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## Unheard voices: Presentation of women domination in Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*.

Abu Sayad Rofi

M.A. in English

Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

**ABSTRACT:** Literature being the mirror of the society, have been representing the issues and affairs of society in various ways since its beginning. Over the time literature has changed its dimension of presentation depending on various forces and factors. Likewise, fictions from Northeast have the traits of presenting the region and regional affairs in different frames, by focusing on the double marginalized people of the corner. Multiplicity of marginalization can be witnessed with these people for being someone from Northeast, which is regarded as an inferior part comparing other states and another marginalization are visible in their own home and nativity for being someone from the subaltern groups like women, tribe, immigrants. This paper aims to explore the presentation of women condition, social reality and regional issues presented in the short story "*These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*" by Temsula Ao, through various realistic story relating the state of Nagaland, and this can also be regarded as the microcosm of all the eight states of Northeast India.

**Key points:** gender, education, food, rights, society, Northeast.

In the countryside, ethnic clans act as one of the major institutions to control the society of common men. To maintain a dignified status in the society remains as the primary objective of all the villagers any mishap can ruin the long-achieved prestige and well dignified positions. Unfortunately, the prestige of any family is attached to the 'feminine' members only, which limits the freedom for the women and forced them to spend their life under the periphery of patriarchal rule. Temsula Ao very skillfully portrayed the women's domination in the Northeastern region in her short-story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*.

Temsula Ao's short story *The Jungle Major* in her collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* has mentioned the similar incidents of relating prestige and dignity of the family and of their clan with the deeds of a woman. Story of Khatila, a well-educated, tall, fair, slim woman with most charming smile, moreover she belonged to a very respectable family and a major clan. All her siblings are well settled as one of her brothers was studying in an engineering college, another was studying to be a veterinarian doctor and her sister was married to a "Dobhashi" (Ao, 02). Her beautiful features and her level of education have attracted many of the suitors across the village, and with time they have shifted to other girls much inferior to her. The villagers were surprised to see how the suitors have rejected such a diligent, beautiful, and well-qualified girl for the average-looking village girls.

Suddenly something changed and the girl turned from an angelic character to a symbol of *shame* for her family and her clan. Her education, diligence, beauty went into vain according to the family as she married someone excessively below her status from almost every aspect. The man named Punaba, was not educated like her, he was contrastingly ugly to the girl Khatila, known to everyone for her beauty, moreover, he didn't have a proper family like her. It although the couple seemed to be pole apart from each other the girl looked contented and though she was eligible enough to get a job easily but //very pleased to play her role as a housewife. Hence the family //regarded them as the most mismatched couple and felt disgusted towards them.

The Naga community villages are divided into clans, and if anything goes wrong with any of the encircled families it brings shame to the clan as well. The clan members humiliated Khatila's father for lowering the status and prestige of the clan by condemning his beautiful and well-educated girl to someone of such a lower grade and he was summoned in front of the clan, Ao writes:

“The girl’s father was soundly berated by his clansmen, who said he was lowering the prestige of their clan by agreeing to the match. Why was he condemning his beautiful daughter to live with such a man, they wanted to know.” (Ao, 01)

The social evil of stereotypical patriarchal thoughts was no less of a misfortune for women. Their devastating condition was worsened by the army officials who used the bodies of women as a means of the battlefield. Temsula Ao’s short story *The Last Song*, narrates the story of a girl known as, Apenyu who has become a victim and lost her life during a planned massacre initiated by the Indian army against a number of villagers supporting the rebels by giving donations and taxes.

The Indian army led the massacre during the inauguration of a new church building because of the belief that they are helping the army by paying taxes, everyone tried to escape from the place to save their lives, and only a few like “*gaonburas*”(Ao, 27) tried to console the army officers to spare the life of the commons. Chaos spread over the entire place and each of them began to run for the sake of the safety of their lives. Amid the chaos, a single soul named Apenyo, the lead singer of the chorus was standing with all her courage as if any unseen power is guiding her and protested with her melodious voice against the injustice practiced by the Indian army. Ao narrates:

“Some members of the choir left there singing and were seen trying to run away to safety. Only Apenyo stood her ground. She sang on, oblivious of the situation as if an unseen presence was guiding her. Her mother, standing with the congregation, saw her daughter singing her heart out as if to withstand the might of the guns with her voice raised to God in heaven.” (Ao, 27-28)

Her non-violent protest raged the captain of the army and as a result, he had used the poor girl’s body as a battleground and began to hit her and the captain and his fellow soldiers raped her until she took her last breath

One of the most heinous sins categorized by men is ‘adultery’. Although, adultery is a process of contribution from both sides 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, bring the child up and live with the child for the 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 is also decided by the name

of her husband. In case of adultery, the major members of the clan of the Naga community organize meetings for the judgment 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 house, 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 to 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 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 the 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 a devastating 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, who works as a contractor had brought hope of 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)

Although most of the works encircling the economic condition of the family are dealing with women, the job selection and teaching criteria are always set up by the men only. The 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 a 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 homemade utensils by the others. Temsula Ao in her short story *The Pot Maker* picturized the condition of women in regards to their traditional job and their values.

In the story, a woman named Arenla was one of the best potters of the village, and the 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 sometimes to exchange them with the items produced in the fields like chilies, 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 the villagers consider it as her duty to teach and pass the skill of pottery to her daughter, Santila. Although the community got independence after 1947 along with the other parts of the country 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.

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 to weave and denies teaching anything about the skill relating to 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 indifferent to weaving, she wants to be the best potter in the village and she was so much resolute to learn the skill from her heart. In order to learn the skill, she goes too far off places to other women of the 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 her 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, Sentila's father, Mesoba was summoned before the village council and asked him to deliver the explanations of the overspread 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)

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