

Political Trauma among Common People Reflected in Selected Stories of Temsula Ao

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Abstract:

This paper tries to explore the pattern of political trauma inflicted upon common people during Naga insurgency and the situation which brought fragility to socio-political life of the people. Nagas of Northeast were the first to oppose the concept “idea of India”. On the eve of 15th August 1947, Naga extremist leader Angami Zapu Phizo declared independence from Indian Union. The conflict between India government and Naga extremist under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo began. In this juncture of time, the political history of Nagaland took a new turn. Though the bullets riddled history of Nagaland has not attained much importance in political writing and in journalistic discourse, yet it got reflected largely in literary exercise of the land. For the preparation of this paper, a methodological study of the secondary sources was made and these secondary sources were found in forms of books and journals. Among these, the writings of Temsula Ao and of some other eminent writers of Northeast and some published journals are mention worthy. The methodological study of all these secondary sources gives an insight of the happening of the then Naga society. Specially, the stories of Temsula Ao record the traumatic political experience of common people those who lived in the midst of conflict. These are terror stories, an untold history of Naga people for which the land cried over and over again. Though the sub-nationalistic fervor was common in Naga psyche yet the stories echoes neither justification nor condemnation. All the section of the society irrespective of men and women, young and old were the victim of the political violence and they lived a chaotic phase of their life under this intense trauma. The ten stories of Temsula Ao’s short story collection entitled “These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone” aptly depict the plight of common people who lived under chaotic socio-political environment during conflict. Three out of ten stories namely ‘The Jungle Major’, ‘The Last Song’ and ‘An Old Man Remembers’ are selected to focus the political trauma which is exposed in these terror tales.

Keywords: *political trauma, conflict, juncture, fragility.*

Introduction: Northeast India has witnessed numerous socio-political issues in recent times, where insurgency, problem of illegal migration, ethnic conflicts and natural calamities such as flood, draught are very common. Insurgency issue has dominated the political history of this land to a large extent. Massive human suffering during insurgency has featured in various literary works of this region. Tillottoma Misra in her “Introduction to anthologies on Northeast Indian Writing” writes “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 learned to live with it.....writers across the states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura are deeply concerned with about the brutalization of the societies by the daily experience of human right violation and the maiming of the psyche of a whole people by the trauma

caused by violence.” (Misra: xix). In the recent frontier literature of Northeast; the works of Tamsula Ao echoes socio-political upheaval of Nagaland, Naga separatist movement has largely found to be featured in her stories. Her short story collection “These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone” consist of ten stories; the genesis of all these stories is the historic Naga movement which was in its zenith during 1950s and 1960s. A study of these terror stories steers the attention of readers towards Naga Insurgency and unfold the inhuman act and brutality that scattered the entire socio-political order of the land for which common people were exposed to political trauma. In the prelude of her short story collection, Tamsula Ao has discarded the historical facts of the stories “These stories however, are not about ‘historical facts’; nor are they about condemnation, justice or justification of the events which raged through 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. 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: ix-x). Before going through the short stories and the political trauma that were exposed to its characters, it will be worthwhile to have a look at the Naga Insurgency that the land experienced during recent times.

Naga Insurgency: Nagaland came under British annexation in 1886. Nagas were independent tribe of Northeast India which had their rich tradition, culture, customs and rituals. During World War-I, Naga youths were employed by British to fight for them; thus a section of young generation of Nagaland practically came to the contact of western philosophy of life. When this employed generation was equipped with new western ideas and philosophy and came back to their native land after their retirement, they formed an organization in 1918 and named it as Naga Club. This Naga Club is the first civil organization of Nagaland which did a lot to create political consciousness among the tribal people. Under the supervision of the Naga Club, the people of Nagaland formed their own political identity. Looking at their political consciousness and integrity, the Government of India Act of 1935 was implemented in the Naga Hills, which demarcated Nagaland as “excluded area”, this Act allowed the Nagas to continue their traditional government with a little interference of British rule. Naga National Council (NNC) was formed under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo. On 15th August 1947, Nagaland became a part of Indian Union along with the other parts of the country. Representing Naga people, Phizo met then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and demanded for sovereign Nagaland. The Prime Minister instantly rejected the demand of sovereign Nagaland and the negotiation between Phizo and Nehru nipped at the bud. Phizo returned from Delhi after this unsuccessful negotiation and mobilized people against the government. As a part of their protest, Nagaland boycotted the 1st general election of India in 1952. Naga Federal Government (NFG) was formed in 1954 which was coupled with Naga Federal Army consisting of a large number of armed guerillas outfit. “The wave of dissidence and open rebellion was heady wine for many of them and they abandoned family, school careers and even permanent jobs to join the band of nationalists to liberate the homeland from forces, which they believed, were inimical to their aspirations to be counted among the free nations of the world. It was however not only the people from the urban areas who joined these forces. Through a method not dissimilar to ‘conscription’ based on clans, many rural adults had to abandon family and fieldwork and were inducted into the ‘underground’ army of freedom fighters.” (Ao:10). Government of India deployed arm forces to douse the flame of dissidence from the mind of the people. Armed

Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) was deployed in Nagaland in 1958. AFSPA provided special power to the armed forces to fight against the underground outfit. It was unfortunate enough that armed forces took undue advantage of this special power and restored physical atrocities, mental torture, rape and even murder. Many cases of human rights violation came to light and this war like situation which created trauma the mind of common people. Temsula Ao records this untold history of pain and suffering of Naga people which prevailed during the time of conflict, most of the characters of her stories are the victims of this political conflict. People those who survived in this crucial juncture of time had to live their lives under intense traumatic political situation.

Trauma during Insurgency: Khatila, the woman character of the first story 'The Jungle Major' of the short story collection "These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone" was mentally assaulted by a captain of Indian army because her husband joined underground Naga outfit. Paying a lascivious look at her young beautiful body, the captain said that she would be punished in a very special way if she would not disclose her husband's hideout. Punishment against women in conflict zone was always found to be in the form of sexual harassment where rape was the most serious crime against the women folk. Young beautiful Khatila was the object of lascivious look of the captain, who was in search of an opportunity to fulfill his sexual desire. She was mentally disturbed in this traumatic situation which affected her daily life a lot. Apenyo and Libeni are the two tragic characters of the terror tale 'The Last Song'. Brutality of Indian army has exposed in a large extent in this story. The pathetic plight of the two women characters of this story was enough to hurt entire Naga psyche and create a political trauma among the tribal people those who lived during that period. Apenyo, the young beautiful girl of eighteen was raped in a sequence by Indian army."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). When Libeni made a futile attempt to rescue her daughter from the clutches of brutality, she too was raped in a violent manner. Rape as a weapon of dominance is found to be used in various conflict zones of the world. During World War-II, Soviet army raped German women indiscriminately in a sequence. In Nagaland too women like Apenyo and Libeni were raped indiscriminately which created trauma in the mind of women folk. There may be numerous reasons behind this brutal act; among which the prime is either to challenge the existence of the underground force or to take revenge upon the people those who disobeyed them. "One reason often advanced for sexual violence based on increased wartime incentives that does account for targeting of enemy civilians is that of revenge. During war, combatants target enemy civilians with violence in revenge for the violence suffered by themselves, their family, or community members. However, why revenge takes the form of sexual violence rather than other violence should also be addressed. Sexual violence is sometimes said to occur in retaliation for sexual violence previously suffered (or rumored to suffer) by co-ethnics" (Wood: 325). Whatever may be the reason behind, but the gravity of this obnoxious act signalize the increase rate of wartime violence meted upon womenfolk, for which they had to live under a traumatic situation. Imlikokba and Sashi the two school going boys of the story "The Old Man Remembers" lost their childhood happiness at the very early age and they had to live under intense traumatic political situation. "We, too, were young and carefree like you once, but all of a sudden our youth was snatched away from us, and instead of school books we were carrying guns and other weapons of destruction and living in the jungle like wild creatures" (Ao:98). Old Sashi unfolded the untold story to his grandson Moalmba, he explains how violent socio-political condition

compelled them to be adult without enjoying their childhood. Horror, bloodshed, murder, violence became the part of their everyday life, inhuman torture of Indian army against their clansman made them revengeful. During their schooldays, Sashi and his friend Imlikokba became the witness of heinous torture inflicted upon the people of their village. The most horrible sight which created post traumatic conflict in their psyche was that, one day when Sashi and Imlikokba were in school a village sentry was running towards them, shouting at the top of his voice, the sentry asked them to run to the village to save their lives. The Indian army caught the village sentry; beat him mercilessly in front of the crowd. No one from the crowd dared to come forward to rescue the helpless sentry, little Sashi and Imlikokba were shocked at the inhuman treatment inflicted upon the poor man. The incident was even more painful for Imlikokba because the man who was on village sentry duty was none other than his father. Situation compelled both the school going young boys to take arms and ammunition instead of books.

A close reading of the three stories shows how people in the terror land had to live during the war like situation. Brutality in war zone appeared to be a global phenomenon irrespective of time, place and circumstances, where molestation, rape, physical and mental torture were very common. Besides Nagaland, such type of brutality of Indian army was also seen in some other terror zones of Northeast region where the places like Assam and Manipur can be counted in the list. Common people were threatened and a sense of fear psychosis was created in their minds. In this regard, Tillotoma Misra has rightly mentioned that violence appeared here as never ending phenomenon. Though such brutal act created a sense of political trauma among common people, yet such nefarious activities could not douse the quench of freedom from the mind of most of the indigenous people.

Conclusion: Trauma occurs when a person or group of person of a society is overwhelmed by situation and responds with intense fear and horrors caused by helplessness. In Nagaland too, people became helpless during the then prevailing situation, the wave of political trauma affected everyone's life and psyche. Young Khatila lost the rhythm of her life, she was neither involved nor aware of the rebellious activities of her husband, yet the wave of political trauma affected her a lot. In such conflict zone, women easily became the victim of violence because the enemy targets this weaker section of the society and inflict physical and mental torture upon them, the story of Apenyo and Libeni bears true testimony of it. It is a war rape narrative where rape is used to insult and dehumanize the existence of the opponents and create a political trauma among the common people. This story is akin to the novel "Two Women" originally titled *La Ciociara* of Alberto Moravia's where Moroccan soldiers raped both mother and daughter in a church and God remained just as passive witness. The unstable political situation of Nagaland snatched away the youthful dreams from the young generation, where Imlikokba and Sashi are mere representative. The sight of his father's pain and suffering and the battered body made Imlikokba hysterical. Intense mental torture compelled him to be revengeful. Both Imlikokba and Sashi discarded simple tribal life style and became loyal to the underground outfit. It is observed that children who often witness conflict, violence and war became the victim of trauma, likewise the duo witnessed community violence and developed post traumatic stress and became rebellious. Through her short sorties, Tamsula Ao has expressed common people's narrative which is often suppressed by the meta-narrative of conflict. Both Internal as well as external conflict are predominant in the conflict zone, where the former can be measured in terms of human suffering which was caused by political instability and all pervasive internal trauma

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