

# CHAPTER-9

## OVERPOWERING THE POWER AND ENUNCIATING THE RESISTANCE: A FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE IN TEMSULA AO'S "THE JUNGLE MAJOR" AND "THE LAST SONG" FROM *THESE HILLS CALLED HOME: STORIES FROM A WAR ZONE*

Dr. Rajkumar Bera

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Midnapore City College, Paschim Medinipur. rajkumarbera.bera@gmail.com

### Abstract

Temsula Ao is a creative ethnographer and a prolific writer in the realm of Tribal Literature. She is a critically acclaimed figure who always stands for Naga community. Her profound knowledge of culture, belief, tradition, glory of history and heritage and the sense of indigeneity transcends her to an intellectual world of indigenous tradition. Her ground-breaking ethnographic work entitled *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* which encompasses myth, folktales and variegated indigenous experiences. Her writings try to map out the spirit of independence and national identity. Ao's stories are generally emerged from the internal fault-line of Indian nation-state through her constant emphasis on the concept of home, nation, ethnicity and identity.

### Introduction

Literature being a typical product of socio-cultural and political circumstances of contemporary given period in which it is produced, reflects traditional values, system, culture, belief, contemporary class-struggle and the internal confictions of socio-political backdrop. This context is deeply attuned to the words of William Henry Hudson who in his book *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, remarks –

Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced if it, what they have thought and felt about those 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. (Hudson, 1913, p.10)

In the broad context of Indian Nationalist politics, North-East India consisting of seven different states confronted the problematics of national identity. The region being separated from the mainland India claims for the negotiation of their national identity. The very process of constructing North-east in course of pre and post-colonial period, jerks up a threat for losing of individual identity. Nagaland being a part of such region constantly confronts violence consequences and asserts their separate individual identity. For achieving their freedom and consolidated identity, Naga people struggle hard through their various violent means. Their violent resistance ultimately categorizes them as 'other' and threats to the other major group of Indian people. Their constant struggle against the threats and maltreatment of the people of mainland India attempts to settle their lost glory and indigenous culture and identity.

The position and the circumstances through which Naga communities experience their bitter suffering are created and manipulated by the strategic power of the main-stream group of people in India to represent such marginalized people as meaningless performers. The power-politics of the main-stream always works through network systems. Power is neither mutable nor merged to the action nor to the intention of its suppositional agents; should it be considered as a verb rather than noun or something that can be held onto. It is something which regulates using its mechanisms within a network system that runs a society smoothly. Michel Foucault, a French intellectual and theorist points out his dynamic notion regarding power in *Power/Knowledge*:

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here and there, never in anybody's hand, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising the power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues and crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gesture, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Resistance of Naga people with their distinguished individual sensibility is reflected through different literary forms and contexts from North-East part of India as Tilottama Misra in her writing *The Oxford Anthology of Writing from Northeast India – Poetry and Essays* argues in context of Northeast literature: “Perceptions of the traumatic experience of people living in the midst of terror and fear and yet cherishing hopes that human values will triumph some day and a new dawn of peace would emerge out of this trial by fire” (9). This victimized part of India suffers a lot from crisis of their indigenous identity. In this context, Ved Prakash asserts in his book entitled *Encyclopedia of North-East India* – “In India's north-east, insurgency is an ethno-cultural phenomenon, in the sense that perceiving their ethnic identity threatened, they seek political power to preserve it” (25). Naga people are very conscious of their identity and the fear of losing such identity creates in their

minds an ideology of ‘nationalism’ in which sense, they scathe the impeccable people and have become victim or subject of criticism. Their resistance integrates their indigenous identity critiquing the power structure of the mainstream discursive practices to create ‘subject’. Benjamin Noys in his research article “The End of Monarchy of Sex: Sexuality and Contemporary Nihilism” included in the volume *Theory, Culture and Society*, rightly says that- “As soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance.” (15)

Temsula Ao’s writings are reflective representatives of the sense of fear and anger of Naga people from modern educational policies and identification. Being a Naga origin, Ao argues:

The cultures of northeast India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization in the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga ... communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. (Cited in Sarkar, 11-12)

Ao’s meditative writing *These Hills Called Home: Stories from A War Zone* has connotated such fear and anxiety of Naga people as she deliberately unfolds the objectives of her representation of sensitive stories or events in the first section entitled “Lest We Forget” of the collection:

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 the loss of life – their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors

scarred both in mind and soul. Many of the stories in this collection have their genesis in the turbulent years of bloodshed and tears that make up the history of the Nagas from the early fifties of the last century, and their demand for independence from the Indian state. But while the actual struggle remains a backdrop, the thrust of the narratives is to probe how the events of that era have re-structured or even ‘revolutionized’ the Naga psyche. It was as though a great cataclysmic upheaval threw up many realities for the Nagas within which they are still struggling to settle for a legitimate identity. It was almost like a birth by fire. While some remained untouched by the flames, many other got transformed into beings almost unrecognizable, even to themselves. (Ao, 2006, p. x)

These *Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, being a highly critically acclaimed anthology of short stories, connotes a tension between local militancy and Indian Army. This collection vents out the shameful destructive and devastating effects of the Indian Army in their brutal treatment on the innocent Naga people. The collection also maps out vividly the cultural heritage, belief, traditional values, system and rituals and morals of Naga communities. Ao narrates in her introductory section entitled “Lest We Forget” –

A few of the stories in this collection try to capture the ambiance of the traditional Naga way of life, which, even for our own young stars today, is increasingly becoming irrelevant in the face of the progress and development which is only now catching up with the Naga people. (Ao, 2006, p. x)

Temsula Ao’s characters always uphold strong will to continue their existence in any kind of adverse and unfavourable circumstances integrating their mind with sanity and peace. There are many contexts and situations

where the characters are thrown aside in constructing their identity and their resistance are ignored and avoided. Ao, through her literary creations, has tried to revive the lost history, glory of cultural legacy and indigenous sensibility by positing their revolt against the repression of state authority. Temsula Ao, through variegated literary contexts has overturned the image of integrated and uniform degradation of Naga communities in their resistance and struggle. This context attunes to the words of Parag M. Sharma who rightly argues in his chapter entitled “Towards an Appreciative Paradigm for Literatures of the North-East”, included in the book *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, edited by Margaret Ch Zama: “In the northeast the violence is no distant and remote happening from which the unwilling can insulate themselves but an integral part of daily lived experience that does not spare anybody”. (58)

“The Jungle Major”, the first story of this collection, portrays the traditional cultural values and legacy and the clash between the local militancy and state-sponsored Indian Army through thorough depiction of the life and struggle of the protagonist Punaba. Nagaland has become a disturb area due to the endless contrast between the imposition of the nationalist ideologies by the central government over the Naga peoples, on one hand and the attempts of the Naga communities to preserve their cultural inheritance and fascination for maintaining such legacy. In course of the narrative of the story, Punaba joins the secret underground mission of protest run by a new group of patriots to emancipate themselves from the suppressive clutch of Indian government. Because of Punaba’s secret engagement with the underground mission, the entire village comes to the forefront of Indian Army. Their regular visit to this village creates a threat to the lives of the villagers: “So they went away after threatening the villagers that if they were upholding vital information about the rebels, they would come back and raze their village to the ground” (4). Punaba’s wife, Khatila who is full of intellectual resources with her quick thinking and presence of mind, helps her husband to escape from the brutal

clutch of Indian Army. The Army officer always threatens Khatila to know about her husband by stating- “We know how to deal with women like you” (4).

The above-mentioned statement in context of the story, unfolds the undercurrent meaning of threatening process in which the innocent Naga girls are molested and sexually seduced by the soldiers. By detailing this story, Ao has portrayed the hardship, suffering, mental tormentation caused by the torture and establishment of rules and regulations of State-force who lacks the knowledge of ethnocentric and values of the Naga indigenous people.

Indian military forces in a gradual flow capture the land of Naga peoples through their strategic imposition and standardized treatment towards community people. All the Naga people, owing to the fear of maltreatment and punishment, try to accustom themselves with the new policies; though there is still protest in their mind. The process of colonization of Indian soldiers gives a light on Foucault’s idea of power structure where power and knowledge are correlated and without one, another is impossible. Foucault through out his works mainly concentrates on their interdisciplinary relationship that makes a proper discourse in life and society. Power is exercised through the implementation of different set of ideas and rules that produce knowledge to establish something as true. The exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information. The exercise of the power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely knowledge constantly incite4s the effects of power. Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* argues:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another and there is no point in dreaming of time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without

knowledge; it is possible for knowledge not to engender power.

(Foucault, 1980, p. 52)

Foucault argues that power recreates its own field of articulation through the production of knowledge. He points out that power produces knowledge and knowledge produces knowledge in their reciprocal relationship. He accepts the popular saying that knowledge is power. Again, in *Discipline and Punish*, he asserts:

Power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constituting of a field a knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute as the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 27)

The story has documented human suffering, particularly Naga peoples, due to the resistance of secret patriotic underground agents against the State-sponsored military forces. It reflects the hard processes of the Naga people's power of resilience. The community people are tortured from the pressure of taxes and other necessary things for sustenance of the local militancy and the pressure of Indian Army for paying taxes to local secret agents. This contest invokes the Foucauldian notion of 'power' and 'resistance' to understand the deplorable condition of Naga communities. Foucault emphasizes on the interdisciplinary relationship between power and resistance as an integral part of society. Power can never work alone without resistance where power is exercised, someone is there to protest or resist. In order to analyse the power relation, one must analyse the power as whole – the hidden transcript and the public performance. Foucault asserts that resistance is the essential precondition of power, without such form of protest, tension and struggle, there would be only complete domination or subjugation. Resistance is everywhere

and at every level; there is no power without potential revolt or rejection. Foucault asserts his view of the relation between power and resistance in *The History of Sexuality, Vol-I*, in the following-

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always “inside” power, there is no “escaping” it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that history being the sense of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? ... Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power of network. (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 95)

The plight and unhinged condition of Naga community peoples are excavated by Ao through her subtle narration in this story in the following words: “The houses were ransacked by the security forces, the grain in their barns was burnt and the people themselves were herded into camps away from the village and kept in virtual imprisonment insides areas fenced in by bamboo stockades”. (3) Again the theme of Naga people’s extreme suffering, the combat between the protestant group and State-sponsored armed force, the very process of resistance and the secret mission of the underground local militancy has been pathetically delineated in the narrative “The Last Song” where Ao repeats the continuation of the story as manifested earlier in “The Jungle Major” to associate the common readers to the pitiful journey of the people of Naga community on the sympathetic and humanitarian ground. The story “The Last Song” gives a vivid picture of a tragic and inexplicable story of a growing young singer namely Apenyo and her mother Libeni. In course of time, Apenyo gradually shows her extraordinary gift of singing and achieves

the position of a church singer with her melodious voice. But the fate of Apenyo takes immediately an opposite turn in an event when the villagers were exceptionally jubilant on the very day of church-inauguration, Apenyo and her mother are brutally raped and the villagers are arrested for paying taxes to the underground army. The clash between violent pressures of the State-sponsored military force and the dauntless resistance of the Naga people is very much contextual in Michel Foucault's assertion on the conflict between the politics of the State and revolution against it, in *Power/Knowledge* in the following-

State consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible and that Revolution is a different of codification of the same relations. This implies that there are many different kinds of revolution, roughly speaking as many kinds as there are possible subversive recodifications of power relations and further that one can perfectly well conceive revolutions which leave essentially untouched the power-relations which form the basis for the functioning of the state. (Foucault, 1980, pp. 122-123)

Ao in this story has depicted quite directly how women of any community are treated as commodities and are also criticized for their contribution in protest and resistance along with the male people in Nagaland. It is true that women and children are the worst victims of war. During war, women are abducted and kept captives for the purpose of sexual slavery. Preeti Gill in the introduction of her anthology of essays entitled *The Peripheral Centre: Voices from India's Northeast*, describes the situation of women of Northeast:

To say that women have faced violence in situations of conflict is to state the obvious but what it means in terms of the short term and long-term impact is something that is still being studied and

analysed. Women find themselves at the receiving end of violence on three fronts; from the state, the militants and a corresponding escalation of violence within their own homes. The effects of violent acts like rape, sexual abuse and physical assault and abuse has led to psychological and emotional trauma and a very high incidence of what is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. (Gill, 2013, p.10)

With the flow of new patriotic zeal, everyone in Naga community moves on against the high tide of Indian colonial bondage to earn their freedom, identity and land: “if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, then certainly by paying taxes to the underground government” (26). The brutal attitude of the administrative power of Indian Army towards women has been well documented through their constant physical exploitation of Apenyo and her mother. Ao quite pathetically exhibits the situation in the story: “there was chaos everywhere ... when she (Libeni) came upon the scene at last, what she saw turned her stomach. The young captain was raping Apenyo while a few soldiers were watching the action and seemed to be waiting for their turn (28)”. The masculine and patriarchal socio-political structure of society always lacks the basic and fundamental concern and understanding of gender dynamics and progression. As a result, the patriarchal structure always permits the agents to be involved in various sexual violence towards women considering them as meaningless substances.

Ao has described that the power of state is all-pervasive through its employment of military power to control the Naga people with violent manner. The power of state in this story, links up the role of state apparatuses, Foucault has analysed in his notion of power discourse. Foucault points out that State plays the role of superstructure to the power-relation. Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* argues-

The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning – conditioned relationship to a kind of ‘meta power’ which is structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this meta-power with its prohibition can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relation that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power. (Foucault, 1980, p. 122)

Ao has tried to reveal the dark and devilish strategies of the governmental system in which women as the marginalized product, become the coerced victims in an unequal power struggle.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, Ao has tried to illuminate the hidden history of the Naga community of Northeast region of India to uphold their struggle for self-identity, violence, rape, abduction and political commotion. She has also endeavoured to publicize the rich cultural legacy of Naga people following the ancient ancestral ritual, norms, beliefs and cultural practices. In her stories, Ao has portrayed quite pathetically the hardships, difficulties and continuous struggle under the diplomatic power-politics triggered by the clash between the State-sponsored Indian Army and the local underground secret agency.

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