. Khatila could feel the impending danger so worked out a plan to save him from the danger. Taking the advantage of his ugly appearance Khatila immediately asked her husband to wore some old torn out clothes and she marked his ugly face, hands and feet with ash. Treating her husband as servant Khatila shouted at the top of her voice “you no good loafer, what were you doing all day yesterday? There is no water in the house even to wash my face. Run to the well immediately or you will run the day you were born”. The Indian army standing outside

of the house got the impression that Khatila was treating her servant who was not following her accordingly. When they knocked at the door from outside by the time Khatila made all the arrangement that there would be no sign of Punaba's presence in the house. When she opened the door and interrogating with the army, by then Punaba in guise of the servant made his way with a water carrying basket on his head to bring water from the nearby well. The army could not recognize Punaba at all, though once the captain tried to stop and interrogate him, his wife Khatila intervened and said "Sahib, no use of talking to him, he cannot talk. Besides, don't you see there is no water in the house? What do you want with a servant?" Thus, Punaba made his safe retreat, his ugly and undersized physical appearance proved to be as boon in disguise. Perhaps, the captain could not imagine that the husband of a tall, fair and slim girl with a charming smile could be so ugly and undersized. Thus the 'mismatched couple' escaped from the impending danger which could be otherwise fatal both for the couple and for the villagers.

6. THE OLD MAN REMEMBERS: A STORY OF 'THE SECRET OF OUT LOST YOUTH' :

The pain of the old man's right leg gradually became unbearable, yet he attended the funeral of his childhood friend Imlikokba who had died during his sleep. Imlikokba was Sashi's bosom friend, both of them grew up together, played together, went to the village school together even both of them got married in the same week. The death of his childhood friend Imlikokba was unbearable for Sashi. He faltered in grief and sorrow, the villagers knew their close association well but most of them were unaware about their involvement with underground army. Imlikokba and Sashi joined underground army at the early age of their lives. Looking at the Imlikokba's body inside the coffin Sashi said "So Imli, after all you've decided to leave me and go ahead, ha. When we were young, I could outturn you any time, but today you have overtaken me. But no matter, such time is not of our choosing. Go in peace, my friend and do not look back. I, too, shall cross the water soon and join you. Until then, Kunknalim!" bade him farewell and came back home. At home old Sashi was astonished at the question of his grandson when he asked, "Grandfather, is it true that you and grandfather Imli killed many people when you were in jungle". The old man became speechless at the boy's question; he started to tell the story of 'the secret of out lost youth'. Old Sashi gradually unfolded once again the past story of his life within himself, it was the story of horror violence, bloodshed and murder for the remote hill of northeast India called Nagaland. Sashi and his friend Imlikokba were too young to understand the meaning of political conflict but they were victim of it. Their childhood was snatched my cruel time and they were even not given a chance to be young. Gradually Sashi started to tell his past history to his grandson Moalmba "We too were young and carefree like you once, but all of a sudden our youth was snatched away from us and instead of schoolbooks we were carrying guns and other weapons of destruction and living in the jungle like wild creatures". Violent, socio-political condition compelled them to be adult without enjoying their childhood. Horror, bloodshed, murder, violence became their part of everyday life. Inhuman torture of Indian army against their clansman made them revengeful. In their very childhood Sashi and his friend Imlikokba became the witness of heinous torture inflicted upon the people of their village. The most horrible sight which shocked both Sashi and Imlikokba is "One village sentry was running towards the school, shouting at the top of his voice. 'Run to the jungle, run to the jungle'. We were paralyzed with fear and shock and simply stood where we were. But he kept on running and shouting, his voice now gone hoarse from shouting and from the smoke he inhaled with every word. At last our teacher took up the cry and instructed us to scatter in different directions towards the jungle, telling us to go as far as we could before nightfall. He added, 'Stay together in small group and don't make a noise or light any fire whatever you may be. We will come for you in the morning. Now run, run for your lives'. I quickly took hold of Imli's hand and began to pull him away from the compound. But he did not run or move toward the path I had chosen for us. Instead he was moaning and pointing to the figure just below us on the village path. It was the sentry and some soldiers wearing heavy boots and helmets were beating him up. I cried out to him, 'Come on Imli, otherwise those soldiers will catch us too and kill us'. Still he did not move and instead, made as if he would go towards the fallen man. I held on to him tightly, not letting him go and craned my neck to see the man on the ground. His face was unrecognizable, a bloody mess, but because we were standing at a higher level, I could make out what he was wearing. It was only then that I realized why Imli was behaving in this manner; the inert man on the ground was his father who was on village sentry duty on that day and was coming to warn the schoolchildren to run away from the village" This sight was really unbearable for a child like Imli, his childhood mind became revengeful, he began to whimper like an wild animal.

Sashi and his friend Imlikokba managed to save their lives and entered into the deep and dense jungle, they did not know where they were going. Being tired and hungry and exhausted with terrible physical and mental agony they feel in deep sleep. When they woke up in the next morning, they found that they were surrounded by a group of people holding arms and pointing their guns at their heads. Sashi and Imlikokba were taken to a camp by the members of underground rebel and they informed the two that they had been recruited into the Naga National Army. Destiny scripted a new chapter of their lives; they became the member of underground army. Youth was snatched away from them; the contemporary socio-political condition did not allow them to enjoy their robust youth. Thus Sashi unfolded the story of the secret of their out lost youth.

7. CONCLUSION:

Through the stories of the collection, *These Hills Called Home* the writer intends to communicate with the readers about various issues of then contemporary Naga society which are mostly related to Naga freedom struggle. Violence, identity crisis, oppression, bloodshed and political unrest were common in the society. The protagonists of her short stories are common people of Naga society, through them the writer brilliantly presented horrible experience of naga freedom struggle. Through the protagonists of two stories-*The Jungle Major* and *The Old Man Remembers* the writer has presented how humanity was assaulted and violated to a large extent. The story of Punaba and Khtila shows how the mismatched couple's life had been changed drastically by the political war and how the heroine had to bear verbal assault of the over ground army. It was only her talent and presence of mind which saved her family and the lives of the villager. Similarly, in the story *The Old Man Remembers*, the protagonist Sashi recalls his childhood days and repents how they lost their youth and became a victim of political conflict. Though the main theme of Temsula Ao's stories centers round unstable naga conflict, yet the subplots unfold the stories how humanity was challenged in the war zone.

REFERENCES:

Books:

1. Ao T. (2013): *Once upon a life* Zubban Publication, New Delhi.
2. Ao T. (2013): *These Hills Called Home* Zubban Publication, New Delhi.
3. Ao T. (2007) : (ed) *Writing Orality in Soumen Sen and Desmond Kharmawphlang Orality and Beyond*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi,
4. Baruah S.(2009) (ed): *Beyond Counter Insurgency Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*(ed), New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009
5. Chandrika S. (2012) *The Naga Society*. New Delhi: Manas Publications.

Journals:

1. Devi G.K and Laishram. S (2016) *Narrative of political Violence and Social Realities: A Study of Temsula Ao's These Hills Called Home Stories from war Zone*, *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 4(9), 917-920
2. Ray P P. (2016): *Terror Tales: The Naga Insurgency in the Writings of Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire*, *Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 57-71

Author's Biography

Dr. Champak Kumar Bharali M.A, M.Phil, B.Ed, PhD, has completed his post graduation in English literature, currently he is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Jorhat Engineering College, Assam. He has 15 years experience of teaching in various capacities in schools and colleges. His areas of interest are English Literature, Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Soft Skills, Cultural Studies and Folk lore Research.