



QUEST FOR ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE SHORT STORIES OF AO TEMSULA'S, 'THE JUNGLE MAJOR' AND 'THE LAST SONG'

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ABSTRACT

The culture of every state/ nation is reflected in its native society and to understand this society, the study of native literature becomes mandatory. Mother India has a rich and varied culture heritage. It has become a home to several castes, creed, communities and ethnic people each having its own peculiar literary traditions. Human identity in a world of tangled relationship is causing confusion of identity which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. Fundamentally, incomplete and imperfect, the human beings search and strive for attaining the unattainable ideals of completeness and perfection. The best solution for the problem of identity crisis then is reconciliation with one's own self and environment. The aim of literature is not only in the unfolding of human beings' life and the ambience but also in creating awareness about certain short comings and inconsistencies. A sentry of society is looking towards change and an integral link between man and society. Literature records the longing and regrets of all sections of society. Thus, with the help of this paper I would like to present AO Temsula's desire to explore the unexplored one who is neither celebrating nor negating Indian nationalism in the stories. In 'The Jungle Major', she is striving for sovereignty of land to the Nagas identity. It is evident that Temsula engages and questions the notion of nationalism in the context of Nagaland and their identity not of India and related identity.

Keywords: *identity, nationalism, ethnic, idealist, terrorist.*

INTRODUCTION

Temsula portrays the oppressive measures that were taken by the Indian Armed forces to stop the terrorist activities. As a result, poor people became more sympathetic to the underground

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forces for misguidance. Thus, we must take preventive measures to combat with such incidents even in our state. 'The Last Song', which is the story of a young girl called Apenyo who seems to have a great talent for singing a solo song for Nagas. The Indian Forces for information of disruptive activities kicked and shot the people who tried to flee from the gathering. Apenyo and her mother were raped and killed. Temsula captured the voices of the common people. The Naga resisted the assimilative policies of India invoking the right to self-determination on the basis of their distant ethnic identity and unique history. The Nagas deified the Indian Constitution and led poor people to take arms to fight for separate nation. Initially, the Government expected that the revolution would be suppressed and Nagas would accept Indian Sovereignty but it invigorated. This paper is an attempt to discuss the ethnic identity of the Nagas to retain its independent territorial land which was challenged by Indian Government.

Ethnicity is the state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. Ethnic groups are defined as "a distinct collective group" of the population within the larger society, whose culture is different from the mainstream culture. Webster defines it, "A member of an ethnic group; especially: a member of a minority group who retains the customs, language, or social views of the group." Cashmore defines, "the salient feature of a group that regards itself as in some sense (usually, in many senses) distinct... Once the consciousness of being part of an ethnic group is created, it takes on a self-perpetuating quality and is passed from one generation to the next generation." *'It is created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities'* and ethnic groups are to be seen as a product of political myths, created and manipulated by culture elites in their pursuit of advantages and power.¹ It is our identity that constitutes our sense of self. Literature, language and society play prominent part in expressing one's identity. Affirmation of identity becomes more mandatory to validate their filial, social, ethical and cultural heritage as their legacy.

Aim:

It is to highlight socio-economic-moral and cultural milieu, and inclination which hinders social, lingual, educational, democratic, and universal-brotherhood development oriented spirit. It is to throw light on human values too. It is to inspire, motivate and influence local common-people to bring out the change in society. Mazinee said, "If you want to change the world put fire into hearts of young minds". Thus, it is an endeavour to bring forth lacunas in front of the young minds to bring out the positive change for onward all round-development in the youths of Northeast India in general and Tripura in particular. This paper is an attempt to discuss and analyse the ethnic identity of the Nagas to retain the independent territorial land and which was challenged by the government or Armed forces of the India. In the reading of

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Temsula AO's short stories. their search for an independent Nagaland and their continuing search for identity provide the backdrop for the stories. These stories speak movingly of home, neighbourhood, village, district, country, nation and international level.

Quest for Ethnic Identity in Temsula AO's, 'The Jungle Major' and 'The Last Song'

The unrest in Nagaland is rooted, not in the classical factors of deprivation or social injustice but in a deep fear of the loss of both ethnicity and identity; and it is this fear that animates one of the most serious insurgencies in India's North East. Ethnic identity is the symbolic use of certain markers of culture by a community to differential itself from other groups and communities. It forms the core of national identity for most of the world's people. Ethnic identity is often linked with claims to territory believed to be the exclusive homeland of a particular ethnic group. The ideology that legitimates this claim is sometime referred to as ethnic nationalism and the member of particular piece of land. The existential identity of the Nagas is immersed in mythical lore-how they originated, the location of their origin and why they came to live at different places or inhabit the geographical area called Nagaland and outside the state in some places in the joining states. Each tribe with its distinct language, social customs and dress codes has continued to live as an identifiable ethnic identity within the group collection known as Nagas.

In the stories it is expressed that villagers were disappointed at the behaviour bred to them by the Indian army dislodged from their ancestral site and placed them to a new place making it convenient for their security forces to guard them. Art and craft are very important to assign a distinct identity to the Naga tribe. In the story the 'Last Song', the girl Apenyo watches her mother weaving colourful shawls which will be sold in the market to bring additional income. Ethnic identity in the concept of space has to do with property, self- possession and the politics of sovereignty. It is also realised in the possession of a sovereign land. Realising identity begins with claiming of land. Territorial land plays an important role in shaping cultural and ethnic identity. Temsula AO says, the combination of ethnicity and territory gives a Naga the most dynamic definition of his identity. Therefore, as the Armed Forces decided to take their territorial land they challenged their decision, and finally took arms which led to the birth of the Naga separatist Movement.

Temsula AO in her book, 'These Hills Called Home' writes, 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 last of the century, and their demand for independence from Indian states. though she is neither celebrating nor negating nationalism in her stories, the struggle for independence becomes a backdrop of her stories. In one of the



short story, The Jungle Major, it is found that the whole village participated in this nationalist movement, for the sovereignty of land.

*'It was after a year or so of Khatila's marriage that the entire land was caught in the new wave of patriotic fervour that swept the imagination of the people and plunged them into a struggle, which many did not even understand.'*ⁱⁱ

The villagers even felt the Indian forces as foreigners who came to claim their land. To the Nagas, identity is very much affiliated to the possession of his land.

*'The subject of independence became public talk; young people spoke of the exploit of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of patriotic warriors to liberate their homeland from foreign rule.'*ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus, it is clear that Temsula AO engages and questions the notion of nationalism in the context of Nagaland as even the remotest village were getting involved in this movement.

'These were, however, troubled times for Nagas. The independence movement was gaining movement by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved, if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, the certainly by paying taxes to the underground government.'^{iv}

The armed forces were sent to raid the houses of Naga leaders and harassed the common villagers who gave shelter to these disruptive activities oriented Nagas. Temsula AO's these stories portray the independence movement and oppressive measures which were taken by the Indian forces to stop this movement. In the story, 'The Jungle Major', the Armed forces threaten the villages if they do not give or conceal any information about the rebels.

'The officer concluded that a beautiful woman like her cannot be heartbroken over the disappearance of an insignificant man like Punaba from her life, so they went away after threatening the villagers that if they were withholding vital information about rebels, they would come back and raze their village to ground.'^v

The armed forces used many stringent measures to stop this movement.

'As had happened to other villages, their barns would have been set on fire, their houses destroyed and the people would have been taken to the grouping

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areas. But thanks to the audacity of Khatila's ploy, the entire village was saved from a fire.^{vi}

As a result, those villages which were not then directly involved in this conflict became more sympathetic towards the underground forces when they heard of the atrocities committed by the armed forces on innocent villagers.

In other story, 'The Last Song,' which is the story of a young girl called Apenyo who seems to have a great talent for singing and who will be singing a sweet, melodious, serene solo song in the village church at a big event of the dedication of the new church building. In the opening line of the story Temula AO writes,

'It seemed the little girl was born to sing...what the mother considered unreasonable behaviour in a child barely a year old, was actually the first indication of the singing genius that she had given birth to.'^{vii}

The girl's mother has religious bent of mind. He believed in God and use to worship God. She never left her alone at home. Temsula writes,

'Her mother would take her to church on Sundays because she could not be left alone at home.'

Apenyo's father Zhamben was a gifted singer. Her mother Libeni was a widow because her father died in teachers training course. Libeni and Apenyo survived on what was grown the field. Libeni was the best weaver and her shawls were in great demand. The daughter had deep desire to help her mother. The mother was convinced that she has inherited this virtue from her father. Libeni did not marry second time for her daughter. Apenyo was perfect blend of natural physical and singing beauty. Temsula stressed-

'Every time the choir sang it was her voice that made even the commonest song sound heavenly. Along with her singing voice, her beauty also blossomed as Apenyo approached her eighteenth birthday...which earned her nickname singing beauty'^{viii}

The government decided to nab the people for anti- national activities on the celebration day of church building and arrest all the leaders. The mother and the daughter experienced unexpected behaviour. Armed forces were misbehaving.



It was a great moment for the villagers and they had prepared well with great enthusiasm joking of having double Christmas that year. But it was however trouble times for the Nagas. The Armed Forces grouping the whole village would be dislodged from their ancestral sites and herder into new ones, making it convenient for the security forces to guard them day and night and as their part of retaliation method the Indian Armed Forces surrounded the crowd and even shot at or kicked and clubbed the villagers who tried to flee from the place.

‘There was chaos everywhere. Villagers trying to flee the scene were either shot at or kicked and clubbed by the soldiers who seemed to be everywhere.’^{ix}

It was very unfortunate that Apenyo and her mother were also raped and killed by the Indian Military forces which the story is later told by a woman to the new generation. Temsula AO through her woe telling stories capture the voices of common Naga people who are someone unaware of this movement but were made victims and loss of life. At last we find that both the mother and daughter lost their honour and life. The Captain was also punished and God justified his ways.

So, it is evident from these stories that how the Independent movement which gained momentum was challenged by the government forces to incorporate Nagaland into Indian Union and retaliate the independent movement which however cost the lives of common villagers in the spiral of violence.

Reading of Temsula AO’s these stories put forth the question of ethnic Identity and possession of sovereign land as the Nagas confined to their distinct ethnic identity of holding a land that have been claiming their ancestral homeland which was an independent state and wanted to retain it without assimilating with the Indian Union but in claiming their sovereign land it cost lots lives.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research paper is descriptive, interactive and participatory method. The main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden and must be discovered and well expressed. To prepare this paper I found the facts by interacting the Author in a flight from Ranchi to Kolkata and with some professors, people and students of my College.

Findings



The grim situation of their life reveals the spirit of endurance and courage that inspired them dare to dream in circumstances that hardly let them survive. Their love for nation and devotion for motherland may be for the betterment of humanity. The common objects of nature and human life are glorified and coloured in the radiance of romantic imagination endowed with boundless love for liberty, fraternity and equality.

Suggestions

One should not be stamped on the bases of one's ethnic love and performance only. Ethnic people should not be termed typically for the cultural inclination that becomes a threat for lack of alteration, dynamism, language, innovative, thought provoking ideas, education and spirit to compete and change. They should not follow the maternal or paternal patterns only to progress. They must seek change in life style and judge before following ancestors. Since, culturally, morally, and spiritually static state enable one to go economically down. He feels helpless, poor, weak and unprotected for his pathetic condition. To enjoy the life one must have positive values which are: Truth, purity, cleanliness, self-restraint, honesty, patience, forgiveness, modesty, learning, self-actualisation, and non-attachment. As per the need of time and context some other values can come handy such as love, simplicity, non-violence, bread –labour, patriotism and piety etc. If one acquires positive values as mentioned above then one is streamlined in his efforts through objectivity and rationality. This naturally implies good actions and consequently good results for both self and society promoting happiness and bliss. On the other hand, if a person falls prey to the enticement of negative values such as: falsehood, impurity, indulgence, thievery, impatience, revenge, anger, ignorance, passion and attachment, then one invites the grip of selfish materialistic interests.

Conclusion

At last, I would like to conclude that it must be imbued with original ideas for the development of their personality by inculcating human values since, this is important need of the hour and then the rest will follow automatically. The poor need courage, the life of the people left neglected is made to suffer in society. They need courage to survive to endure, to fight for survival and the assertion of the ethnic consciousness through literature one fights more to make the society aware of its hidden, dark truths that need to be confronted in order to transform into a better future. We are social animal and interacts with persons of socio-economical-moral-cultural-ethical-religious and behavioural values. We know that literature is the mirror of society. Here, one gets information, information paves way to thoughts, thoughts lead to actions, actions enable ones to make habit, habit leads to attitude and attitude builds one's personality which decides one's destiny. All these come from an individual's interest, attitude and values and later on take the form of culture. If one becomes self-reliant,

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self-sufficient, self-dependent then one may look forward for rights to self-determination and ethnic identity.

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