

CONTEMPORARY NAGA LITERATURE: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO SELECT FICTIONISTS AND POETS

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **CONTEMPORARY NAGA LITERATURE: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO SELECT FICTIONISTS AND POETS** submitted to the Nagaland University for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English is a bonafide record of research work carried out by Ms. Pelhouneinu Kiewhuo under my supervision and that it has not been previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or other title or recognition.

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ABSTRACT

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE NAGAS.

Nagaland located in the North- Eastern part of India with an area of 16,579 sq. km, is bounded by Myanmar on the east, Arunachal and a part of Assam on the north, Assam on the West and Manipur on the south. It was established as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union on 1st December, 1963. At present there are sixteen districts in Nagaland with the newly formed districts of Tseminyu, Niuland, Chiimoukedima and Shamator.

The Nagas have no written records of their origin or migration and therefore, there are many theories concerning the origins of this group of indigenous people. Most Nagas believed that their ancestors came from a place somewhere in the far North, which is present-day China. The exact origin of the word 'Naga' is also vague. According to one of the most accepted version, the term is said to have originated from the Burmese word 'Naka', which literally means 'people with holes in their ears'.

There are seventeen main tribes and many other minor tribes residing in the terrain each having their own distinct dress, language and customs. Nagaland is known as 'the land of festivals' as people celebrate all tribal and Christian festivals, the most important festival being the Hornbill festival which is an inter- tribal celebration. Their languages or dialects differ from tribe to tribe and sometimes even from one village to another although they all fall under the Tibeto- Burman family. The Nagas lack a common language and so inter- tribal communication is carried on through Nagamese while the official language is English.

The Nagas were a self-sufficient community with agriculture being their main occupation. The traditional religion of the Nagas in the past was animism which is the belief in the existence of spiritual beings inhabiting the natural world. With the coming of the Christianity, majority of the Nagas got converted to the new religion abandoning most of their old practices and customs. However, one can observe that they still celebrate their traditional festivals, observe *genna* (days when work is forbidden), consult traditional healers and believe in spirits.

1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF NAGA LITERATURE.

1.2.1 The Oral Tradition.

The Naga community in ancient times was primarily an oral society with folktales, folksongs, myths and folk beliefs as the main source of information to explain how things came to be and define who the Nagas are and what they believe in as a community. However, when the Westerners came, they began to set up schools and churches and carried out various mission works among the Nagas eventually resulted in mass conversions and giving a setback to the native religion which bears close relation to the tradition of the Nagas. In this manner, the oral tradition of the Nagas was regrettably lost to the Western civilization.

1.2.2 The Naga Writings in English.

The entry of Naga writings into the literary world is of a recent phenomenon. With the establishment of more schools, the Nagas began to learn the art of reading and writing, and most significantly, a ‘new language’, that is, English. Easterine Kire talks about the “silencing of oral narratives at critical periods in their history”. It was only when the native tradition of the Nagas was almost completely lost that they began to realize the importance of their history and a new batch of emerging writers began to explore the imaginative world and implemented them into their writings. Among the first English books written by the Nagas was a collection of folktales titled *Folk Tales From Nagaland*, published by the Department

of Art and Culture, Nagaland. The age old storytelling tradition continues to find its expressions in the new forms which are the writings in English. Many emerging prominent Naga writers such as Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang, Monalisa Changkija, etc, have brought to light the historical past of the Nagas through their works.

1.3 STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE NAGA COMMUNITY.

1.3.1 The Domesticity of Naga Women.

In the traditional society, there have been a sharp distinction between in the economic roles the Nagas perform; the men engaged generally in hunting and warfare whereas, the domestic and agricultural activities are assigned to women.

1.3.2 Social and Political Position.

The Nagas being a patrilineal society restrict women in many ways and do not provide equal rights and opportunities with men. Women are not free to roam around the village or any other place without any specific purpose. It is also a kind of taboo for them to sleep elsewhere other than their own home. Women are also punished more severely than men when it comes to chastity for both married and unmarried women.

1.3.3 The Economic Condition.

From the past till the present, women still do not have the right to inherit any property and cannot claim any properties as theirs. This is because women go to their husband's house after marriage and hence the people is of the view that by depriving them of the properties, the inheritance would remain within the same clan especially assets like land which have been passed on from generation to generation.

1.3.4 Contemporary Dynamics of Naga women in the Society.

The focus on women in the field of education brought about by Christianity and modernization had significant changes in their lives by bringing them out of domesticity

which provided them the opportunity to assume new positions in the society such as schools, offices, hospitals, etc. However, in spite of assuming new roles and status, women are still being debarred from holding leadership in the churches and the decision making body. It is seen that they are given subordinate roles or assisting roles.

One of the most important elements of the contemporary Naga society is the presence of many women's organizations or groups for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of women and to eradicate social ills in the society, especially those against women. Each tribe has their own women organizations while groups like Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) and Naga Women Hoho (NWH) are representatives of Naga women as a whole.

1.4 FEMINISM: MEANING, HISTORY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON NAGA LITERATURE.

1.4.1 Meaning and Definition of Feminism.

Feminism in its broadest sense is a range of socio- political movements and ideologies that seek to redefine and establish equality of sexes in the field of politics, economy, personal lives and society.

1.4.2 History and Development of Feminism.

- **The Influence of the Enlightenment.**

Although it is impossible to determine the exact period when Feminism took its roots in history, one movement which greatly influenced and paved the way for the feminist movement was the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century which gave importance to the notions of human worth, liberty, equal rights, reason, progress, etc. A notable feminist during the Enlightenment was Catherine Macaulay.

- **The first wave of the 19th and early 20th centuries.**

During this period, women campaigned for suffrage and raised their voice for equal right to vote and equal access to the parliament. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the*

Rights of Women (1792) may be said to be the precursor for these suffragette movements.

Other important advocates during this wave included Virginia Woolf and John Stuart Mill.

- **The second wave of the 1960s.**

The second wave feminist movement also known as the women liberation movement emerged after the Second World War. It was associated with the diverse thinkers who campaigned for equal legal and social rights for women. Notable feminists of this period are Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Mary Ellmann, Kate Millett, and others.

- **The third wave of the 90s.**

The third wave feminist movement was a continuation and reaction to the perceived failures of second wave feminism emphasizing on individuality and diversity and includes women from various backgrounds and races.

There have been speculations about a **fourth wave** starting from 2012, which is associated with technology like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking. It emphasizes on social media to counter sexual harassments, violence against women and rape culture in work places and other places.

1.4.3 Influence of Feminism in Naga Literature.

Naga women began to realize, particularly through education, that the society in which they lived in is biased, and unfavourable towards them. Therefore they also joined the movement by forming groups which aims to fight for the injustices meted out against them in the society and took to writing to voice out their anguish and anger towards gender discrimination that have been prevailing among the Nagas since time immemorial.

Chapter Two

Patriarchy and its Defiance in Temsula Ao's Fiction and Poetry

2.1 Introduction

Dr. Temsula Ao is a strong feminist who attempts to highlight the subordinated gender, that is, the female community through her works. Her characters are very clear depictions of the Naga society where women are deemed to be inferior to men and are considered as 'the weaker sex' which ascribe to an ideology termed as 'patriarchy'. Yet, women though been considered as subordinate to men have a way of turning situations in their favor. The manipulations of women and their unwavering stance in times of unfavorable circumstances are what pull them out through rough waters.

2.2 Patriarchal defiance in *Aosenla's Story*.

The novel *Aosenla's Story* (2017) is about a married woman who recalls her own past when she was married off much against her wishes to Bendang while she was still in college and dreaming of going for her post-graduate studies. Although Aosenla's mother sympathizes and understands her daughter's distress, yet gave in to her husband's wishes to marry her off to a very rich and reputed household. Despite initially being a mere possession in the hands of her well-to-do husband, Aosenla upturns the whole domineering family set-up by way of manipulating situations and eventually becomes a matriarch by taking control of everything, not only in her house but of her in-laws as well.

2.3 Wading through Patriarchal waters in *Laburnum for My Head*.

In *Laburnum for My Head*, Lentina was firm in her decision to have a laburnum tree of her own and also devises plans to have a grave apart from her husband's, with her passion

tree planted over it. In her dealing with land holdings and transfer of her newly- bought land to the Town Committee, she defies patriarchal tradition where matters concerning the land is handled only by men in the Naga society. She succeeds in implementing her wish at the end despite the obstacles, that is, to be buried in a corner with a laburnum tree over her grave instead of a headstone.

The story *Three Women* strongly portrays the strong love that women have that they are willing to go to any extent to protect each other. Even after learning the truth that Medemla and Lipoktula are not her real family, Martha decides to stay on with them for the rest of her life. Medemla, inspite of losing her job with no letter of reference from the hospital for her service, is a tough woman determined to adopt Martha when she was abandoned by her father for being a girl. Lipoktula in order to save her daughter, Medemla, from an incestuous marriage which will ruin her future, keeps her past a secret and forces Merensashi into complying with her demand to break off the engagement of his son with Medemla. The three women are thus seen to be each other's stronghold and with the birth of Martha's son, their lives are once again renewed and rekindled.

In the story *A Simple Question*, Imdongla is her husband's savior at all times when there were hostilities between the underground rebels and the Indian army. Although illiterate, she manages to save Tekaba whenever he is at his wits end in the face of danger at the hands of the rebels and the army. This is in complete deviation from the traditional belief that a man is strong and thereby capable of protecting women who are weak and emotional.

2.4 Elements of Revolt in Tamsula Ao's Poetry.

Through the three poems, *Woman*, *The Creator* and *The Edge*, Tamsula Ao have showcased the predicaments of women in the domestic world where she is subdued and violated against her will. Yet despite all these subjugations, women's revolts have been

apparent towards the end of each of the poems ushering in a ray of hope for women that they can rise above all these patriarchal constraints and repressions.

Hence, Ao through her works have highlighted the strength of a woman even without a man. The tough circumstances in life are what make women defy patriarchal norms to protect her family and survive the test of times.

Chapter Three

Resignation versus Retaliation in Easterine Kire's Fiction and the Objectification of Women in Poetry

3.1 Introduction

Although Easterine Kire has out rightly denied of being a feminist and the intention in her novels may not have been to portray the themes of feminism, yet her strong female characters urges for a study of the works through a feminist perspective. Kire's novels *A Respectable Woman* and *When the River Sleeps* present two kinds of women who react differently when faced with such oppressional situations.

3.2 Resignation and Resilience in *A Respectable Woman*.

The first is the one who submits to fate and resigns having lost all will to live. They are unable to withstand the tough circumstances thereby allowing the situation to take control over their lives. This trait of submission is portrayed in *A Respectable Woman* through the character of Atsa Bonuo, who dies from grieving over her dead sons, Khonuo who never resumes a happy normal life again after her husband's death and Beinuo who succumbs to her husband's atrocities because of her timidity.

Whereas, the second category of women are headstrong female characters who refuses to be cowered down by the overwhelming currents around them. In the novel, Azuo Zeii is an energy-welding like woman who encourages and teaches people around her, the importance of resilience and to remain steadfast in difficult times. Kevinuo is also one who knows what she wants and recognizes her sense of freedom not compromising with any man who would snatch that away. While Uvi finds joy and learns to be resilient enough to keep herself going even when her whole family dies one after the other.

3.3 Retaliation against Submission in *When the River Sleeps*.

In *When the River Sleeps*, the two sisters Zote and Ate are ‘Kirhupfiimia’, the meaning of which Kire explains at the end of Chapter Thirty- One; - *certain females believed to have poisonous powers and greatly feared*.

Zoe is unrelenting and takes her vengeance determined to for being wronged and ostracized which she finally releases although it ultimately leads to her own end. It is through this, one may assume that according to the society, a woman can never revolt or take a tough stand like men. If a man has resorted to such tactics, he may have been praised for his bravery or strong- will while it is the exact opposite for a woman. Zote by being an open rebellion earns her reputation as ‘the villain’ with no consideration of who first provoked her to go to that extent. Her acts of terror have being used against her thereby justice is undone. Had the woman not cursed and spit towards them, Zote would have never harmed her. Likewise, the villagers without ascertaining the truth immediately cast out Zote and her sister Ate from the village which only caused her to take revenge later.

Submissive spirit which is common to almost all women in the Naga society is also seen in Ate who accepts whatever fate befalls her. She is a victim of the society ostracizing her and her sister accepting isolation and also conceals her identity in order to fit in the community.

3.4 Objectification of Women in Easterine Kire’s Poetry.

While the characters and purpose of Easterine Kire’s poems are a little vague for the readers, the element of women being objectified which is seen present in few of her poems such as *David and Bathsheba- I*, *Snow Ballet* and *At St Xavier’s* provides ample evidences of women being considered as weak and subordinate beings.

Chapter Four

Subjugation and Pain in *The Many That I Am: Writings From Nagaland*

4.1 Introduction

Although most of the tribes in Nagaland have imbibed the ideals of Christianity with the coming of the American missionaries, yet the Nagas still follow their tradition to some extent, one of which is the patriarchal system. In many aspects women are being discriminated against in favor of their male counterparts. With the intent to portray the female voice which has been silenced, a collection of short stories, poems, sketches and personal essays of Naga women was brought out under the title *The Many That I Am* which was compiled and edited by Anungla Zoe Longkumer.

4.2 Gender Roles in the *Cut Off*, *I Wish You Were A Man* and *Old Man's Story*.

The two short stories *Cut Off* and *Old Man's Story* and the poem *I Wish You Were A Man* have been vivid portrayals of gender roles among the Nagas whereby, men are engaged in the so-called outdoor activities and professions while women have been confined to the domesticity of her kitchen and the fields. It shows how gender roles have a great bearing on women who have to work tirelessly for their unending chores while men do not have to toil as much as them in the society.

Although women are restricted to go out of their homes to participate and involve in social activities, yet they can be instrumental in bringing about changes especially in upholding peace during times of war or conflict. This is pictured in the story *Cut Off*, where all the able-bodied men left their homes with any weapon they could get hold of, in order to fight with men from another village over election disputes but the women leaders patiently

negotiated with the men from both sides, hence preventing the escalation into a bloody conflict.

4.3 Domestic Violence and Abuse in *My Mother's Daughter* and *The Power to Forgive*.

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse or family violence is the violence that takes place in a domestic setting and is perpetrated in various forms including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, or sexual abuse. This has being the core issue explored in *My Mother's Daughter* , where the author through a first- person narration, has vividly painted a grim picture of Naga family where the father occasionally beats up his wife and children. In the story, when the narrator asks her mother, why her father hates them, the latter only replies that it was just because of him being drunk and that it is not his fault. The narrator too grows up to marry a man just like her father and when her daughter asks her the same question she used to ask her mother, as a child, she also replies the same answer her mother gives to her many years back.

The mother of the narrator and the narrator herself as a mother, blaming the alcohol may have perhaps been served as a form of excuse as she does not want to be termed as a 'bad woman' by being vocal against her husband's inhumane behaviors. She may have been silently bearing all these physical and psychological tortures for fear of shame, stigma and societal pressure of the Naga patriarchal setup.

The Power to Forgive is about a young woman who was raped many years at the age of twelve by none other than her own uncle. This traumatic incident forced the girl to withdraw herself from the society, avoiding new people or moving freely around other people. Although the unfortunate incident has stigmatized her whole family, she was mentally defeated with no hope of living a normal life like others. It was only towards the end of the story, when she was getting married, 'she finally felt free', (Kire 110).

4.4 Subjugation and Strength in *NoNoNo Woman* and *Vili's Runaway Son*.

Rozumari Samsara's poem *NoNoNo Woman* talks about subjugation of a woman's identity. She was taught by the Patriarchy to be an obedient woman, to buy products by the Capitalist, and not to listen to her inner voice by the Media. The women demand her to serve while the men urge her to forget herself. . The last line of the poem 'And I'm a NoNoNo Woman' (Line 19) reveals her non-conformist ideals in the strict patriarchal society.

Estes explains the four kinds of mother: the ambivalent mother, the collapsed mother, the child mother and the strong mother through the illustration of the story of *The Ugly Duckling*. Vili in *Vili's Runaway Son* is seen as 'the strong mother' who put asides all her shame and weariness to be able to save both her son and husband. For two months she struggled to obtain the required amount of money to be paid to the underground for a gun which was stolen by her son. Even though her reckless son has brought in huge trouble for the family, her only worry was the safety of her son which implies the unconditional love a mother has for her child and family.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Literature is a reflection of society. It has been assumed that gender inequality is not an issue among the Nagas as the condition of Naga women is comparatively better than women in many other parts of India. In many Indian societies, there are numerous cases of female foeticide, infanticide, dowry system, child marriage, etc. However, the situation is undergoing gradual transformation with women's rights now being recognized, their literacy rate on the rise, and women entering into politics, teaching, medical fields, etc and general improvements.

Whereas, Naga women do not face such all such social evils but that does not denote the absence of gender discrimination in the Naga society. The Naga society being patrilineal and patriarchal, men have always been at the forefront of every privileges both at home and outside since the ancient times. Even today, it can be seen that men are the ones who take control in the decision makings both at homes and in the social, religious and political arenas.

The selected works in this study have proved that with education being the foundation of many changes in the society, educated women have taken to writing to express their anguish and resentment of the patriarchal society in which they live in. Writing as a form of silent protest has made them feel empowered and feel at peace. Through a room of their own, they are beginning to form an identity of themselves which were once defined by the structures constructed by the society. The common goal of almost all the women's works was to vocalize their inner as well as physical experiences. It was considered to be the means through which women can be elevated from the current status to a position where they can explore not only their own unique and autonomous identity but also establish a literary canon of their own.

This study thus presents the female Naga writings as a strong opposition to the traditional patriarchal setup prevalent in the Naga society in the past and has still been a continuing trend in the present. Women, especially from the urban areas, are managing their careers outside their homes and family, violating the patriarchal code of decision making and the rebellion of women against the male- constructed structures which are evident in the selected texts in this research.

Thus, through their works, the women writers have attempted to bring about a change in the mindset and attitude towards the woman community in the Naga society. It is hoped that this research will provide an understanding of the workings of patriarchy and the emergence of a new literary trend wrought in female consciousness which can lead to further critical readings and analysis.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, Pelhouneinu Kiewhuo, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Contemporary Naga Literature: A Feminist Approach to Select Fictionists and Poets**, is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the supervision of Dr. Jano S. Liegise and that it has not been submitted, either in full or in part, to any other universities or institutions for the award of any degree, diploma or title.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE NAGAS.

Nagaland located in the North- Eastern part of India has an area of 16,579 sq. km lying between $25^{\circ}6'N$ and $27^{\circ}4'N$ latitudes and between $93^{\circ}20'E$ and $95^{\circ}15'E$ longitudes. It is bounded by Myanmar on the east, Arunachal and a part of Assam on the north, Assam on the West and Manipur on the south. The capital of Nagaland is Kohima with Dimapur as its commercial city. The state of Nagaland was a district under Assam for about ninety years and was known as 'Naga Hills District of Assam'. It was only in 1957 that it became a separate administrative unit being renamed as 'Naga Hills Tuensang Area' and then established as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union on 1st December, 1963. Nagaland is a rural state with Kohima and Dimapur being the only urban centers. At present there are sixteen districts in Nagaland with the newly formed districts of Tseminyu, Niuland, Chiimoukedima in 2021 and Shamator in 2022. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in Nagaland.

The Nagas have no written records of their origin or migration. Therefore, there are many theories concerning the origins of this group of indigenous people. The various tribes are believed to have migrated at different times, each settling down and establishing their respective villages. Most Nagas believed that their ancestors came from a place somewhere in the far North, which is present-day China. They initially migrated to village of Makhrai-Rabu also known as Makhel (present-day lands belonging to the Mao tribe in Manipur), from where they dispersed to the various directions.

The exact origin of the word 'Naga' is also vague. In the olden past, the Nagas did not call themselves by that name, but was given by outsiders. There are many other theories regarding the origin of the word 'Naga'. According to one of the most accepted version, the term is said to have originated from the Burmese word 'Naka', which literally means 'people with holes in their ears'. The use of 'Naga' also dated back to the writings of the Assamese's *Buranjis*, which records the history of the kings of Assam, beginning from the 13th century, long before the Hindustani people came into contact with the Nagas. Hence, it is also likely that the word 'Naga' may had been given by the Assamese who are close to the Nagas than any other people. Although the derivation of the word 'Naga' is obscure, as the Nagas became more united, they began to use that name for themselves.

There are seventeen main tribes and many other minor tribes residing in the terrain each having their own distinct dress, language and customs. Every tribe has its own name, which often gives clue to their history. The villages are generally divided into *khels*, each with its own headman and administration. The entire village is responsible to the common needs of the community. Land holdings are generally owned by the clans and inherited by the males in the Naga patriarchal society. A common village institution present in all the villages in the past is the *Morung*, which is a kind of dormitory where all kinds of training and skills are taught to the young boys and girls.

Nagaland is known as 'the land of festivals'. The diverse tribes, 'each with their own culture and heritage creates a year- long atmosphere of celebrations' (*Wikipedia*). In addition to the tribal celebrations, the Nagas also celebrate all the Christian festivals. The most important festival is the Hornbill festival which is inter- tribal celebration launched to promote the rich culture of Nagaland and also to protect the cultural heritage of the state. In the pre- Christian period, Feasts of Merit were given especially by the wealthy persons in the village in return

for social status and high rituals.

Dr. J.H. Hutton remarks,

“It is generally assumed in a vague sort of way that those tribes which are spoken of as Nagas have something in common with each other which distinguishes them from many other tribes found in Assam and entails them to be regarded as a racial unit in themselves... The truth is that, if not impossible, it is exceedingly difficult to propound any test by which a Naga tribe can be distinguished from other Assam or Burma tribes which are not Nagas”.

The Nagas belong to the Mongolian group of people and more than eighty- five percent of the population speaks tribal languages. Their languages or dialects differ from tribe to tribe and sometimes even from one village to another. However, they all fall under the Tibeto- Burman family. The Nagas lack a common language and so inter- tribal communication is carried on through Nagamese, which is a combination of Hindi and Assamese. The English language is considered the official language in the state.

The Nagas were a self- sufficient community in the past. Their main source of livelihood was through the cultivation of lands from which they procure a wide range of food and spices. With rice being the most important crop, the Nagas also supplement their diet by growing other crops like maize, millets and cereals, yam, potatoes and other root crops and vegetables. The forest is an important provider of wood, herbs, honey, wild vegetables, wild animals, etc. The primitive Nagas also engaged in building wooden houses, weaving, making baskets, pottery and carpentry. Other goods which were not a necessity like shells, semi- precious stones, glass beads, etc were imported from distant places.

The traditional religion of the Nagas in the past was animism which is the belief in the existence of spiritual beings inhabiting the natural world. Three types of gods and spirits are

known to the Nagas, which are: the creator, the sky spirits and the earth spirits. Sacrifices and rituals are performed in order to appease the gods and spirits for good harvests, fertility and health. With the coming of the Christianity, majority of the Nagas got converted to the new religion abandoning most of their old practices and customs. However, one can observe that they still celebrate their traditional festivals, observe *genna* (days when work is forbidden), consult traditional healers and believe in spirits.

1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF NAGA LITERATURE.

1.2.1 The Oral Tradition.

The Naga community in the past was primarily an oral society. Folktales, folksongs, myths and folk beliefs form an integral part of the oral tradition of the Nagas. Since time immemorial, the Nagas do not maintain any written records of any aspect of their lives but only through the oral medium, they pass down their traditional values from one generation to the next. The customs, beliefs, values and opinions of the Naga society were handed down from the ancestors either through mouth or by practice. The practice of the oral tradition of the Nagas is as old as the birth of the Nagas themselves. It was the only means through which the people learn the ways of life and in turn teach the younger generations through the same.

Feats of brave heroes and legends were sung in the songs and narrated as tales. It was the custom of the elderly to narrate to the younger ones of the myths of their land, her heroes and their achievements. Folk songs too serve as another medium of oral transmission to the young people who would gather together and sing and dance to the songs learnt at the *Morung*. The *Morung* plays a major role in inculcating the youth of their tradition and culture. It is a large dormitory where young boys and girls after reaching puberty, leave their homes and go to live in there. It is in this institution, which is like a modern day school,

where the young men learn the tactics of warfare, carpentry, hunting and other occupations, while the women are taught the art of spinning, weaving, pottery and so on. Thus, the oral medium of instruction is majorly transmitted through the *Morung*.

Right from childhood, the Nagas are taught through stories and legends about survival, endurance and respect for all mankind and nature. Even the toys and play things are fashioned in such a way that they learn about the roles they would assume from a very early age. Girls carry their dolls on their backs, play with kitchen things and are also taught the traditional methods of sewing and weaving, while the boys are introduced to traditional games, group play and assume the roles of warriors from an early age.

Children also spend a great amount of time listening to the elders as they recount tales of their past and sing traditional songs. Every evening, the children would gather around their grandparents or any elderly in the village to listen to stories. It is in this manner, the children would do the same, in the process of oral transmission of tradition when they become old.

The past events of war, of great men, spirits and of seasons of various plantations and so on are the composition of the folk songs. Stories handed down through time depict the Nagas' interrelationship with the animal world where humans and animals would share the same spirit, acquiring supernatural powers and so on. These are also carved or displayed in the traditional shawls as well. Their ties to the past have essentially been passed down verbally through anecdotes and songs. The 'old' ways of the Nagas showed a close interlink of culture with religion and also with the socio- political life. The lifestyle of the Nagas is related to their cultural and religious beliefs. The oral tradition has preserved and upholds the unique system of beliefs, the pristine virtue and the rich cultural heritage present in the folk tales, myths, legends, proverbs, superstitions, songs and recitations, which have been passed down from the remote past of the Nagas.

Oral tradition is the main source of information to explain how things came to be and as they are unique to a society, they help to define who the Nagas are and what they believe in as a community. The daily way of living of the Nagas was governed by the rules of their customs and traditions. However, when the Westerners came into the Naga inhabited areas, they did not understand the Naga values and practices and ridiculed them. As Christian mission works gradually started taking place among the Nagas, the age- old tradition which was the only governing norm of the Nagas at that time was threatened. The arrival of European colonizers in the indigenous areas of the Nagas ushered in a change of perspective and the looming of a new westernized future. In the name of modernization, they began to educate the Nagas with a new form of culture which was considered superior and advanced as compared to the so- called ‘heathen’ ways of the Nagas. According to the whites, anything that is non- Eurocentric is considered as “backward”, or “inferior” and so it is their duty to educate the uncivilized masses often termed as ‘the white man’s burden’. The Europeans began to set up schools and churches and carried out various mission works among the Nagas. The first church was set up at the Molung Kimong in the Ao area of the Nagas by the missionary couple Dr. E.W. Clark and Mrs. Mary Mead Clark. This was followed by other missionary works in various parts of the Naga areas. In many villages, there was conversion to the new religion which initially backfired with hostile responses but gradually it began to take over the old religion.

According to the ideals of Christianity, ‘folksongs were classed as “objectionable songs”, folktales as “doubtful stories”, the age- old *morung* system as mere “congregating promiscuously”, the religion as “demon worship”, etc. The missionaries, no doubt, adopted strict ‘puritanical’ measures to “civilize” the Nagas!’ (Pou 67).

Eventually mass conversion began to take place giving a setback to the native religion which bears close relation to the tradition of the Nagas. Christianity which is now the new religion,

changed the outlook of the Nagas and it further influenced them to abandon their old ways by adopting the Western tradition in lifestyle, dressing, beliefs and many other aspects as well. In this manner, the oral tradition of the Nagas was regrettably lost to the Western civilization. In the view of J.P. Mills, due to the introduction of modern education and Christianity, there will remain hardly any memory of the stories and songs which the Nagas have handed down from father to son for untold ages.

1.2.2 The Naga Writings in English.

The entry of Naga writings into the literary world is of a recent phenomenon. With the establishment of more schools, the Nagas began to learn the art of reading and writing, and most significantly, a ‘new language’, that is, English. The schools and churches replaced the old *Morung* which imparted oral education to the young people. The written literature of the Nagas evolved with the introduction of Roman alphabets, modern education, the translations of the Bible, church hymns and other religious texts by the American missionaries.

Easterine Kire talks about the “silencing of oral narratives at critical periods in their history”. According to her, the first phase began with the arrival of the American missionaries around the 1860s when the Nagas viewed their own tradition with doubt and skepticism. The second phase came in around 1919 after the British occupation and the Second World War while the third began after Indian Independence in the 1950s when the newly educated Nagas were busy writing letters to the Government of India that they forgot about their own narratives. It was only when the native tradition of the Nagas was almost completely lost that they began to realize the importance of their history. The few educated Nagas therefore took up the task of chronicling the history and traditions of the Nagas through writing. While earlier works have been confined to the political dimension, there have emerged a new batch of writers who began to explore the imaginative world and implemented them into their writings. Among the first English books written by the Nagas was a collection of folktales titled *Folk Tales From*

Nagaland, published by the Department of Art and Culture, Nagaland. Eventually there grew a conscious effort to recreate a resplendent past through a retracing of the traditional folklores and folksongs, which was a form of forging the identity of the Nagas. Literature began to be utilized as a form of reviving traditions as the fictional stories were based on the Naga culture and have reflections of the history of the people. The age old storytelling tradition continues to find its expressions in the new forms which are the writings in English. Veio Pou remarks, *“This transition from the oral to the written immortalizes the celebrated tales and allows the retelling to reach newer imaginations”*.

Many emerging prominent Naga writers such as Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang, Monalisa Changkija, etc, have brought to light the historical past of the Nagas through their works. Their writings trace back to the times when the Nagas rose in conflict against India demanding sovereignty from the Indian Union after the British granted independence to the latter. The suppression of the Nagas by the Indian army during those times have resulted in untold sufferings of not only the Naga freedom fighters but the common people as well, which are all vividly portrayed in these contemporary writings. These Naga writers have used their literary art to recreate the rich cultural heritage of the Nagas while also bringing to light the social realities and history which are gradually being forgotten.

Easterine Kire, who grew up in Kohima, the center of conflict at that time, focuses primarily on the Indo- Naga war which resulted in horrifying violence and bloodsheds. Her novels such as *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Life on Hold* (2011), *A Respectable Woman* (2019), etc, talk about the freedom struggle by the Nagas during the post-Independence period. Kire’s attempt to preserve the oral tradition and the history of the Nagas can be seen reflected in the way she constructs her stories around the past lives of their ancestors.

Temsula Ao, who is one of the prominent voices in the Naga literary world has based her works mainly on the oral tradition of the Nagas and emphasized greatly on recovering the lost heritage of the Nagas' past. Some of her works like *Ao- Naga Oral Tradition* (2000), *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006), *On Being a Naga* (2014), and many others, chronicles the culture of the people in the past in an attempt to prevent them from being eroded and forgotten.

Nini Lungalang's writings have been largely recognized for incorporating the sufferings of her people, that is, the Nagas. Though she has published only one book of poetry, *The Morning Years* (1994), the poems in it has been included in various anthologies with her powerful *Child of Fortune* depicting women being victimized during times of conflict.

Monalisa Changkija, who is a distinguished journalist and proprietor of the English daily, *Nagaland Page*, has a strong political tone and eco- feminist inclinations in her poetry. Her works included two volumes of poetry, *Weapons of Words of Pages of Pain* (1993) and *Monsoon Mourning* (2007) and a book of collected essays *Cogitating for a Better Deal* (2013).

These contemporary literatures have not only spoken for themselves but have also voiced for the common man as too. They have served as social commentators like the storytellers in the olden days. By blending in life experiences and tradition with the artistic imagination, these writings have manifested the Naga existential reality of both the past and the present.

Many other Naga contemporary writers have also taken to writing as a way to preserve people stories and to reclaim and rewrite history. Sue Monk Kidd said in *The Secret Life of Bees*, "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or where we have come from.

1.3 STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE NAGA COMMUNITY.

Since time immemorial Naga men and women have co-existed peacefully and collaborated throughout every activity, during times of war, festivals and other economic activities. It has been argued that women in the Naga society enjoy better status than many other ethnic groups in India; however an insight into the daily lives of the women portrays that the customs and traditions do not give equal rights to women. At every step of their life, women can be seen bounded by the customs of their community. The traditional notion of women being confined to the domesticity has an impact on the mentality and attitude of both men and women towards the status of women. Their roles and status were determined by the social institutions and norms. In spite of being controlled, women play an important role in the socio- economic development of the villages.

1.3.1 The Domesticity of Naga Women.

In the traditional society, there have been a sharp distinction in the economic roles the Nagas perform; the men engaged generally in hunting and warfare with the domestic and agricultural activities assigned to women. It is believed that the idea of distinguishing duties based on gender have started from the time when the Nagas were practicing head- hunting. In those days, men were supposed to be physically fit and defend their village from the enemy's attack and the other works are left for the women in order not to burden the former. It is in this context; the division of labor took its roots and continued even after head- hunting was no longer practiced. The domestic chores like cooking, washing, cleaning, etc, are all done by women who do not question this inequality as they have been brought up believing that these works are meant for them alone.

Women were not encouraged to participate in politics, administration and religious practices. They cannot become a village chief as the people used to believe that a village ruled by a woman is against the will of God, and hence cursed. Traditionally a woman cannot become

the religious head of her family, clan or the village and is prohibited from taking part in the religious rituals in the past. Women also have no say in the decision making process in any meeting or gathering.

1.3.2 Social and Political Position.

The Nagas being a patrilineal society restrict women in many ways and do not provide equal rights and opportunities with men. The word 'patrilineal' also known as the male line 'is a common kinship system in which an individual's family membership derives from and is recorded through their father's lineage. It generally involves the inheritance of property, rights, names, or titles by persons related through male kin'. (*Wikipedia*). With regard to social behavior, it can be seen that men have more liberty than women. Women are not free to roam around the village or any other place without any specific purpose, irrespective of them being married or unmarried. It is also a kind of taboo or restriction for them to sleep elsewhere, even at their friends' place, other than their own home. They are also looked at with suspicions when they return home late without any reason which is not the case with men. Women are also punished more severely than men when it comes to chastity for both married and unmarried women.

With them confined within the four walls of their home at all times, women generally do not have the leisure to roam around with their friends while men are not compelled to be confined like women. The attitude of both men and women affected the status of the latter to a great extent. Even some well-known expressions such as '*empty vessels make more noise*', is used to refer to a woman who talks a lot or it can also mean that the words of women cannot be relied upon. Such instances indirectly depict the position of women in the Naga patriarchal setup. The practice of traditional form of dating where boys visit the girls they admire and engage in singing and chatting along with their friends also brings to light the lack of choice of women to woo any men of their choice.

However in the present day, there is much more liberty for women as compared to the olden days. Women can move around freely not only outside their village alone but all over the world irrespective of whether they have work or not while in the past women are not allowed to move out of their village for fear of the enemy.

1.3.3 The Economic Condition.

From the past till the present, women still do not have the right to inherit any property and cannot claim any properties as theirs. It is only the male who can claim the inheritance and in the absence of a son in the family, the property goes to the nearest male relative from the same clan or lineage, irrespective of whether there are daughters or not. This is because women go to their husband's house after marriage and hence the people's view is that by depriving them of the properties, the inheritance would remain within the same clan, especially assets like land which have been passed on from generation to generation. During marriage, the parents of the bride give her both movable items such as household articles, clothing, etc and immovable assets like the field or sometimes even a plot of jungle land in order to maintain the relationship between her ancestral family and her generations. However houses and lands are not given to them and are passed only to the male members of the family.

A married woman has some control over the properties of her family to a certain extent so as to let her sons inherit, since she cannot inherit them. However she has the right over the properties only when she is under the roof of her husband. A divorced woman who goes back to her parents' house loses all such privileges and in cases of adultery leading to divorce, a woman may be stripped of even her rightful belongings. Thus it is seen that after divorce, a woman is sent off with only the clothes she is wearing while a man in spite of committing the same offence, that is adultery, does not face such kinds of punishment.

Although Christianity has overtaken almost all aspects of culture, the tradition of inheritance is still prevalent in the Naga society in the present times.

1.3.4 Contemporary Dynamics of Naga women in the Society.

Modernization brought about by Christianity along with the spread of modern education and the democratic political systems have gradually altered the traditional system of the Nagas. The focus on women in the field of education brought about significant changes in their lives by bringing them out of domesticity which provided them the opportunity to assume new positions in the society such as schools, offices, hospitals, etc. The Christian faith eradicated the old traditional practices such as head hunting and other belief systems and superstitions. It brought about a new perspective and attitude which emphasizes on the freedom of both men and women and that they are to complement each other being uniquely created and different from one another. These new principles redefined the gender relations of the past by paving the way for women in the strong patriarchal set-up. However, in spite of assuming new roles and status, women are still being debarred from holding leadership in the churches and the decision making body. It is seen that they are given subordinate roles or assisting roles. Further, even in the church the board of Deacons is mostly males and even in other mission works, women are not encouraged for the positions of the head or top leadership.

When education was initially introduced in Nagaland, the boys were the first to get access to the formal education since many parents were reluctant to send their daughters for the same. Therefore, men were inducted into the tertiary sector of government services ahead of women and so the latter has become entirely dependent on them for their sustenance. Men become the 'bread winners' and hence the ultimate authority is vested in him.

However, of late women have begun to venture into these sectors as well contributing to the total family income. Marriage of women at early teenage has also been replaced by them marrying in their twenties and thirties or for some even in their forties, the main reason being the pursuance for higher education and desire to be dependent financially. In the new emerging situation, women have now been recognized in terms of their achievements in education, career or position in the society unlike the past when the status of a woman is generally in relation to her family as a sister, daughter, wife and mother.

One of the most important elements of the contemporary Naga society is the presence of many women's organizations or groups for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of women and to eradicate social ills in the society, especially those against women. Each tribe has its own women organization while groups like Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) and Naga Women Hoho (NWH) are representatives of Naga women as a whole. There are also many church women organizations which have been formed with the aim to fight social evils alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. One such example is the passing of Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act in 1989 which was a joint effort of Nagaland Baptist Council of Churches (NBCC) and the different women organizations in the state headed by the Naga Mothers Association (NMA).

Women's organizations have also played as mediators of peace between warring parties. By intervening and taking a neutral stand during difficult situations, they have prevented conflicts from escalating into more hostilities and violence. Working alongside men, the women organizations are playing active roles in the present- day social and political life of the Nagas. However, inspite of the changes taking place due to the influence of Christianity and western education, the principle of patriarchy are still firmly rooted and strictly adhered to and therefore it is important to critically understand the conflict between the tradition and the dynamics of the contemporary Naga society.

1.4 FEMINISM: MEANING, HISTORY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON NAGA LITERATURE.

1.4.1 Meaning and Definition of Feminism.

Feminism in its broadest sense is a range of socio- political movements and ideologies that seek to redefine and establish equality of the sexes in the field of politics, economy, personal lives and society. It holds the view that men and women are not treated equally in the society and that the male point of view has been prioritized over that of the female. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Feminism is “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state”. Feminist movements campaign for women’s rights such as the right to vote, hold public offices, educational opportunities, etc. They fight against gender stereotypes and discrimination and make attempts to establish educational, professional and other opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Feminists have also worked to protect women from sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence and to also ensure access to contraception, legal abortions and many others.

The term “feminism” originated from the French word “féminisme” which was coined by Charles Fourier, a French philosopher and utopian socialist in 1837. The word was first used in English in the 1890s, in association with the movement for equal political and legal rights for women. Although the term “feminism” entered the public discourse only in the nineteenth century, the thought has birthed in women long before the word came into its formal usage. There have been scant evidences of early organized protests when the Roman women in the 3rd century BCE, filled the Capitoline Hill and blocked every entrance against consul Marcus Porcius Cato resisting attempts to repeal laws which limit women’s use of expensive goods. There have also been other similar isolated voices in various parts of the world against the

inferior status of women gradually paving the way to the great movement which was to come later.

1.4.2 History and Development of Feminism.

The feminist movement is the oldest power struggle however its manifestations have been the least public. The fundamental belief behind the feminist theory is that, right from the beginning of human civilization, women have been given a secondary status by masculine dominated social discourse and western philosophical tradition. The history of every civilization shows that women have always been subordinated to a position where they have no means to reclaim their unique identity unless they revisit the history, explore it and finally re-establish it through their own experiences and insights. Therefore in order to explore their own unique identity, women have to define themselves against the male informed ideals and beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. While decentering phallogocentric notions, they passed from various stages of development in order to establish their unique and autonomous identity.

- **The Influence of the Enlightenment.**

Although it is impossible to determine the exact period when Feminism took its roots in history, one movement which greatly influenced and paved the way for the feminist movement was the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment gave importance to the notions of human worth, liberty, equal rights, reason, progress, etc. During this time, while men are seen as rational and objective, women were considered as mere subjects who are emotional, lack rationality and a barrier to social progress, therefore the former is fit for roles in public life whereas, the latter should be assigned the domestic roles. This period brought about intense debates on gender, slavery, colonialism, etc which set the ground for the rise of feminist consciousness. There emerged a circle of women writers who banded together to influence the political and cultural life of that time. A notable feminist

right before the Enlightenment was Aphra Behn whom Virginia Woolf has immortalized in her work *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

Another feminist during the Enlightenment was Catherine Macaulay, an English historian who in her *Letters on Education* (1790), argues that boys and girls should have the same access to education and that the differences between the sexes were not a product of nature but caused by the environment and education.

There have been numerous feminist movements and ideologies which emerged and represent different viewpoints. The history of modern western feminist movement has been divided into three waves, each dealing with different aspects of the feminist issues.

- **The first wave of the 19th and early 20th centuries.**

During this period, women campaigned for suffrage and raised their voice for equal right to vote and equal access to the parliament. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) may be said to be the precursor for these suffragette movements. In this book, she advocated for the equal social and moral rights for women. She argued that women should have the same legal rights as men on the grounds of moral worth, equal humanity, rationality and freedom. In fact, she is regarded as the foremother of British feminist criticism who provided insights to suffragettes to fight the battle for women's rights. Another main social reformer of early 19th century was also Florence Nightingale, who was convinced that women had every potential of men but none of the opportunities. She pioneered the importance of nursing schools and also advocated better education for women. From the beginning of human civilization, the world of literature has been dominated by male writers and women's writing was excluded from the mainstream culture and literature. Women were discredited to perform social roles in the public or private sector which would have enhanced their economic condition. They were also discouraged to pursue literary ambitions by the patriarchal structures of society.

And therefore, there was a need for women writers and theorists to challenge the oppressive doctrine and practice of patriarchy with alternative narratives which would provide a safe zone to women for exploring and creating a distinctive artistic genre. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), originally written as a lecture which she was to deliver at Girton College, Cambridge on the theme 'Woman and Fiction' in 1928 laid the building blocks for feminist criticism. Her treatise takes the charge of inferiority levelled against women and presents a powerful materialistic analysis of women's oppression. She argues that women's book is not written as men would write it. She also maintains that artistic genius is not a miraculous gift that one is born with, rather it develops among educated and leisured class when two criteria are fulfilled. The first is 'a room of one's own', which symbolizes an independent space for women as an individual. The second is 'financial independence'. It is only through the fulfilment of these two criteria, women would excel in both social and literary endeavours. She also gave the concept of 'androgyny'. While clarifying it, she argues that although physical body is divided into two sexes, yet it is possible for the mind to contain the characteristics of the both.

Not only women tried to establish equal opportunities for both sexes, feminist men also helped advance women's liberation, although there were only few. One of them was an English philosopher, political economist and feminist John Stuart Mill, who was inspired by his wife women's right advocate Harriet Taylor Mill. He made the argument that women should have equal rights with men, based on equal reason and education, an equal right to work and vote. He declared that the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes- the legal subordination of one sex to the other, is wrong itself, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. Mill also became the first British Member of Parliament to introduce a bill calling for women to receive the vote.

- **The second wave of the 1960s.**

The second wave feminist movement also known as the women liberation movement emerged after the Second World War. It was associated with the diverse thinkers who campaigned for equal legal and social rights for women. During this period many notable works appeared in the literary arena, making the powerful advocacy for women's liberation from masculine coded language and philosophical system. Some of the major works of second wave feminism included, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Elaine Showalter's *The Literature of Their Own* (1977), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968).

The American Feminist critic Elaine Showalter challenged Woolf's concept of androgyny. In her essay *Toward A Feminist Poetics* (1979), she gave the concept of 'Gynocriticism' as an alternative framework for the analysis of women's writing. This concept focuses on the historical study of women's literary texts written by female authors. It takes two strands, the first is the ideological or phallogocentric approach where women were actually readers and consumers of literary texts. This criticism critiques the misinterpretation and stereotypical image of women depicted in literature written by men. And the second is Gynocriticism which is a mode of literature where women are authors and producers of literary texts.

One of the earliest key concepts that encouraged the feminist literary theory to expand its horizon and the actual theoretical foundation of feminist criticism was laid down by Simone de Beauvoir. In her famous book, *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir claims that femininity is not inherent but a social construct developed through the long process of socialization. She says that the inferiority of women was mainly due to the three factors: the first being the notion that women were always taught to help men and thus derive their existence in relation

to them. Secondly, women were encouraged to externalize the aspects of femininity such as docility, selflessness, beauty to validate themselves in the society while the third is that, women have enjoyed lesser rights than men. Therefore, she argues that it was not women's inferiority that rendered women as historically insignificant; rather it is the historical insignificance that doomed women to an inferior state.

According to her, women is not born but made through the process of socialization which is predominately male centric, reducing women to second sex and to the inferior and subordinate state. Simone de Beauvoir states: *One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.* Some feminists of the second wave demanded for greater inclusion of women on the grounds of female moral superiority. They viewed women as sympathetic and emotional while men are considered as tough, competitive and emotionless. Therefore, they argue that the world is in need of female side of humanity in politics and society so as to prevent nuclear war and environmental destruction.

- **The third wave of the 90s.**

The third wave feminist movement was a continuation and reaction to the perceived failures of second wave feminism and emphasizes on individuality and diversity. This wave of feminism or sometimes also called the post-feminism begins in the 1990s. The focus of the movement has slightly shifted; it is less focused on political processes and on laws but more on the individual self. Also, the feminists are more diverse now, the first and the second wave feminists were mostly Westerns, middle-class, white women, whereas the third wave feminists comprises of women from different ethnicities, colours, religions and social backgrounds. This movement extended into postcolonial feminism, ecofeminism and gender studies. The feminist thinkers associated with this movement advocated social justice for women.

There have been speculations about a **fourth wave** starting from 2012, which is associated with technology like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking. It emphasizes on social media to counter sexual harassments, violence against women and rape culture in work places and other places. The campaigns like “Every Sexism project” and “Me Too movement” is associated with it. The “Me Too Movement” was a movement initiated by Tarana Burke, a social activist who had used “Me Too” in 2006 on MySpace social network as part of a campaign to promote “empowerment through empathy.”

Over the several decades, the feminist movement has helped women to stand for their own and to be acknowledged. However, feminism today cannot be easily defined anymore, it is not as visible as it used to be during the first wave, and some women do not want to be associated with feminism as they still perceive it as a rigid and out-dated movement.

Nonetheless, in September 2014, the United Nations launched a new campaign called HeForShe, which aims for gender equality, which is not only women issue but rather human rights issue. As Emma Watson, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador herself mentioned at one of the HeForShe conferences: “How can we effect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?”

One of the goals of the campaign is also to lure men and boys to advocate for their own rights, not only women, which is very important because the campaign aims to make men comfortable to call themselves feminist as well. Even though, the campaign is being criticized as being run by women exclusively, the publicity that was drawn on the feminist issue is gradual again which is a good sign, hitherto there is no country in the world where women are absolutely equal to men.

Therefore, feminism was a social movement, initiated through a series of resistance movements against the notion of patriarchy, social inequality and role of capitalism in the oppression of women. In the beginning it was an incoherent system of opposition to

phallogocentric thinking and practice, but now feminist theory is a well-established field of critical inquiry and study. The scope of feminist literary theory is not only to encompass a mode of reclaiming, and establishing women's autonomous identity in social and literary spheres, but also to advance parallel to male centric literary discourse. Thus, today diverse range of feminist thinkers apply post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, Marxist and postcolonial approaches to decentre male ideology in order to define, establish and achieve women's social justice in all spheres of life.

1.4.3 Influence of Feminism in Naga Literature.

It is often assumed that Naga women are liberated since crimes against them such as female infanticide, dowry deaths, etc are not heard of. But on in-depth observation, one can notice that the freedom enjoyed by women is often limited as compared to men. Women across the world are denied their rights inspite of their long struggle for emancipation. Among the Nagas too, women are still yet to fully exercise their rights although the education along with Christianity has brought about considerable changes and improvements in the status of women. Right from the family level boys are preferred over girls for education to the community level where women are restricted from holding top religious, social, political posts.

The feminist movement which was spread across the world was felt among the Nagas too, through globalization and encounters with other cultures. Naga women began to realize, particularly through education, that the society in which they lived in is biased, and unfavourable towards them. Therefore they also joined the movement by forming groups which aims to fight for the injustices meted out against them in the society. While there may be not be feminist groups directly demanding for their rights, women have also taken to writing to voice out their anguish and anger towards gender discrimination that have been

prevailing among the Nagas since time immemorial. The conflict situations since the 1950s between the Nagas and Indian government and among the Naga factions themselves have incurred immense misery and sufferings to both men and women alike. However, it is only the men whose narratives have been told ignoring those of the women community.

Therefore, women writers articulated these traumas of women during conflicts into their writings which changed the mind-set of the readers opening up to them a whole new perspective and outlook. Stories like *The Last Song* by Temsula Ao, *Child of Fortune* by Nini Lungalang portrays the traumatic experiences of women during the Indo- Naga conflict while Easterine Kire's *Mari* recounts the impact of the Second World War on the Nagas and particularly women, like the protagonist who had to run for cover because everything they had was being ravaged. *The Night* by Temsula Ao also brings to light, the truth of how men, though have involved in illicit affairs can settle and start his life afresh while women are put at disadvantage with society shaming and stigmatizing them with very less or no hope of marrying.

The lines from Dr. Rosemary Dziivichii's poem *Womanhood*, clearly defines the gender roles and disparities present in the Naga community:

Why my brothers don't carry water from the distant pond... Why
men sit and drink
from morn till dusk as their women sweat silently... Why women
only cry

Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* also presents a realistic picture of patriarchal society through the grandmother of the protagonist, Dielieno, who strictly monitors every move of the little girl in the belief of disciplining her to be a dutiful wife in the future, while being biased towards her brothers, spoiling them with unconditional favours and affection.

Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* states,

“The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break the silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.” (44).

Therefore, with the intent to explore the aspects of gender trouble and the status of women in the works of Naga female writers, this research shall employ the feminist approach in dealing with the chapters under study.

Chapter 1 is an encapsulated study of the Nagas as a whole; their origins, culture, economy and religious beliefs and digs into the oral tradition and its evolution into written literature. It shall also provide a brief explanation on the theory of Feminism and its influence on the Naga literature.

Chapter 2 highlights the tough circumstances in the lives of women through the stories *Aosenla's Story*, *Laburnum for My Head* and *A Simple Question* which compel them to defy patriarchal norms to protect their family and survive the test of times. It also portrays the strong love that women have that they are willing to go to any extent to protect each other in *Three Women*. The three selected poems for the study, *Woman*, *The Creator* and *The Edge* shall showcase the predicaments of women in the domestic world and women's revolts against all the patriarchal constraints and repressions.

Chapter 3 brings in the dichotomies between two categories of women through the two novels *A Respectable Woman* and *When the River Sleeps*. The first category women in the stories are the ones who are mentally weak to withstand the unfavorable circumstances they face in their lives and hence resign to their fate whereas; the second category of women in the represents resilience and strength within each woman. Selected poems from *The Windhover Collection* shall also showcase the objectification of women in the Naga patriarchal system.

Chapter 4 is a collection of the diverse voices of Naga women from different walks of life with the theme of feminism running throughout the different genres present in the book. It

‘questions the continued dominance of the male over the female and the constant helplessness endured by women in the intransigent patriarchal society of the Nagas.’ The texts taken into consideration for the purpose of this research include both short stories and poetry.

Chapter 5 shall bring forth the contemporary dynamics of the status of Naga women in the society. It shall also sum up all the arguments presented in the preceding chapters and reiterate the points supporting the research.

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Chapter Two

Patriarchy and its Defiance in Tamsula Ao's Fiction and Poetry

2.1 Introduction

Tamsula Ao is an Indian English poet, scholar, novelist and ethnographer from Nagaland. She was born in October, 1945 at Jorhat, Assam and attended Nagaland's oldest college, Fazl Ali College in Mokokchung and passed her degree examination with distinction. She completed her masters in English from Gauhati University, Assam, a Post- Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English from the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (now English and Foreign Languages University), Hyderabad and her PhD from North- Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong, Meghalaya.

She retired in 2010 as Professor, Department of English, and also as Dean of the School of Humanities and Education at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, where she had been teaching since 1975. From 1992-97, she served as the Director of North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur on Deputation from NEHU, and was a Fulbright Fellow to the University of Minnesota from 1985-86. She is a recipient of Padma Shri and is widely respected as one of the major literary voices in English to emerge from North East India along with Mitra Phukan and Mamang Dai.

Ao's works have been translated into German, French, Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. She has written 6 books of poetry, 2 books of short stories, a book of literary criticism titled *Henry James and the Quest for the Ideal Heroine*, and a book on her own culture called *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. Her poems and articles have appeared in many anthologies and one of her short stories has been translated into German, while her first book of short stories called *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* was translated into Kannada. She

received the Nagaland Governor's Award for Distinction in Literature in 2009. In 2013, she was the recipient of the Sahitya Akademy Award for her short story collection *Laburnum for my Head* (2009).

Dr. Temsula Ao interacted with Native Americans as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Minnesota which gave her an opportunity to learn of their culture and heritage, most notably their oral traditions. Inspired by this, she decided to do the same with her community on returning to India.

Thus, Ao spent twelve years recording the rituals, customs, laws, folktales, myths, belief systems and the like, which was published in 1999 as the ethnographic work *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. This work has earned the reputation of being the most authentic documentation of the Ao-Naga community.

Dr. Temsula Ao is a strong feminist who attempts to highlight the subordinated gender, that is, the female community through her works. Her characters are very clear depictions of the Naga society where women are deemed to be inferior to men and are considered as 'the weaker sex'. Gender roles cast men as strong, protective and rational while women are depicted as weak, submissive and emotional. These gender roles have been detrimental to the position of women in the society such as excluding them from leadership status or decision-making roles both in family as well as in the outside world. The division of labor in the society expects Naga women, whether literate or illiterate, to be domestic and dutiful in the making of homes. These social practices ascribe to an ideology which is termed as 'patriarchy'.

Patriarchy thus is the belief that women are innately inferior to men. It is a system in which men are given the privilege of absolute and primary power and predominate women in roles of political leadership, moral authority, and social systems. The term 'Patriarchy' is

derived from the Greek word 'patriarkhes' which means 'father or chief of a race'. While in the past, the term was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male heads of the family, in recent times since late twentieth century, it has been used to refer to social systems in which power is primarily held by men. This concept of patriarchy was developed to explain the dominance of men as a social phenomenon rather than a biological creation.

Jennie Ruby in her paper entitled *Resistances to Patriarchy* defines Patriarchy as:

a form of society where men's needs, concerns, and interests are central; where a family's children are named after the father, not the mother, and the authority of the father/ husband over both wife and children is revered. (Ruby 38).

The belief that men are superior to women has been used to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions thereby leaving the latter powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political and social power. Yet, women though been considered as subordinate to men have a way of turning situations in their favor. The manipulations of women and their unwavering stance in times of unfavorable circumstances are what pull them out through rough waters.

2.2 Patriarchal defiance in *Aosenla's Story*.

The novel *Aosenla's Story* (2017) is about a young married woman who recalls her own past and how this have summarily led her to her present situation. Sitting in the verandah of her house with a wedding card in her hand, Aosenla is lost in her own thoughts without any will to do any work. The novel opens with the scene of a typical summer afternoon, turning into another, predictable, oppressive evening, providing a very gloomy and desperate setting depicting some kind of suppressed and restraint environment. Aosenla gazes at the large building of her in- laws which implanted in her a fear of which she herself does not seem to recognize. She was married off much against her wishes to Bendang when she was

still in college and dreaming of going for her post-graduate studies. Aosenla's mother sympathizes and understands her daughter's distress yet gave in to her husband's wishes to marry her off to a very rich and reputed household. She knew very well that Aosenla would always be at a disadvantage in a prominent household where the sisters of Bendang who have high standards of living will treat her poorly, but

the onerous task of pushing her daughter into such a household became her 'responsibility' because it was her husband's 'wish', (Ao 9).

The strong patriarchal system in the Naga family can be seen in the way Aosenla's grandmother advises her when she refuses to marry, that a woman needs a man all her life no matter her education or status. She remarks, that a man may be blind or lame or ugly, but he is "superior" because he is a man and women are helpless (Ao 18).

Aosenla's grandmother though a woman herself, fails to understand the predicaments of a male domination where women's voices and wishes are ignored or suppressed. She may rightly be considered as a 'patriarchal woman' because of the ideals she holds and believes. Lois Tyson in her book *Critical Theory Today* calls herself a 'patriarchal woman' as she was programmed to believe in the system of patriarchy, 'and not to see the ways in which women are oppressed by traditional gender roles', (Tyson 82).

Most of the times, women themselves have been instrumental in the practice of oppression of the female community as they staunchly are of the traditional view that women need no freedom to choose what kind of life they want and that men should be given priority in everything. This is also seen portrayed through the persona of the grandmother of Dielieno, the protagonist in Easterine Kire's *Terrible Matriarchy*. Grandmother Vibano would give the best portions of the meat to Dielieno's brothers while never showing any favor towards the little girl. The latter who is staying with her grandmother would be made to wake up early in

the morning, take bath with cold water in the freezing morning, fetch water, feed the chickens and do many other household chores as part of training her to be a dutiful wife in the future. Vibano was also reluctant to send Dielieno to school when her parents suggested as she was of the view that schools only ruin girls and make them forget their position in the family.

Aosenla, too, is cowered down by her oppressive husband and his family. She was used as a kind of bait by her husband to fetch for himself goodwill from other prominent persons. This realization came to her when she once refused to dance with a Brigade Major at a party which resulted in Bendang lashing out at her upon their return from the party, for to him the sole purpose of the wife was to “enhance his image” in society, (Ao 33).

This unexpected behavior of Bendang does not amount to as much as the one in which he accuses Aosenla of having extra marital affair with Toshi, who is a friend of Sentinungsang, the youngest brother of her husband. Aosenla takes immense delight in books and music and so when her youngest brother-in-law comes home during the holidays from Allahabad, he would visit her house along with his friends and chat about books and music and that is when Toshi, short for Merentoshi, introduces new genre of books to Aosenla. Though Bendang often accuses her of flirting with young men, things came to a head when Aosenla agrees to help her cousin, Imlirenla, in teaching the children at the kindergarten school. Being a good singer, Imlirenla enlisted the help of Toshi to help them with the timing and harmonization of the song as neither she nor Aosenla were good in singing. Gossips reached Bendang through a distant cousin of his mother that Aosenla was seen with Toshi all the time laughing and joking with him. Hence, the former along with his mother, uncle and sisters awaited Aosenla to return home and hurl harsh accusations as soon she steps in. Aosenla, though terribly shaken by the unexpected events before her, mustered courage and challenged that the matter shall only be dealt with the presence of their clan members to determine the truth and that they will also have to deal with the family of Toshi as well since he is also involved. This

bold stance of Aosenla stunned her husband and his family, leaving them in utter silence and astonishment as she leaves the room. After this incident, the whole family no longer treated Aosenla like before. Although they still despise her, they are reluctant to openly berate her and discredit her. This was the first step Aosenla took in defiance against the oppressive patriarchal family. That night Aosenla felt that she had finally “taken an important step towards herself” and in demanding due respect as an equal among them, (Ao 41).

She began to groom herself more by wearing new clothes, putting on light makeup and lipstick which depict her opposition to a dominating family which expects her to be docile and submissive. Her dedication to educate herself and listening to music further boosted her self-esteem. She was beginning to gain a new identity of her own and is now using her new public persona as a ‘weapon of self- defense’, (Ao 42). This change in Aosenla’s personality ultimately have an effect on Bendang who is now more devoted to his wife, restricting himself from gambling and drinking and reducing his business trips. Aosenla, with the delusion that she has now transformed her husband forgives him for his wayward ways in the past and slips back into being a dutiful wife and mother after getting pregnant. Much to her astonishment, Bendang too returns to his old ways of drinking, gambling and going on long business trips again having achieved his wife submission to him. Realizing that she is in need of her husband which prompted her to go the extent of transforming her own self to win her husband’s love, Aosenla became more resentful towards her own body:

she wanted to obliterate her ‘self’ and become something without a form. She also wished that her brain and mind would stop functioning. But a small voice within her mounted a relentless campaign, urging her to fight the futile fuming and pick up pieces of her life... (Ao 49).

Aosenla developed some complications during her pregnancy which led to the death of her third child. Her husband and mother-in-law were more disappointed than her since Aosenla already gave birth to two daughters and the unfortunate dead child was a son. She remembers the long faces when she gave birth to her daughters and so she herself was also secretly wishing for a son so as to please her husband and his family.

This preference for a male child is seen in almost all patriarchal families especially among the Nagas in particular. The Nagas' traditional belief is that a man is strong and is capable of protecting his family and clan while a woman is considered weak and only fit for doing menial work. A man is also the sole inheritor of his parents' land and assets which is why the male relatives inherit a father's property after his death if he has no sons though he may have daughters. Therefore, Bendang and his family, too, might have preferred a son over a daughter which only leads to a more hopeless future for them as the doctors informed that the uterus of Aosenla had to be removed in order to save her life which meant that she can never give birth again.

However, the death of the baby boy only made Aosenla stronger. Her initial sense of defeat and dread to return home from the hospital was overcome by a deep feeling of calmness and serenity. Although she mourns for her baby, Aosenla now resolves to give all her attention to her daughters who are alive. Her self-discharge from the hospital and returning home without seeking any help from her husband and family determines her new decision to lead a different life away from the looming great family. The doctor, Kilang, becomes confused of her strange indifferent behavior and warns Bendang that Aosenla who seem so composed may have an outburst and slip into depression anytime. But that never happens as Aosenla have long learnt to accept her fate and put up a brave face. She no longer cares for her husband's needs, leaving the servants to take care of his demands while being very meticulous in every detail regarding her daughters' welfare. She would engage herself in household chores and

refusing to slow down when her husband and maid protested. Even her doctor was amazed, witnessing the relaxed demeanor of Aosenla and the ways in which she carries herself overcoming her grief.

Aosenla becomes all the more defensive and stronger against all odds after having a heart-to-heart conversation with her daughter, Chubala. One particular morning, Chubala, the elder daughter complained of upset stomach and so pleaded not to go to school. After her sister left, Chubala when alone with her mother in the room confronts her asking,

‘Where did you leave the baby? Why did you come home alone? Is it because it was another girl? Or is it because grandma did not want another girl?’ (Ao 69).

These questions astonish Aosenla who began to realize how sensitive her innocent daughter has become to the inner turmoil in her mother and how these unspoken queries must have been bothering her since her return from the hospital. They both broke down in tears and Aosenla went on to explain to her daughter about the circumstances which led to her baby brother’s death and how one should accept his fate when it is unfavorable and be happy, which finally answered the little girl’s lurking doubts. Chubala hugs her mother and tells her how much she loves and admires her and wishes that her father also understands her mother like she does, after which she runs off to the bathroom leaving her mother to mull over what has just happened between them. The words of Chubala gave fresh hopes to her mother who decides to lead her life on her own terms:

Instead of being apologetic and timid, she assumed a ‘couldn’t-care-less’ attitude, which surprised even her. It was almost like saying, ‘It is my life and I am going to lead it in the way I want to.’ (Ao 71).

The shy and timid woman now began to refuse to be submissive and subjugated. Aosenla who was earlier a mere shadow of her husband, is now beginning to create an identity of her own by venturing out of her home and participating in the social activities. She became the President of a Mothers' Union and also became a board member of her daughter's school. She no longer seeks her husband's approval to take part in the society. Her deeds earned her respect and admiration outside her home, while her family realizing her conviction had no option but to remain silent watching her developing into a stronger woman each day. Aosenla defied the patriarchal notion of a domestic wife and mother by taking control of her own life after her third pregnancy. When Bendang presented her a beautiful gold chain through the maid, she simply wrapped the gift again after having a look and then put it away in her old jewelry box. She neither thanked him nor showed any act of gratitude which confused him:

The quality in Aosenla that Bendang was unable to fathom so far was her innate reticence, which abhorred all forms of confrontation, a quality that was often mistaken for timidity. But gradually he was beginning to recognize this aspect of her character as some form of resistance and was therefore wary of her when she withdrew into these periodic spells of isolating herself not only from him but from the girls as well. (Ao 83).

Though having established herself as an independent woman outside her family, Aosenla still faces times when she would feel dizzy, losing all sense of the happenings around her. During such times, she would retreat into her bedroom to lie down in order to compose herself. It was during one of these times when Aosenla realizes that these delusional periods started after her husband indirectly refused by saying 'later discussion' when she wanted to help out in Dr. Kilang's Home for the destitute. The inability to assert herself caused her such torments, yet even after the realization; Aosenla was not ready to face her husband again for the same issues. This depicts the powerful impact of patriarchy upon the

minds of women who have grown up living under the command of men that they fail to find the courage to resist the deep- rooted structure.

While being unable to fight for her own wants, Aosenla decides to build a future for her girls away from the influence of her husband's family. She resolves to create a world for herself and her daughter.

‘With or without’ was a revolutionary phrase even to her own self; could she, the timid Aosenla, translate this resolve into action? Life had taken a different turn for her and she knew she was no longer that person who had preferred to remain in the shadow of the man the world knew as her husband. (Ao 91).

As opposed to the patriarchal tradition of the wife waiting for her husband to have food, Aosenla no longer wait for Bendang and would also react angrily whenever he gets late dressing up for church or parties. Matters concerning her husband from the smallest to the biggest would be left in the hands of her maid, while Aosenla herself supervised everything regarding her daughters. The diversion of her attention from her husband to her daughters was Aosenla's way of revolting against patriarchy.

Noting the change in attitude in Aosenla, Bendang tries to reconcile with her again by planning a vacation trip for them alone to Darjeeling. However, he meets with an accident on his last trip out of town which leaves him with a broken leg, a dislocated hip, a bruised face and other severe concussion. During one of his talks with Aosenla, when the doctor, Kilang, asks her if there was any problem in her marriage or if she had a quarrel with Bendang before the accident, he himself was struck with amazement at her stern calmness that she cares for her husband's welfare and shall do everything for his recovery although their marriage have not been perfect. She disarmed him with her usual civility and demure smile....Kilang was struck by the calmness and he even thought that it was “rehearsed”, (Ao 98).

Aosenla displays her strong ability in decision making when her maid reveals to her a secret that Bendang had an affair with a young girl from the village which led to her giving birth of a baby whom Bendang's family refuses to acknowledge as his. The unfortunate girl who is the cousin of the maid left home to marry a man in the plains never to return while the ill-fated baby grew up to be infamous for her affairs with boys and also becomes pregnant but once again history repeats itself when the boy refuses to own the baby. She dies not long after leaving full responsibility of the baby in the hands of the grandparents. So, the maid tells Aosenla that the grandfather is coming to hand over the baby to Bendang for her maintenance. Aosenla was shocked upon hearing this and realizes that her marriage could be in danger and her daughters' future might be at stake. She decides to take control of the situation herself without letting anyone know, even Bendang.

This bold step taken by Aosenla is much against the conventional patriarchal norm where a man takes all the important decisions, be it in the family or in external affairs of the society. In the book *Gender Narratives; Reinterpreting Language, Culture and Tradition in Nagaland*, the paper entitled 'Women and Decision Making in Naga Society' talks about the Naga society where,

'there is still a critical area where women are underrepresented and suppressed that is decision- making...' (93).

A woman has no say in the decision- making process but Aosenla taking full responsibility for the future of a baby without consulting her husband, portrays her as an unconventional figure against patriarchal tradition. She takes into confidence the help of her doctor Kilang, and keeps the baby in his orphanage until a final decision is taken for the future of the baby.

A man is the head of the family in the Naga patriarchal society. He is the one who takes control of everything that happens in his household while a woman is confined only to the

domestic chores. However, here Aosenla is seen assuming the role that her husband is supposed to play:

The entire burden of the family had fallen upon her since Bendang's accident and now coping with the new knowledge had become an additional responsibility. It was apparent that Aosenla was stepping into yet another level of consciousness, a consciousness of practical reality. (Ao 122).

Aosenla then proved her shrewdness by convincing her husband to go for further treatment outside the state as suggested by Doctor Kilang who was surprised that she was able to make a hard man like Bendang agree to their plans. She also takes the initiative to name the unclaimed child as Tiajungla, which is normally the role of the father. Aosenla's two daughters, Chubala and Narola, were both named by their grandfather, that is Bendang's father. Unlike Bendang's mother who was totally shattered and became emotionally and mentally unstable after her husband's death, Aosenla only became stronger after her husband became physically disabled. The old woman has become cranky and would complain endlessly and only Aosenla could calm her down. In her defiance against patriarchy, Aosenla gradually was becoming into a matriarch who has taken all the affairs of the household including the grand old house of her in-laws into her own hands:

Aosenla, the timid girl and submissive wife was gradually becoming Aosenla, the bold and decisive woman. It was as though she had been put through a trial by fire and emerged a wiser woman... (Ao 142).

Towards the end of the novel, Aosenla too wonders how she was able to manipulate the people around her and turn things in her own favor. She questions herself who she really is:

...the reluctant bride and the timid wife, or the disappointing daughter-in-law who could not produce a male heir for the big house? Or is she the wife who once craves for her husband's approval and love but no longer cared if he loved her or not? She wonders if she is now the amalgamated self of all these other selves and often thinks that she would like to be free of these imposed selves, which have grown unawares over the years. (Ao 195).

Although Aosenla understood that she was a mere possession in the hands of her husband, she is no longer concerned about it. In reality, she has upturned the whole family set-up by way of manipulating situations. She has done whatever she could when crisis was looming over her home. With Tiajungla taken away by a lawyer, who is presumably sent by her grandmother, Chubala her eldest daughter getting married, finally Aosenla felt happy and relieved.

"She is content", (Ao 203).

2.3 Wading through Patriarchal waters in *Laburnum for My Head*.

Laburnum for My Head which won Tamsula Ao the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2013 is a collection of eight short stories set in the rich and troubled region of Nagaland. Ao being a feminist has incorporated a lot of feminist elements within the narration while also upholding the basic essence of almost Naga fiction, that is, a historical viewpoint.

The title story *Laburnum for My Head* is about the obsession of a widow who refuses to conform to be buried in the traditional way and instead invents for herself a new and unusual way to be laid to rest when the time comes. The story begins with the description of the laburnum bush blooming in its full beauty in the gravesite during the month of May. While many tried to erect headstones by removing the bush, it refuses to die and with every season, it displays itself in variant colors, flowers in its full bloom during May, the stalks

turning into brown pods by summer-end, scraggly and shorn during winter, springtime bringing back the pale green shoots and then in May, the blossoms would be outshining the other specimens.

It was Lentina, the protagonist, who had a great liking for the laburnum bush that they were planted in that particular place. It all started with her ardent desire to grow these yellow flowers in her garden. Lentina associates herself with the laburnum which she assumed was feminine, unlike the gulmohars with their orange and dark pink blossoms which may have perhaps intimidated her. She considered the laburnum flowers hanging downwards as a gesture of humility which makes it even more admirable to her. So she decides to have the plant of her own liking and plants the saplings bought from a nursery at the edge of her boundary wall.

However, in the first year, the new gardener pulled them out while doing away with the weeds so Lentina bought and planted some saplings again. But this time too, some stray cows on being chased by the neighbors' dogs had entered her gate which was open and munched on some plants including her laburnum saplings. All these incidents of killing her precious flowers may be indication of the patriarchal constraints which shatter the dreams of many women. In a Naga family, the male child is given preference in education, job opportunities and is allowed to pursue their goals, while the girl child despite having many dreams are restricted to go for higher education or to venture out of their homes and work independently like men. Women are oppressed whenever they attempt to make their own choices for their own lives. This leaves many a woman uneducated and illiterate about their own rights and choices.

A determined woman she is, Lentina was not one to be discouraged by any forces which are obstructing her little dream. She refuses to give up and plants more saplings in the third year

which miraculously survived and thrived, but not for long, as they all die after a worker from the health department sprayed the deadly DDT which affected the young plants when the heavy rainfall flooded the garden. The intense desire of Lentina to have that particular flower planted in her garden gathered much concern from her family, that she was developing an unhealthy fascination for laburnum, therefore she never expresses her wish again to anyone after that.

Lentina's husband then developed a strange disease and passed away one night before any proper diagnosis was taken. After the elaborate funeral program, Lentina makes an unusual proposal which took everyone by surprise:

Usually it is men who take part in the last rites at the gravesite and stay on to supervise the erection of the temporary fence around the fresh grave. But when Lentina saw the group, including her sons and her own brothers, stepping out of the house behind the hearse, some impulse urged her to join them. (Ao 4).

The unexpected urge within her to join the man may be an indication of free spirited Lentina to be on par with the so- called dominant gender. Though everyone was surprised by the unusual demand by the woman, no one raised any objection considering the situation.

At the graveyard, on seeing the headstones on the graves, she decided to replace the headstone with something else on her grave when she dies, that is, a laburnum tree. This quick thought made her heart glad that she began to smile although it was her husband's funeral. This unconventional idea to have a tree planted on her grave instead of a headstone signifies her unconformity with tradition.

With excitement, Lentina takes into confidence her old driver, Mapu, who is commonly called as Babu and goes off to the cemetery. After walking around, she calls her puzzled driver and points to him a certain spot in the corner of the cemetery which will be for her

grave after she dies. Despite protest from Babu that her place has been earmarked beside her husband, Lentina was adamant and so the former had to relent and also had to secretly take the help of his son-in-law who is an officer in the Town Committee office in order to reserve the plot. However, Lentina drops the idea as she has to make an official request which would jeopardize her dream. Her intention to carry out her plan in secret may be because of the opposition she might face should she express her unconventional wish.

In the article 'Self Or Motherhood: Is that the Question?', from the book *Indian Feminisms* which was edited by Jasbir Jain and Avadhesh Kumar Singh, the latter talks about the 'new' woman who,

does respond to her desires but carefully... for Indian women have a different history, different ethos, and forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination. They live in a different social and cultural reality, nay realities, and respond to them in as varied ways they themselves are. (Singh 129).

In the same manner, Lentina thought it wise to have her wish remain in secret rather than it being objected or ridiculed. She then bought a plot of land right next to the south wall of the cemetery which became public knowledge. Anticipating that the Town Committee would raise issue for the ownership since such lands were only to be in the possession of the church or religious organizations, Lentina prepares a draft with the help of her nephew who has just started practicing law in the District Court. Her draft included some terms which states that:

1. The new plot of land could be dedicated as the new cemetery and would be available to all on fulfilling the condition that only flowering trees and not headstones would be erected on the gravesites.
2. Lentina, as the Donor, should be the first to choose a plot for herself.

3. Plots would be designated by Numbers only and records of names against the Plot Numbers would be maintained in the Committee Register.
4. The terms were to be widely publicized and the Town Committee would ensure that they were adhered to strictly. (Ao 12).

These conditions set by Lentina portrays her as a strong woman whose husband's death did not impact her mental state like most women who falls into deep desperation and helplessness but instead she became more decisive and persistent into fulfilling her wishes. She refused to follow the norm set for her, which is, to be buried beside her husband, and chooses a plot for her own burial with her own terms and conditions for the new cemetery which she denoted to the Town Committee. With the help of Babu, her precious laburnum saplings are planted in the new plot again. Lentina then became very ill that she was not expected to survive the cold winter, but she miraculously did and began to resume her old routine in the house again.

The sons too, sensing a new spirit in their mother, began to ask for her advice on business and family matters, something which had never happened during the father's lifetime. (Ao 15).

Her recovery from the illness was a sort of healing for Lentina and her family. Women in the Naga society are not allowed to engage in matters apart from their domestic chores. Their confinement within the four walls of the kitchen which restricted their development as individuals outside their domestic circle is never understood by men. However, Lentina's assertion of her choices in life and her overcoming the deathly illness change the perspectives of her sons towards her.

The laburnum tree which was planted began to bloom and the next May, Babu takes Lentina to witness the beautiful sight of her passionate tree. It was as though waiting for her tree to blossom, Lentina soon dies a peaceful death. And the cemetery, in fulfillment of her conditions, is now filled with variety of trees blooming in their own seasons over the graves;

hibiscus, gardenia, bottle- brush, camellia, oleander, croton bushes, jacaranda trees, a banyan tree and few ashoka trees but the laburnum tree stands beautifully tall amongst all in its season:

And if you observe carefully, you will be amazed to see that in the entire terrain, there is so far, only one laburnum tree bedecked in its seasonal glory, standing tall over all the other plants, flourishing in perfect co- existence, in an environment liberated from all human pretensions to immortality. (Ao 20).

The idea of Lentina to have trees planted over the tombs instead of headstones and to designate plots only by numbers and not names can be seen as a revolt against the age old conventions of the society. Her assertion of her rights in her own plot cowers down the masculinity of her sons and the Town Committee which comprises of men alone. Her clever manipulations have proved to work on the people around her, allowing her to finally fulfill her desire to be buried at a secluded corner of the cemetery with nothing but a laburnum over her grave.

The story *Three Women* in the collection, talks about the lives of three different women who are related and linked by not just blood alone but by different circumstances. The three have lives very different from each other, yet they become bonded by situations that befall on them. The story is narrated through the first person narrative of the women themselves.

The first speaker is the youngest among the three, that is, Martha. That she was an adopted child she never knew for a long time. Although she asks her mother and grandmother with whom she lives, why her classmates call her ‘coolie’, they would shrug off without telling her the truth. It was only when she was in grade IV that some of her friends told her the truth that Medemla is not her real mother. On learning the truth, Martha runs home and confronts her

grandmother who only sat by the fireplace silently without speaking to her. Martha became frightened that she might be sent off to her 'own people'. The particular smell of her grandmother which was warm and soothing when she is near now made her more afraid of being different from them. She does not want to leave her grandmother, mother, friends and the village. After sitting near her grandmother for what seems a long time to her, Maratha feels all the more restless and even after her grandmother leaves, she remains seated and decided that she would refuse to be sent away and never leave her family. She resents her mother and grandmother and questions herself why they had not told her the truth although she does not doubt their love and concern for her.

The second narrator is Martha's mother, Medemla, who begins her story with a rejection of marriage from her fiancé, Imsutemjen, whose father had opposed to their marriage. Although feeling betrayed and depressed over the rejection, Medemla continues to work as a resident nurse which help her to maintain some normalcy. She rejects several marriage proposals after that and so her parents no longer discuss that matter again having realized that she wants to remain single her whole life. Since she was the staff nurse, she has to oversee every delivery and it was on one such occasion that Martha came into her life. Her mother was collapsing due to much loss of blood and in order to save both the baby and mother, she was given inductive drips to deliver her baby since the father refused to do Caesarean section. Although the baby was safely delivered, the mother goes into convulsions and dies before the doctor could be summoned. And that was how Martha became part of the hospital ward after being rejected by her father. Medemla became attached to the baby girl who would cry when she was leaving for home. This connection urged Medemla to adopt the baby although she was not very sure of her own future prospects:

It was as if some unseen hand was forging a bond between my lonely self and this abandoned child and inwardly, I began to dread the day when some childless couple

would adopt and take her away from my life. That is how I began to examine the possibility of adopting her myself. (Ao 68- 69).

Medemla's Superintendent told her that she would have to leave her job if she were to adopt the baby and also would get no letter of reference from the hospital. Although stunned by these terms, Medemla became stronger in her desire to adopt the child. She was ready to face any consequences for the baby. Martha, the baby, was happily accepted by Medemla's parents and soon she went to school after attaining her fifth year. This story of Martha's adoption was narrated to her by Medemla on her return from work when she finds the grandmother and granddaughter sitting strangely silent over the matter. After the touching truth, the three women stood in embrace affirming the power of a mother's love.

The third narrator is Lipoktula, Martha's grandmother. She recounts how Medemla, Martha's mother, was born. Lipoktula and her family were poor so she tries to earn more through weaving while her husband had to work as a laborer after their harvests are over. They were unable to pay their two sons' fees on time which often debars them from appearing exam. The sons eventually run away and join the Assam Rifles after studying only up to Class VI, but send money regularly for their sister, Medemla, who is a bright girl, going to study nursing after passing her matric exam. She writes to her mother that she has fallen in love with the son of Merensashi that is, Imsutemjen, who is studying engineering in the same town. Upon receiving the letter, Lipoktula was shocked that her past is threatening to destroy her daughter's future. The truth is, Merensashi had raped her many years ago when she was alone in the field one day and Medemla is his daughter. Although, she has kept this incident a secret from everyone apart from her mother who advised her that it is best to be silent, the danger has started to loom over her family leaving her in dilemma since it will be incest to have her daughter marry her own half- brother Imsutemjen. She finally took a firm decision

to pursue the boy's father to break off the marriage as she cannot even tell her husband to reject the marriage proposal without citing a proper reason:

The first time I had acted out of fear of the truth which would have ruined two families. But now I was going to build a defense on the truth because of a different kind of fear: the fear that my daughter would be condemned to live in an incestuous marriage. (Ao 75- 76).

So one Sunday after church, she quickly walks up to Merensashi and tells him that Medemla is his child and so he has to break off the engagement. She also threatened to publicly announce about the incident which happened many years ago and she even provided proof saying that Medemla too has a birthmark below her left collar- bone just like him, when he was not convinced. Eventually Lipoktula succeeds in turning things in her favor and Insutemjen writes to Medemla breaking their engagement.

In the next narrations, it is learnt that Martha falls in love with a classmate, Apok, and becomes pregnant before marriage. Therefore their relationship has to be formalized in a hurry.

In the epilogue that follows, Medemla gives birth to a son after a long labor for almost twelve hours. The two older women keep the baby beside his mother on the bed, after holding him in turns. When Apok, the new father, comes in to have a look at his son, he could sense their bond:

But his vision is obstructed by the daunting circle of the women, these three different kinds of mothers, standing as though mesmerized by the miracle of new life. He is reluctant to break the spell and, feeling like an intruder in a sacred ceremony, slips out unobserved. (Ao 80).

This story portrays the power of a woman in times of adversities. Medemla adopts Martha out of immense love for the child although she is not her real child. The formation of a special

bond between Medemla and Martha right since her birth is a kind of destiny for both the women. Although Martha eventually learns the truth about her parentage, it only made the relationship between the mother and daughter stronger. In fact, they reaffirmed their love and promise to never leave each other.

Lipoktula, the grandmother, is also no different when it comes to her love for her daughter Medemla. She attempted to protect her daughter's future to the extent of threatening Merensashi as she was his own daughter who is unwittingly planning to marry her half-brother. The disastrous consequence of an incestual marriage was thwarted by the relentless efforts of Lipoktula. Her past incident with Merensashi was known only by mother, who for the sake of protecting her daughter's prestige, told her to keep it a secret. She said:

‘You know, it is always wise for a woman to keep a part of the self all to herself and sometimes she has to choose between telling the truth which destroys, and living with a lie which may remain a secret forever...’ (Ao 75).

All the three women are thus bonded in a very special way which Apok also realizes in the end when he walks out of the room instead of intruding the space the women have shared when Martha's baby was born. There is a fierce determination in all the three women which have perhaps made them grow closer. Martha despite knowing that Medemla and Lipoktula are not her real family, she is determined to stay with them no matter what. When the Superintendent informs Medemla that she would lose her job if she adopts Martha, she was not frightened but instead she became all the more challenged to go through the ordeal all because of her love for the baby. The difficult journey from the hospital to her village did not deter her from loving the baby. Even Lipoktula was firm in her decision to not let her daughter's marriage happen as it will ruin her future. Her quick action for obstructing the marriage proved to have an effect on Merensashi who calls off the engagement for fear of defamation and disaster.

Thus, it can be seen from the lives of these three women that no matter what circumstances are around them, they all have a way to strive forward in fulfilling their determination.

The story *A Simple Question* is about the life of a wise woman, Imdongla, whose husband is a gaonburah. The 'gaonburahs' are elderly men appointed from the major clans during the British rule to help maintain order in the village. They are considered as agents of the government. These gaonburahs are often the victims in times of troubles as the governments hold them responsible if any villager joins the underground, while the rebels force them to identify young men who have enrolled in the army with threats to burn down the village granaries. Moreover, the underground demands grew with more material support in the form of money, grain and livestock:

Though the gaonburahs were supposed to inform the government about the activities of the rebels, they were under tremendous pressure from the underground forces because every move they made was monitored from close quarters. (Ao 82).

So the gaonburahs are caught between the Indian army and the Naga rebels and Imdongla's husband Tekaba being one himself was always in danger. The so-called taxes of the rebels increased from Re 1 to much more exorbitant demands and any reluctance on the part of the villagers was punished with severe beatings of not only the person alone but the gaonburahs and elders as well. However, Tekaba was saved from the beatings through Imdongla's presence of mind. Once when the collectors were berating a villager for bringing lesser rice, Imdongla quickly wittedly grabs a basket of rice and brings it to Toshi, the helpless villager saying that she owes him as he had lend it to her during her son's age-set feast. The collectors thereby took off with the rice leaving Toshi and her husband Tekaba unharmed. Thus, Imdongla's intervention at the right moment saved both the man and her husband from the beatings of the underground.

However, the situation in the village became more tensed as more army camps are now being set up with regular patrols running around the village. The villages in which the camps were made became prime targets of the underground and they would be charged double the taxes. All able-bodied men would be forced to work for the army without food and wages; the villages which resisted the setting of army camps would be set on fire while the people are cordoned off into grouping zones constantly being monitored. Moreover, the villagers had to meet the demands of the collectors as well- rice, livestock and money or sometimes all the three at the same time.

One day when Imdongla returns home from the field, she was informed that some soldiers had taken away all the elders including her husband to the army camp charging them of helping the underground with supplies. With her husband's red blanket which is worn by a gaonburah, and his red and black jacket, Imdongla resolutely walks to the army camp to rescue her husband. After some reluctance, the sentry allows her through the gate thinking that she might have some information to deliver. Upon entering and seeing no one, Imdongla throws her husband's clothes to him who was being kept separately away from the other elders. The captain noticing her, tries to open Tekaba's cell but she jumps in between saying that she would not leave without her husband which was conveyed to the captain by the interpreter. Left with no option but to shoot her, the captain moves forward but Imdongla stood and looked as if she was taking off her waist cloth which he knew was "the ultimate insult a Naga woman could hurl at a man signifying his emasculation" and so he turned round and went out of the room, (Ao 86).

Imdongla then sat down, lit her pipe with the match box from the captain's table and keeps it in the folds of her supeti which is a form of skirt worn by Naga women. She understood that her presence in front of her husband's cell would protect him from any harm by the army. She was determined to stay near her husband's cell unless he is released, while the captain

ponders over Imdongla's words translated by the interpreter. She had compared the arrested elders to the soldiers' fathers and questions how would they feel if their own fathers have acted in fear for both the Indian army and the underground. He realizes the helplessness of the villagers when Imdongla repeatedly asks him a question, 'What do you want from us?' and for the first time in his tenure in these hills, this apparently simple village woman had 'made him see the impossible situations faced by the villagers', (Ao 87).

The captain orders the release of Tekaba immediately, while the others are to be released only the next day as a ploy to save the face of the army. Tekaba leaves along with his wife and as the captain searches for his matchbox to smoke, he remembers the old woman Imdongla smoking her pipe and ultimately concludes that she had stolen the matchbox. Although the theft of the matchbox was petty and insignificant, the captain is once again reminded of how a simple illiterate woman had challenged his military supremacy and outwitted him to have her own way.

Imdongla being a fearless woman was able to rescue her husband not only from the clutches of the Indian army but was also able to preserve his honor by bringing him back the red shawl and the jacket worn by a gaonburah which the soldiers have removed from him citing the reason that he does not deserve to wear them. While Naga women do not interfere in talks between men, Imdongla was a non-conformist to the tradition and would often engage herself when her husband is discussing important matters with other leaders. On one occasion before her husband's arrest, when the collectors from the underground were demanding double taxes twice in a year, the elders had gathered at Tekaba's place to discuss the matter. Imdongla being inquisitive forcefully enters into the discussion and advises them to not comply with every demand the underground makes. At this, her husband told her to be silent as she does not know anything but Imdongla retorts back reminding him of the incident when she saved him and Toshi. She even challenged the others to go to the underground leaders to negotiate

their demands and ask them to accept even pigs and chicken sometimes instead of rice as the villagers cannot survive without rice.

Imdongla thus proves herself to be an unconventional woman whose wisdom and timely actions was able to save not only her husband but her whole village as well. It was through her, the captain of the Indian army came to understand the plight of the innocent villagers who are caught in the hostilities between the underground rebels and the army. Although the story hints at no future references of peace in the village, the releasing of Imdongla's husband, Tekaba, and the other village elders towards the end of the story, provides the understanding that the captain has learnt his lesson and will no longer treat the villagers like before.

2.4 Elements of Revolt in Tamsula Ao's Poetry.

Tamsula Ao has published six books of poetry, all of which have the word "Songs" in their titles, perhaps due to the lack of any other word for poetry in most North Eastern languages, because 'poems are songs in oral cultures, and Tamsula Ao sees herself as Naga woman poet in search of tradition.'(xvii).

Her books of poetry include *Songs That Tell* (1988), *Songs That Try To Say* (1992), *Songs Of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs From Here and There* (2003), *Songs From The Other Life* (2007) and *Songs Along The Way Home* (2017). Ao through her poems strive to bring about a social change in her land by creating awareness about pertinent issues such as the insurgency, its impact of violence, endangering of indigenous culture, social issues, and many others. Amongst the social issues explored, one prominent theme is the concept of domesticity of women in the Naga society. Some of her poems showcase how women have been confined and restricted to the domestic household that they belong.

In the poem *Woman* from the book *Songs That Tell*, Ao has expressed her discontentment with the traditional woman who has to attend to the needs of others ignoring her own. Since time immemorial, customs have enforced such an assignment to a woman despite her cries of protests.

Man beguiled her / Into submission / Thus establishing / Timeless dominion / While he forayed and strayed / (Lines 11- 15).

These few lines have summarily pictured the life of a Naga woman who has to live in submission and obligation to the dictates of men whether at home or outside. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the word 'forayed' here in the poem means 'a sudden or irregular invasion or attack for war or spoils'. While the word 'strayed' means 'to roam about without fixed direction or purpose'. Through the usage of these two particular words, Ao may have attempted to describe the intrusion into a woman's life and privacy physically, mentally, emotionally or sexually without any warning by a man. He does not have a purpose specifically on which areas of her life he controls, but strays and wanders anywhere as he deems fit. The poet here brings in the lives of strong women like Boadicea, Godiva, Clytemnestra, Cleopatra, Medea and Borgia who have deviated from the ideals laid by men and customs.

Boadicea, the queen of the Iceni tribe of Britain and also considered as a British 'folk hero' led an uprising against the Roman Empire which has annexed their kingdom after the king's death.

Lady Godiva who was a late Anglo- Saxon noblewoman and wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, rode the streets of Coventry, naked covered only in her long hair, to gain remission of the oppressive taxation which her husband has imposed on his tenants.

The third woman named in the poem is Clytemnestra, a Spartan princess who murders her second husband Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, presumably because he killed her first husband and infant child.

Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt had greatly influenced the Roman politics during her times and was a representative of the romantic 'femme fatale' who is an attractive and seductive woman luring men to their destruction.

Medea plays the role of helper- maiden who helps Jason and marries him but he abandons her after ten years, for which the former murders Creusa, the second wife of Jason. She also kills her own sons by Jason and marries King Aegeus later.

Borgia, here in the poem maybe a reference to Lucrezia Borgia, a Spanish- Italian noblewoman and the Governor of Spoleto, which is a position, held usually by cardinals. She is also portrayed in many artworks, novels and films as a femme fatale.

Temsula Ao through the illustration of rebellion women like the above has winded up the poem saying that although moulded by religion and principles, the woman sometimes rebels to break free of all these bondages which binds her.

The notion of rebellion is also seen in another poem *The Creator* from the book *Songs Of Many Moods*. She describes how a woman after being born, has to fight to live in a man's world. With guile and smiles, the poet was taught to please and lure men. The word 'guile' in Collins Dictionary means 'the quality of being good at deceiving people in a clever way', which exhibits negative connotations. A woman from her childhood is mentored to be feminine, apologetic and attractive to men so she may have to use guile to sustain herself in a male- dominated community. However, all these mockeries tire and become a burden to her as seen in the third stanza. The poet no longer wants to serve men by faking around with her personality but instead now struggles to establish and preserve her true self within from

disappearing. She refuses to be tied down to the domestic circle without a name but only that of her husband's.

Struggling to preserve / The self from dissolving / Into a domestic web / And from becoming / The nameless half / Of the entire man / (Lines 21- 26).

The final stanza is her reaffirmation to create her real self and a 'brave new world', with no restraints from any other influences.

The poem *The Edge* from the sixth book *Songs Along The Way Home* is another rebellion poem where the narrator refuses to be repressed by her husband. She pictures the daily life of a wife and mother through the lines- at the end of an ordinary / domestic day / (Lines 3- 4). She asserts from the beginning of the poem itself that there are many women are sitting on the edge unable to break free from their domestic life. Children would come home with injuries and tales of them defeating their foes in brawls while the mother serves them hot meals and comforting hugs. The husband also returns home with 'bleary eyes' and 'unsteady gait' warning of 'another stormy end to the day' (Line 15). Here, the words 'bleary eyes' and 'unsteady gait', maybe indicative of being in an inebriated state. He demands immediate attention from his wife who is 'in perpetual terror of this rogue protector / in all his malevolent maleness' / (Lines 19- 20). From this description, it can be seen that the woman is terrified of her drunken husband and his antics. However, she resolves to ignore not to be subdued by him again that night.

But it'll be different tonight. / ... ignoring the yells and threats / firm in her resolve / never to submit again / (Lines 21- 25).

She questions why the glowing white sheets should be defiled by the 'sordid drama of the night / when she can simple leaps over the edge? / (Lines 29- 30). Although the narrator makes use of the 'white sheets' in stating her reason, she may also be referring to her own

body which she refuses to submit to her husband. She reasons why she should always bear her husband's tantrums when she has the possibility to free herself from it.

Thus, Temsula Ao has strong women characters that resist patriarchy in their own way, refusing to be subdued by it and instead they attempt to rise above all these gender handicaps to assert themselves as individuals both in their own homes and in the society. Veio Pou in his book *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English* writes: The voice of women in the Naga society is further reduced to anonymity because they are left out in the decision making bodies of the society... These men oriented establishments...gatherings are always opinions of men. (Pou 168).

However, Aosenla, the protagonist in *Aosenla's Story* did not seek the opinion or permission of a man in her activities outside her home. She engages herself in social organizations and indulges herself in her passion, which is music and books, with no regard whether her husband approves or not. She also eventually becomes a matriarch by taking control of everything not only in her house but of her in-laws as well.

In *Laburnum for My Head*, Lentina was firm in her decision to have a laburnum tree of her own and also devises plans to have a grave apart from her husband's, with her passion tree planted over it. In her dealing with land holdings and transfer of her newly-bought land to the Town Committee, she defies patriarchal tradition where matters concerning the land is handled only by men in the Naga society. She succeeds in implementing her wish at the end despite the obstacles, that is, to be buried in a corner with a laburnum tree over her grave instead of a headstone.

The story *Three Women* strongly portrays the strong love that women have that they are willing to go to any extent to protect each other. Even after learning the truth that Medemla and Lipoktula are not her real family, Martha decides to stay on with them for the rest of her life. Medemla, in spite of losing her job with no letter of reference from the hospital for her

service, is a tough woman determined to adopt Martha when she was abandoned by her father and provide for her a home. Lipoktula in order to save her daughter, Medemla, from an incestuous marriage which will ruin her future, she keeps her past a secret and forces Merensashi into complying with her demand to cut off the engagement of his son with Medemla. The three women are seen to be each other's stronghold and with the birth of Martha's son, their lives are once again renewed and rekindled.

In the story *A Simple Question*, Imdongla is her husband's savior at all times when there were hostilities between the underground rebels and the Indian army. Although illiterate, she manages to save Tekaba whenever he is at his wits end in the face of danger at the hands of the rebels and the army. This is in complete deviation from the traditional belief that a man is strong and thereby capable of protecting women who are weak and emotional. Her novels have highlighted the strength of a woman even without a man. The tough circumstances in life are what make women defy patriarchal norms to protect her family and survive the test of times.

Through the three poems, *Woman*, *The Creator* and *The Edge*, Tamsula Ao have showcased the predicaments of women in the domestic world where she is subdued and violated against her will. Yet despite all these subjugations, women's revolts have been apparent towards the end of each of the poems ushering in a ray of hope for women that they can rise above all these patriarchal constraints and repressions.

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Chapter Three

Resignation versus Retaliation in Easterine Kire's Fiction and the Objectification of Women in Poetry

3.1 Introduction

Easterine Kire is a Naga poet and novelist who currently reside in Norway. She was born in March, 1959 in Nagaland and studied in Kohima. Kire did her undergraduate study from Shillong, journalism in Delhi and PhD in English literature from University of Pune. She is considered as one of the prominent voices from Northeast India.

Her first collection of poetry titled *Kelhoukevira* was published in the year 1982 which is also the first Naga poetry book in the English language. Her novel *A Naga Village Remembered* was also the first Naga novel in English which got published in 2003. Her notable fictional works included *A Terrible Matriarchy*, *Mari*, *Bitter Wormwood*, *When the River Sleeps*, *Don't Run*, *My Love* and many others. In 2011, Kire was awarded the Governor's Medal for excellence in Naga literature. Her works have been translated into German, Catalan, Croatian, Uzbek, Norwegian and Nepali. She has also about two hundred oral poems from her native language.

Most of Kire's novels are about the Second World War which affected even the Naga inhabited areas at that time. *A Naga Village Remembered* is about a battle between the British forces and one Naga hamlet. *A Terrible Matriarchy* while focusing prominently on an Angami household has set its background of a time when Nagaland is facing internal strife as a state in India. *Bitter Wormwood* is primarily about the Naga freedom struggle against the greater Union of India. *Mari* is about a young woman who loses her fiancé in the war during the Japanese invasion in 1944. Throughout her novels, Kire has tried to bring forth the lives

of the common people especially of the Angami Nagas through a reference to their culture, inclusion of their expressions in situations, elements of the taboos, and ethos and so on.

Although Easterine Kire has out rightly denied of being a feminist, her novels in which women have significant roles in the plot of the stories may have made her ‘an unconscious feminist’. While the intention in her novels may not have been to portray the themes of feminism, yet her strong female characters urges for a study of the works through a feminist perspective. Kire while belonging to the Angami tribe of Nagaland has evidently depicted the lives of the Naga women and their position in the family and society through the characters in her novels.

‘Thenumia’ (women) in Angami society are considered inferior to men in all respects. They are confined to the four walls of their house and denied equal access to education, occupations and other privileges. Even in marriages, men are lauded for having extra marital affairs while ironically giving punishments to women for the same. They are expected to silently bear all pains and tortures inflicted on them. However, with time, the situation of women has also changed considerably. They can now move around freely outside their homes and be socially active. In the modern society, the scenario has undergone a sea change with women no longer being extremely discriminated against as in the past. They are now able to access education and further pursue higher education and other job opportunities.

While many have now being able to take stand for themselves at home and outside, there are still some who are bound by the harsh chains of domesticity. These kinds of women offer no resistance and resign to fate when they are physically tortured, harassed and other forms of violence are meted out against them. Kire’s novels *A Respectable Woman* and *When the River Sleeps* present two kinds of women who react differently when faced with such oppressional situations.

3.2 Resignation and Resilience in *A Respectable Woman*.

The novel *A Respectable Woman* (2019) is set in post Second World War scenario in Kohima. The narrator begins the story with narration about her mother Khonuo during whose times the Japanese invaded the Naga inhabited areas. Khonuo who was a school teacher herself relates to her children about the war which changed their lives forever. With Kohima being the center of bombings and shootings, the civilians were evacuated to other villages such as Chieswema, Meriema, Riisoma and Jotsoma. On their return to their homes after the war, the residents of Kohima had to rebuild everything from the ruins with debris of their houses everywhere. Though the story was revolving mainly around the theme of war and post war scenario, a sharp contrast between the characters of two types of women can be seen throughout the novel.

The first category women in the novel are the ones who are mentally weak to withstand the unfavorable circumstances they face in their lives and hence resign to their fate.

Khonuo, the mother of the protagonist in the novel belongs to the first category of the women being discussed here. She withdraws into her shell and became old from weariness after her husband's death. Taking a year break from her job as a teacher, she engaged herself in deep remorse neglecting her duties and responsibilities towards her children who needed her the most. She became unbothered by all the happenings around her being lost in an imaginary world with her dead husband.

Atsa Bonuo, as the protagonist Kevinuo calls her is the maternal grandmother of the latter. She has two daughters and two sons but her second son dies at the age of seven out of which she never recovers. She talks as though Razou her dead son was still alive and when people ask her what her younger son was doing, she would remain silent. She would observe the protagonist and her brother playing and comments that they look just like Razou. The only

time when Atsa Bonuo set aside her sorrow was when her elder daughter Zeii, Khonuo's elder sister was getting married. She again returned to her mourning after the wedding. The final blow to her already heartbroken life came when Amo her other son too dies of an old war wound. She dies shortly in longing to be reunited with her sons.

The third woman character is Beinuo, the best friend of Kevinuo since childhood. As a young girl, she was strong and determined not to be a subject to her husband in the future. Once when they were discussing about drunken men beating up their wives, Kevinuo asks Beinuo what she would do if her husband beats her to which she remarked without hesitation, 'I would beat him right back!'... 'He has no right to beat me. I won't let him'. (Kire 106).

However, things turn out to be different as she matures and is married to a boy Meselhou who has been pursuing her since college. He was a little reserved yet his persistence to win the heart of Beinuo earned her admiration and so she finally gives in to his marriage proposal. After her marriage, she gradually changes from a bright vibrant woman to a desperate and depressed one. It was only when she gave birth to her first child that Kevinuo came to learn about the issues in her best friend's marriage.

Meselhou is disappointed that the new born is a girl and hence does not come to visit his wife and the child at the hospital. Although Kevinuo insisted to teach him a lesson, Beinuo refuses her by saying it was a matter between them only. By way of rejecting help, Beinuo has decided to handle things on her own which eventually did not turn out to be fruitful. Her husband does not like her going out with their child Uvi, short for Meluovinu while her mother-in-law does not approve of Beinuo leaving the child at home and going out alone. When her second child who was boy tragically dies of meningitis, her husband blames her and eventually increases his beatings which were a routine affair after their marriage. It was only when Beinuo was on her death bed in the hospital, she reveals everything to Kevinuo

who is more than shocked to learn the truth behind Beinuo's instant withdrawal from their friendship. He had pushed her down the steps which fractured her skull and incurred many internal bleedings. The reason for Beinuo bearing all these tortures was her fear for the society,

'I couldn't. I was so afraid that others would condemn me. I didn't want to be a failure as a wife; ... I have lived in fear all my married life...' (Kire 140).

She dies after pleading Kevinuo to take her daughter Uvi away from her husband.

Clarrisa Pinkola Estes in her book *Women Who Run with the Wolves; Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*, compares women to wolves. She reveals how the Wild Woman who is full of creativity, great endurance and strength lives in every woman. It is a force without which a woman cannot live without. She also describes about the naive women who get married only to end up living torturous lives:

They marry while they are yet naive about predators, and they choose someone who is destructive to their lives. They are determined to "cure" that person with love...

Eventually a woman thus captured will see her hopes for a decent life for herself and her children diminish more and more. It is to be hoped that she will finally open the door to the room where all the destruction of her life lies. (Estes 46).

Meselhou, the only boy in his family is bent upon marrying Beinuo, who is way below his status so that she would not have the courage to oppose however manner he treats her. And the latter who has no brothers and a step mother who does not care for her became the right victim for his schemes. Therefore he sends her letters persuading her to go out with him and showering her with acts of love that she innocently falls for his trap:

Instead of marrying freely, she begins to live falsely. The deceitful promise of the predator is that the woman will become a queen in some way, when in fact her murder is being planned. (Estes 46).

The fates of these mentally weak women not only affect themselves but also have a great bearing on their family and loved ones. Because they are unable to stand strong when a tough circumstance tests them, they eventually succumb to it thereby leading to their own deaths. Khonuo's sudden withdrawal into solitary grieving over her husband's death leaves her children with no absolute parental care. Kevinuo being the elder of the two children feels, '... when my father died, I lost my mother too.' (Kire 19).

Atsa Bonuo meets her death shortly after dreaming of her two dead sons. She was never the same anymore after their death. She did not care for her living children being deeply grieving for the dead that she also eventually joins them in death. She became a living corpse that Khonuo her own daughter feels somewhat happy that her mother is relieved from living a torturous life.

Beinuo, the most tragic of the three meets her death at the hands of her own husband who was masked as a very loving man but was in reality, a monster. By refusing to leave her husband, Beinuo not only died but has also endangered the life of her young daughter Uvi, whose father does not care for her as she is a girl. Beinuo's desire and false belief in marrying a man who loves her and leading a luxurious life has nothing in store for her but death:

All humans want to attain early Paradise here on earth. The problem is that ego desires to feel wonderful but a yen for the paradisaical, when combined with naïveté, makes us not fulfilled, but food for the predator. (Estes 45).

The second category of women in this novel *A Respectable Woman* represents resilience and strength within each woman. ‘Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress- such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.’ (*American Psychological Association*).

In this context, the first woman possessing the spirit of resilience in the novel is Azuo Zeii, as the narrator who is the protagonist herself calls her. Although she grieves for the deaths of her loved ones, she is one who recovers quickly from such traumas to continue living. Before the death of her mother, Azuo Zeii had become so weary for all the tragic happenings in their family that she looked even older than her mother, according to the narrator’s observation. Her mother lost both of her sons, Razou during his childhood and Amo, during his youth which became too much for the old grandmother of Kevinuo, to bear. She had lost her mind that someone has to always keep a watch over her in case she wanders off or hurt herself. The grandfather of Kevinuo also passes away a year after the death of his wife, with only the two sisters, Kevinuo’s mother Khonuo and her aunt Azuo Zeii alive in their family. A family of six was reduced to two in a very short period of time. Yet in the midst of all these tragedies, Azuo Zeii remained strong and steadfast to go on with her normal life unlike Khonuo whose husband’s death drained out all sense of life from her. She supported and tried to persuade Khonuo not to be overwhelmed with grief that she has forgotten everything around her.

‘...You can’t retreat from life like this.’ (Kire 19).

It was only because of her, Khonuo was able to recover from her grief and return to take up her role in the family and her occupation as a teacher in the school.

In the novel, it is seen that most men are indulged in heavy drinking which results in them creating problems in their homes and outside, but the worst being their wives getting beaten up. It was in this scenario the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act was formulated to put an end to all these activities which have risked the lives of not only the drinkers but their wives as well.

Estes' concept of 'the Wild Woman' is described as the source of the feminine who "thunders after injustice... the mucky root of all women..." (Estes 11). Azuo Zeii does not favor the idea of women being abused and was strongly against women being treated as the property of her husband after marriage. She advises Kevinuo not to put up with her husband's beatings in the future should he resort to such acts,

'...Kevinuo if you should ever marry such a man, remember that you are not his property for him to beat you and break your bones... don't ever accept that as normal.' (Kire 104).

Kevinuo being a staunch believer of leading her life in her own terms has no regards for any societal influences. She has rejected two marriage proposals and when her mother and others pressurize her to get married, she would only joke around. In the Naga society, an unmarried woman is not favored upon and looked at with questioning eyes. She is thought of as unconventional and living a miserable life. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *We Should All be Feminists*, reveals the thoughts of people on feminists, as 'women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands', (Adichie 9) which is an absolute fallacy because a feminist is one who discards or refuses anything which compromises her own happiness and comfort. And the truth is not that Kevinuo dislikes marriage but she does not want to be trapped and controlled by her husband like her best friend Beinuo. She refuses to sacrifice her freedom through marriage. After Beinuo's death inspite of being threatened by Meselhou not to come to their house anymore, Kevinuo tries to take her daughter Uvi from him so that the little girl would not have to suffer at the hands of her father like her mother. She even thinks of going

to Shillong with Uvi claiming her as her own child with no father. After Meselhou's sudden death, Kevinuo adopts Uvi as her own after drawing up three ancestral links to Meselhou. Although her attempts to save Beinuo fail, her determination to protect Uvi from her monstrous father succeeds in the end. Kevinuo has broken all beliefs and barriers by becoming a single mother to Uvi without the need for a husband on whom she would have to depend.

The spirit of resilience can be seen in Uvi who, although very young, has understood the complexities of life and has reacted very maturely to the unfavorable circumstances she face from childhood. Uvi who is the daughter of Beinuo has witnessed every incident of her mother being tortured and beaten up by her father. She loves her baby brother so much and would not let him out of her sight and so when he died, she was deeply affected. The second death she witnessed was that of her own mother who passes away a week after her brother's funeral. Her father too dies shortly after that being thrashed for pelting stones at the CPR patrol along with a friend in a drunken state. Although she has lost her whole family in a brief period of time, yet Uvi was a resilient enough to put up a brave face. She is found speaking to her mother in front of her grave when her father died. She considers that her dead family is still alive and talks to them as though to a living person. It was what Kevinuo realizes how little Uvi tries to cope with life even in the midst of distress,

... Perhaps that was her way of dealing with her many losses. By holding conversations with them as she was doing, she was bringing them back to life and back into her world and by doing that, perhaps she was able to cope with their absence. (Kire 156-157).

Kevinuo after adopting Uvi, would sometimes find the little girl alone standing by the window being lost in her own world. She realizes that Uvi is growing up now not to believe

that her dead mother can hear her talks and this is what pains Kevinuo. But she also muses that this is just the way Uvi copes with life and ‘that she chooses loving in spite of pain, that she chooses life in spite of loss.’ (Kire 161).

Thus, the resilience of women in the novel can be seen through the lives of the three women, Azuo Zei who despite losing her parents and brothers has never withdrawn from life, she has learnt that death is inevitable which have enabled her to continue living; Kevinuo who is bent upon living life her own way and is also the more determined to protect Uvi in spite of being threatened by the little girl’s father; and Uvi who, though a child, is mentally strong and wise not to allow her losses to affect her living but instead chooses to accept her fate and bring the dead to live through her unusual way of coping with the deaths in her family.

3.3 Retaliation against Submission in *When the River Sleeps*.

The novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014) is about a man named Vilie, belonging to the Angami tribe of Nagaland who sets out on a perilous journey to find the magical stone from the sleeping river which has been surfacing in his dreams for two years. The story is set in the primitive forests of Nagaland with very less human touch or contact. Kire has also included a number of traditional beliefs and customs such as weretigers, spirits, polluted areas of lands, magic, etc. and a raw picture of the eating habits especially of the Angami Nagas throughout the journey of Vilie. Although the plot is majorly about the journey of Vilie to the sleeping river and his return after acquiring the heart-stone, the novel also portrays the persona of different women through their encounter with Vilie, the protagonist.

Vilie in the course of his journey after getting the heart-stone comes to a village which happens to be inhabited by women, termed as ‘Kirhupfiimia’. These women are being cast out from the village and made to live separately as they are believed to have powers which

they may use to harm others. When Vilie initially enters the village unaware of their nature, all the women began to look at him with hostility and a tall woman with long hair who was called Zote stands ready as though to attack him. It was at that moment when a young woman intervenes and takes Vilie into her house, thus saving him from the vicious women. It was through Ate, Vilie learns more about the Kirhupfiimia. She explains that such women are outcastes in their village and so they live by themselves away from the village. Kire gives the meaning of the term 'Kirhupfiimia' at the end of Chapter Thirty- One; - *certain females believed to have poisonous powers and greatly feared*. (Kire 132).

In English, they may be considered as 'sorceresses' since there is no other term which fits the description of the traits of such women. According to the Cambridge dictionary, a sorceress is '...a woman who has magical powers and who uses them to harm other people'. 'The first records of the word sorceress come from the second half of the 1300s. The word sorcerer came later, around the 1520s. Both words ultimately come from the Latin *sortarius*, meaning "person who casts lots" (referring to a person who tells fortunes). .. Fictionally speaking, a sorceress is a female magician (the kind who wields supernatural powers, not the kind who does card tricks). Sorceresses...are often villains in the stories where they appear...' (*dictionary.com*).

In the novel, Zote spells destructions for others who come her way. She points at the womb of a pregnant woman who constantly spits in their direction whenever she crosses paths with Zote and Ate. Thus, the woman falls to the ground screaming with the baby instantly dead inside her womb. And that was how both of them were chased out of the village by the relatives of that woman. In the past their aunt was also sent away from the village when she blinded a man for trying to rape her.

Although the two women have used their powers against humans who are powerless, they did that only on being provoked and not just against anyone without reason. Women are thus

ostracized and condemned when they try to defend themselves.

V. Geetha in her book *Patriarchy* explains that:

‘...women who appeared a threat to the larger social group because they did not conform to the norms that governed feminine behavior were, and are, accused of practising magic and sorcery and punished severely and sometimes killed.’ (Geetha 7).

Zote does not stop there. One night she enters the house of Ate and gets hold of Vilie’s bag which contains the heart- stone and takes it away forcibly after a lot of scuffle with her younger sister. The sole reason for her wanting the heart- stone was to take revenge on her ancestral village for casting them out many years ago. The next morning she descends on the village while shrieking curses and pulling out plague of boils on the villagers. A swarm of rodents and lizard- like creatures from her bag sprang out and comes down to the village in a black cloud which led to chaos in the village with people running around in total frenzy. As the men tried to throw their spears, Zote blinds them by pointing at them. She then drew out more curses setting the thatch houses on fire. There was no way anyone could stop her from unleashing her long impending fury.

No matter how many times she is forbidden, quelled, cut back, diluted, tortured, touted as unsafe, dangerous, mad, and other derogations, she emanates upward... (Estes 8).

Zote enters the village council hall where only men gather to hold meetings, inter- village battles planned and village disputes being settled. By entering, she defies the taboo which restricts women to enter that particular hall. Her vengeful acts of harming both the guilty and the innocent aroused the wrath of the ancestor spirits who in turn kills Zote. In the novel, Zote is being portrayed as ‘the bad woman’ just because she retaliated against the ill treatment meted out against her and her sister. She was chased out of the village and when she returns to take revenge for the wrongs done to her, she gets eventually killed.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, *If you are a woman, you are not supposed to express anger, because it is threatening.* (Adichie 21-22) She talks about how women are called 'mean' and 'aggressive' when they express their disapproval of anything which men themselves might have done the same thing but will not be criticized as the former. Adichie illustrates from the life of an American friend who succeeded a man in a managerial position. And she once disciplined an employee for a forgery on a time sheet, which led to the latter complaining to the top management about her 'being aggressive and difficult to work with...', (Adichie 22) although her predecessor too might have done the same thing as her if he were there.

It is through this, one may assume that according to the society, a woman can never revolt or take a tough stand like men. If a man has resorted to such tactics, he may have been praised for his bravery or strong-will while it is the exact opposite for a woman. Zote by being an open rebellion earns her reputation as 'the villain' with no consideration who first provoked her to go to that extent. Her acts of terror have been used against her thereby justice is undone. Had the woman not cursed and spit towards them, Zote would have never harmed her. Likewise, the villagers without ascertaining the truth immediately cast out Zote and her sister Ate from the village which only caused her to take revenge later.

However, things are different for Ate, the younger sister of Zote. She is soft-hearted and submissive as compared to her sister. She rescues Vilie from Zote when he first arrives at their village and takes him in her house as her guest. Unlike the other women in her village, Ate was a loving woman who fears that she may harm people unconsciously even by her touch and therefore prefers to stay away from others. She relates to Vilie about their kind that is 'Kirhupfiimia' and how they came to live separately away from their own village. Her words simply depict her submissive nature to whatever befalls on her. She does not want to revolt against her fate and chooses to accept it in whatever way it is.

“...We never choose to be the way we are. It is the destiny life chose to give us... (Kire 131).

Ate may be called a ‘good girl’ in a patriarchal society where women are expected to simply follow the dictates of men and submit to them. They are silent and voiceless and render their selfless services to men and society. In the words of Tyson,

... she’s modest, unassuming, self- sacrificing, and nurturing. She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving... she may be sad about the problems of others, and she frequently worries about those in her care- but she is never angry. (Tyson 86).

When all the women in her village disappear mysteriously after the death of Zote, she had no option but to leave with Vilie as she cannot live alone in a whole village. On their way when they spend the night in a shed, a spirit-tiger attacks them, sensing fear in Ate which was the worst weakness of anyone in the face of death. The spirit though disappears after Vilie repeatedly shouted the name of *Kepenuopfii*, leaves Ate with a deep wounded shoulder from its claw. It was believed by the Angami Nagas that *Kepenuopfii* is the benevolent upholder of all things on earth and that the name itself holds great power when one is unable to overcome the spiritual beings.

The wound has a great bearing on Ate who is now struggling between life and death as the herbs which Vilie applied on the open scar had no effect on her. As she slowly slips in death, and the spirits come to take her soul, Vilie fearlessly fought off the spirits constantly uttering the name of *Kepenuopfii* and placing the heart stone in the hands of Ate which revives her back to life. Unlike her sister, Ate does not have a brave heart for which the spirit-tiger takes her life because of her fear and her spirit of resignation in the face of death but it is only through Vilie, she is restored.

As they continue their journey, however Ate cannot stay in the forest like Vilie and also he cannot take her as his wife since he had always loved her like a daughter. Therefore he

decides to let her live in his ancestral home in the village along with the baby of Krishna, the woodcutter who was murdered in his forest home along with his wife just some few days before Vilie's return. Ate who has grown to love the baby realizes she has no malignant powers in her touch just as Vilie assures her. Vilie keeps the identity of Ate a secret from the villagers as they would not allow her to lead a normal life. Vilie returns to his home in the forest while Ate finally gets married and has family of her own towards the end of the novel.

Although Ate is content with her life, it was at the cost of hiding her real identity and submitting to the norms of the society. Had she made known her history, she would have never been accepted into the village and she might have to go back to live as an outcast her whole life. Because the society does not allow anyone different to live and coexist with them, any such person is cast from their own village with no regards for their well-being and existence. Therefore, the trait of submission which is common to almost all women in the Naga society is also seen in Ate who accepts whatever fate befalls her. She is a victim of the society ostracizing them accepting isolation and also submits to the people's customs in order to survive.

3.4 Objectification of Women in Easterine Kire's Poetry.

Most of Easterine Kire's poems are romantic and lyrical unlike her contemporary Temsula Ao who uses poetry as an instrument to vocalize the struggles of being a woman in the Naga patriarchal society. Kire's first book of poetry titled *Kelhoukevira*, largely talks about the Naga struggle for independence from India which resulted in untold sufferings and horrifying experiences. In her title poem, she paints a poignant picture of a paradise- like Naga Hills, been marred by the blood of her own people- men, women and children alike. Her other poetry collection called *Jazz Poetry and Other Poems* primarily focused on the landscape of Nagaland and Norway where she currently resides. The poems here, talk about

simple subjects of nature such as the sea, snow, storm, rain, fog, trees, etc. There is scanty discussion of women's predicaments in her poems. Few as they may be, there are some poems in the collection of short stories and poems entitled *The Windhover Collection*, where women being considered as objects may be taken into account for this study.

In this collection, through the poem *David and Bathsheba- I*, Kire has depicted the Biblical story of King David and his fascinations for a married woman Bathsheba whose husband he kills in order to take her as his wife. The poet urges the king to turn away from committing a sin as he pry on Bathsheba taking a bath:

in the silkmist of her hair / in the marble of her limbs / as she frolics in the waters / unaware
of watching eyes / feasting upon her waterplay / (Lines 4- 8).

These lines project the objectification of a woman's body as something of an entertainment or enjoyment. The poem may be also seen as a call for luscious men to restrain themselves from plunging into lust and desires whenever they see women who are perceived as mere objects for men.

The poem *Snow Ballet* is about being enchanted by the falling of snow. Here, the narrator tells someone to revive herself and come to terms with the reality that she is not her own and that she is merely living the dreams of other people which is apparent from the lines in the poem:

Resuscitate / your conscience / you are not your own / the people know you / as a projection /
of other people's dreams / (Lines 6- 11).

The short poem *At St Xavier's* speaks of the narrator wanting to sit at the church in the presence of God forever. She reveals in Line 4, that she 'have never felt safer or more loved', which indicates that she is insecure and feels unloved other than in the presence of God. She

winds up the poem begging not to be sent out into the world again, depicting the harsh realities, the world offers to humans, especially to a woman. Although the narrator does not specify the cause of her anxieties, she is definitely not ready and dreads to go back to the outside world.

Audre Lorde states in *Sister Outsider* that:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence... The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (Lorde 37).

Thus, the novels in this chapter present the different reactions of the two kinds of women to oppressional situations can be seen. The first is the one who submits to fate and resigns having lost all will to live. They are unable to withstand the tough circumstances thereby allowing the situation to take control over their lives. This trait of submission is portrayed in *A Respectable Woman* through the character of Atsa Bonuo, who dies from grieving over her dead sons, Khonuo who never resumes a happy normal life again after her husband's death, Beinuo who succumbs to her husband's atrocities because of her timidity and Ate in *When the River Sleeps*, where she accepts her fate decided by others and later conceals her identity in order to fit in the community.

Whereas, the second category of women are headstrong female characters who refuses to be cowered down by the overwhelming currents around them. In *A Respectable Woman*, Azuo Zeii is an energy-welding like woman who encourages and teaches people around her, the importance of resilience and to remain steadfast in difficult times. Kevinuo is also one who knows what she wants and recognizes her sense of freedom not compromising with any man who would snatch that away. While Uvi finds joy and learns to be resilient enough to keep herself strong when her family dies one after the other. In *When the River Sleeps*, Zoe is

unrelenting and determined to take her vengeance for being wronged and ostracized which she finally releases although it ultimately leads to her own end.

While the characters and purpose of Easterine Kire's poems are a little vague for the readers, there is evidently an underlying theme of distress in the poems. Being a realistic writer herself, Kire presents in a sub-conscious manner, the position of women in the Naga society where they are treated as objects subjected to the demands and obligations of men and the society. Thus, the element of women being objectified which is seen present in few of her poems provides ample evidences of women being considered as weak and subordinate beings.

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Chapter Four

Subjugation and Pain in *The Many That I Am: Writings From Nagaland*

4.1 Introduction

The Nagas have lived independently and enjoyed sovereignty over their territory for quite a long time. They have a strong traditional consciousness in every social, political and economic sphere. The Naga society which is a casteless and classless society has a form of equality for every tribe which makes it one of the most unprejudiced social organizations. Although most of the tribes in Nagaland have imbibed the ideals of Christianity with the coming of the American missionaries, yet the Nagas still follow their tradition to some extent, one of which is the patriarchal system. The Naga society is a highly patriarchal society where the head of the family is always a male and the family ancestral assets are inherited only by the male members of the family. In the modern era, some parents are beginning to transfer their assets especially those which they have bought themselves to their daughters. However, in many other aspects women are being discriminated against in favor of their male counterparts.

With the intent to portray the female voice which has been silenced, a collection of short stories, poems, sketches and personal essays of Naga women was brought out under the title *The Many That I Am* which was compiled and edited by Anungla Zoe Longkumer, the daughter of notable Naga writer Dr. Temsula Ao. Longkumer herself is a writer, musician and filmmaker from Nagaland. Having travelled and lived outside Nagaland most of her life, she is currently based in Dimapur, the commercial hub of Nagaland, freelancing some content editing, music and filmmaking. Apart from the compilation *The Many That I Am*, she has also authored a book called *Folklore of Eastern Nagaland* (2017) comprising of translations of

folktales, folk songs and real- life accounts, collected from the tribes who inhabit the more remote districts of Eastern Nagaland.

In *The Many That I Am*, one would find the theme of feminism running throughout the different genres present in the book. It ‘questions the continued dominance of the male over the female and the constant helplessness endured by women in the intransigent patriarchal society of the Nagas.’ (‘Introduction’ to *The Many That I Am*).

4.2 Gender Roles in the *Cut Off*, *Old Man’s Story* and *I Wish You Were A Man*.

It has been an obvious observation that the Naga society being patriarchal does not treat men and women equally. There has been a clear- cut division on the roles each gender has to perform and contribute to the society. From the olden days, men go out to hunt, guard and protect the family while the role of the women is mostly confined to the domestic affairs of the household. Her daily chores include waking up early to cook for her family, fetching water, firewood, cleaning, working in the fields and many more. One can notice that a woman would be carrying the traditional basket on her back with her baby in the front while returning from the fields whereas her husband would generally be holding only a ‘dao’ (a single- edged tool with a broad blade).

Gender roles are also known as sex roles which includes a range of behaviors and attitudes that are considered generally as appropriate and desirable for a person based on his or her sex. It has huge influences over a person’s behavior, his or her clothing style, profession and includes personal relationships as well. Eyingbeni Humtsoe- Nienu in her personal essay *When Doors Open* brings to light the gender discrimination in the Naga society through the life of the author’s mother and her family. The author’s mother was the sixth child of seven, six of them being girls, much to the dismay of their father. He thinks that with every girl born to him, his status was thought to have been reduced, perhaps because he was a priest and

wants his own children to be his successor. Although he already has a son, his first-born as his successor, he was not satisfied with the birth of the rest of his daughters. The patriarchal Naga society prefers a son over a daughter as they believe that girls 'belong' elsewhere, to the family they eventually would marry into (Geetha 79). They construct that girls are not capable of preserving their family or ethnic identity as they are being given off in marriage. Such preferences get translated into differential educational investment for male and female children. For instance, if in a family, the income can support only three children's education out of five, then it is most likely that the opportunity would go to the boys, sacrificing the girls' career. Even in matters of higher education, women are not given much financial and academic attention as compared to men which is largely dictated by traditional assumption that women's roles are domestic in nature. It has also been argued that the investments on a woman's education would only be reaped by her husband's family.

Therefore, the grandfather did not favor sending the author's mother and her sisters to school. He had the strong belief that the night school organized by the church on alternate days would change his daughters' fate and so he forbids even the night school. The only one who was able to attend school was the daughter who was born prematurely, and hence physically unfit for fieldwork. The grandfather was of the view that his daughters belong to 'somebody else' and so it is 'wasteful to labor in somebody else's garden!' (Nienu 115). The only strong woman in the family to defy the patriarch was the grandmother whose name was Njiiponi, meaning, 'one who is disliked' or 'unwanted', as she was born a female. She would quietly make all the arrangements so that her daughter, that is, the author's mother, who wanted to study so much, would be able to sneak out to attend the night school. However, her father finds out and would shut the door, leaving her to sleep outside followed by a harsh scolding in the morning. She received academic excellence in her third year of school when her studies had to be discontinued after that since she has reached her teenage and is time to build her

own family. In this manner, in the past, the utmost priority was given to a woman's marriage over her studies or any other ambitions.

With the basic education, the mother was able to obtain a modest government job which gave her financial freedom, supplemented by the rearing of pigs, chicken, cows, fish and growing vegetables. The tool of 'Subjugation' which a man uses to exercise his powers in a patriarchal community, can be seen thwarted in this short personal narration. Subjugation is 'the act of treating a person or their wishes or beliefs as less important than other people or their wishes or beliefs' (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Although the grandfather had strictly objected against his daughters going for formal education, it was the grandmother's unrelenting spirit which assured her daughters' stature in the society, 'proving that, for some women, all that it takes is an open door of opportunity' (Nienu 118).

Thus, it can be seen that there have been considerable changes throughout the generation, with the women venturing out of their homes to pursue their dreams, some of which are considered 'manly', such as learning to drive, carpentry, holding administrative posts, police services, and other occupations. Yet, no matter how much the Naga society is progressing, the people still hold onto the traditional custom of allocating gender roles which can be evidently seen in the story *Cut Off* by Vishii Rita Krocha.

Vishii Rita Krocha is a poet, author and journalist from Nagaland. She has worked as a correspondent for one of the English daily *Eastern Mirror* for five years. She founded a small home-based publication called PenThrill in 2013 and is currently writing for English daily in Nagaland, *The Morung Express*. Krocha co-authored her first book *Echoes of Spring* and has written two other books *A Bucket of Rain* and *Shoposho*. She is a media fellow for National Foundation for India (NFI) and her works have been published by *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* and *Scroll.in*.

The short story *Cut Off* by Krocha in the book *The Many That I Am* relates the tale of Tasu, a young boy who is taught by his father to be a warrior like him when he matures. Through the father, it is learnt that the men would protect the village while the women do the fieldwork, search for food in the jungle, collect wood, fetch water, pound the rice and millet, do gardening, cook and look after the children and the elderly while also engaging in weaving, rearing pigs and raising chickens. Though this was explained to Tasu as something of a normal routine, the hectic hard work a woman has to perform is being depicted here. Gender role has assumed significance since the olden times when young boys and girls are made to leave their homes after attaining puberty, to stay in dormitory-like institution called the *Morung*. Every village has this *Morung*, where boys are taught the tactics of warfare, hunting, etc, while girls learn weaving, pottery, cooking, and other domestic skills as expected of a woman. Although the *Morung* no longer exists in the present times, yet the division of labor based on gender is still prevalent in the rural and urban areas as well.

Jungmayangla Longkumer through her short story *Old Man's Story* has also hinted at the division of work based on gender which is prevalent among the Nagas. Longkumer is a Professor in the Department of Agricultural Extension, Nagaland University, SASRD, Medziphema Campus. She has authored and co-authored multiple peer-reviewed scientific papers and presented works at many national and international conferences. She is actively associated with different societies and academies. Her three published books include *Change & Continuity in Tribal Villages: A Sociological Study* (2009), *Pottery: Earth Stories* (2010), and *Gift in the Pot: Earth Poetry* (2014).

In the *Old Man's Story*, Sanen, a teenager was sent to his village by his mother to spend his vacation with his grandfather. His family being patriarchal as any other Naga family, Sanen was the sole heir and hence, all pressure was on him to live up to the family's name although he has a sister, Narola. She teases Sanen who would have to cook, sweep, and fetch water and

other chores at their grandfather's house. For a woman doing these household chores in the Naga households would be seen as normal thing but a man performing these so-called 'women's work' seems unusual and funny so Narola may have teased her brother for that. In the village, Sanen, after helping out his grandfather with the chores, pays a visit to his grandfather's cousin Azao Senti. In the course of their discussion about the art of pot making, he asks her how pots are made, to which she laughs it off saying it is a woman's job and that men do not make it. The answer she gives Sanen portray how men and women are conditioned and raised to believe the norms made up by the society itself that these become the determinants even in choosing what work one does or profession they pursue. V Geetha, in *Patriarchy*, explains that tradition and religion together outline set of norms 'about what men and women are entitled to and how they ought to behave. These norms are present not as strictures or rules, but as ideas and notions that direct our everyday life', (Geetha 71).

It was through Azao Senti that Sanen and Narola learn that their grandfather was an unconventional man. He would do all the household chores so that their grandmother, who was a famous pot maker, would make pots and sell them off to provide education to her children. He would also accompany her to Lithu, the place where the earth is dug out to make pots, and carry the earth for her to make pots. Awo Tali, their grandfather, was indifferent to all the jokes made about him since he does the household chores and is the only male to go to Lithu to carry earth. Azao Senti also describes how hard a woman had to toil; cooking, cleaning, looking after husband, children, in-laws, pigs, chickens, the rice fields and many more. She assumes that the village women, though tease their grandfather a lot, may had been secretly envying their grandmother whose husband, regardless of any societal norm, has shared her workload and lightened her burden. Even in his wife's funeral, Awo Tali, their grandfather, expressed his deep respect for women who had to endure so many hardships to make pots. He says that his wife had supported their family by the sweat of her brows which

is something unusual in a Naga household. It is men who are the bread- winners of the family while women are the ones who toil within the four walls of her home. It may be noted, here, that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reveals how women are taught to behave or act in public when it comes to them earning a living:

‘...If you are the breadwinner in your relationship with a man, pretend that you are not, especially in public, otherwise you will emasculate him.’ (Adichie 28).

Awo Tali and his wife have, however, broken all such barriers by reversing their roles as against the set gender roles of the society. The former was unashamed to perform the household chores even though he was made the laughing stock of the village. His courage in violating societal norms is depicted in his acknowledgement of his wife, for being the breadwinner of their family.

The poem *I Wish You Were A Man* by Abokali Jimomi, a writer, entrepreneur and mother also talks about gender disparities. She has established an organization called Organic Nagaland in 2011, which supports local produce from Nagaland and promotes organic food, as well as networking with women self- help groups and women farmers. In the poem, the preference for a male child over a female can be seen in the repetitive expressions where “they” perhaps referring to the society, was wishing a woman, presumably the poet that she was a man. If that had been so, they would have been drinking, talk about politics, freedom fighters, illegal immigrants, corruption and power abuse and that her ‘ideas would be taken seriously’ (Line 7), as though women cannot drink and talk about these issues. This is a clear indication of the gender discrimination where women are not allowed to participate in the affairs outside her domestic occupations. The narrator herself depicts this in line 13, where she says that all these talks are ‘a man’s world to manage.’ Although whatever she says is

true and authentic, she is voiceless in the society as a woman. By being a woman, she can only talk 'about flowers and pigs, and clothes and shoes.' (Line 20).

A Naga woman is known by her father's name or her husband's which is also shown in the poem. She has no identity of her own except to be defined through her relations to a man. The last line of the poem, / Woman, what a waste you weren't born a man! sums up the whole notion that women are not treated as equals to men. Their sole occupation is being confined within the four walls of their homes and that they are not entitled to speak publicly. Men would not listen no matter how wise the words of a woman may be.

Thus, it can be seen through the two short stories *Cut Off* and *Old Man's Story* and the poem *I Wish You Were A Man*, how gender roles have a great bearing on women who have to work tirelessly for their unending chores. Norm-breaking is often seen in the modern society when the husband might assist in cooking if his wife is leaving early for work, however this does not happen when she is at home resting or taking a day off. This depicts that cooking and other household chores are the primary duties of women and men can only assist if and when she is unable to do so. In India, and particularly in Nagaland, a young boy would help his mother and sisters in the kitchen, fetching water, firewood and so on. But as he gradually grows up, he refrains from doing so and assumes new duties outside the kitchen. He no longer helps out in the kitchen as he used to do when he was younger. With maturity, men tend to become more set in gender role playing and demand to be served and exercise authority over their sisters and so on.

Although women are restricted to go out of their homes to participate and involve in social activities, yet they can be instrumental in bringing about changes especially in upholding peace during times of war or conflict. Women acting as intermediaries and mediators between warring tribes and vouching for peace and cooperation has been a revolutionary act

of women. They organize themselves to bring the disputing parties to a common negotiating table to settle their issues which have many, a time, prevented violence and bloodshed.

This is pictured in the story *Cut Off*, where all the able-bodied men left their homes with any weapon they could get hold of in order to fight with men from another village over election disputes. With only the women, children and elderly left at home, Tasu, the protagonist, who is now the oldest in his village at the age of ninety- five, is disoriented at the change of times, between the present and the past. His granddaughter, Chavi, who was left at home with him, returns after a meeting of the womenfolk, and apprises him that the women are going to the playground where the men are waiting for their opposing party. She quoted the women president saying:

‘We must go and offer peace. We cannot afford to let violence take over our lives again,’ (Krocha 33).

The women walked in a long line towards the men, amidst the savage screaming and shouting and escalating tensions, which halted the fighting on both sides. The women leaders patiently negotiated with the men, hence preventing a bloody conflict. Tasu then realizes the significant presence of women when he thought to himself, ‘How different the story is when women are around,’ (Krocha 35).

The Naga women are, thus, the torch bearers of peace and harmony, not only in their community alone but in the neighboring villages as well. The Naga Mothers’ Association which is an organization formed by women from all the different Naga tribes, have mediated in various conflicts between the different underground factions in Nagaland, thereby reducing factional killings and destruction. The association had also formed a Peace Team, as part of a campaign called “Shed No More Blood” in 1994, which helped to stabilize the deteriorating political conflict between the India army and the Naga insurgencies. In many such similar

situations, the Naga women have intervened and played an active role in facilitating peace and tranquility for the welfare of the conflicting parties in particular, and the community at large.

4.3 Domestic Violence and Abuse in *My Mother's Daughter* and *The Power to Forgive*.

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse or family violence is the violence that takes place in a domestic setting. It can be perpetrated in various forms including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, or sexual abuse. According to the United Nations' definition, 'Domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.' However in its broadest sense, domestic violence also involves violence against children, parents, or the elderly. Globally, the victims of domestic violence are largely women who experiences more severe forms of violence and abuse than others.

The first known modern use of the term 'domestic violence', meaning 'violence in the home' was in an address by Jack Ashley to the Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1973. Earlier, the term has been used to refer 'primarily to civil unrest, violence from within a country as opposed to violence perpetrated by a foreign power.' (*Wikipedia*). Domestic violence which was previously associated with physical violence have now come to include not only the physical alone, but sexual, psychological or economic as well. Domestic violence occurs as the abusers believe in their supremacy over the victims and that they are entitled to it, or that their actions are justified which may 'produce an intergenerational cycle of violence in children and other family members, who may feel that such violence is acceptable or condoned.' (*Wikipedia*).

It is assumed that women in Nagaland do not face any discrimination or oppression owing to their status or living conditions being much better as compared to most parts of the country. However, on closer scrutiny, it has been found that domestic violence or abuse is seen to be very prevalent even in the Naga community. The National Family Health Survey in its fourth series has found that at least 15 percent of women in Nagaland have experienced physical or sexual violence, while 2 percent of pregnant women have gone through physical violence during one or more of their pregnancies with the most common perpetrator being their husbands. The chief cause of domestic violence in Nagaland is due to the usage of alcohol by the head of the family, that is, the father or the husband. Women whose husbands consume alcohol are much more likely to face harassment than the ones whose husband do not drink, which however, does not mean that the latter do not face any form of violence. Many Naga women face domestic violence or have experienced it at least once in their lives, educated and uneducated, wealthy and poor alike. The Naga patriarchal setup embodies the stereotypical belief that a man has the right to be abusive towards his wife, who is expected to be submissive and patient to bear any atrocities inflicted upon her.

This has being the core issue explored in *My Mother's Daughter* by Neikehienuo Mepfhiio who is from Kohima, Nagaland. She has done her doctorate in Comparative Literature on the subject of a comparative study of Naga and Native American Tribal Literature. She is currently teaching Functional English at Kohima College, Kohima. Through a first- person narration, the author has vividly painted a grim picture of Naga family where the father occasionally beats up his wife and children. He would come home in an inebriated state, destroying things while the narrator and her two younger siblings would pretend to be fast asleep in order to avoid him beating them, and their mother would bear the brunt of his tyranny. The 'muffled cries' of the mother in the story depicts that she does not want outsiders or even her children to hear her cries when she gets beaten up by her husband.

Most Naga women remain silent about domestic violence against them, choosing to deal with it secretly by being submissive and resigning to their fate. In the story, when the narrator asks her mother, why her father hates them, the latter only replies that it was just because of him being drunk:

‘... He was drunk, that’s all. You know he does this only when he drunk at night. It’s not his fault. It’s because of the alcohol’, (Mepfhiio 95-96).

Domestic violence has been accepted as something normal within the family that it becomes approved and condoned, leading to generational cycle of violence. This can be seen in the second part of the story, where the daughter grows up and marries another man just like her abusive father. Each night, she would huddle in bed with her six year old daughter, like the way she held her brother and sister when young, praying the same prayer she did years ago that her husband would spare her. But her husband arrives home drunk and pulls her out onto the ground, beating her for no reason, while she quietly bears all these atrocities:

“I stopped fighting back a long time ago. It only makes things worse, so I bear the blows. I am amazed every time. He is just like Father, and I am just like Mother.” (Mepfhiio 98).

Her daughter asks her the same question she used to ask her mother, as a child, ‘Why does Father hate us, mother?’ and she only answers exactly like her mother that it is not his fault but the alcohol which makes him to torture them. The mother of the narrator and the narrator herself as a mother, blaming the alcohol may have perhaps been served as a form of excuse as she does not want to be termed as a ‘bad woman’ by being vocal against her husband’s inhumane behavior. She may have been silently bearing all these physical and psychological tortures for fear of shame, stigma and societal pressure of the Naga patriarchal setup. Many also do not realize that they are the victims of domestic violence as they lack awareness, and

hence do not file complaint against their abuser. They come out only they can no longer bear anymore:

All of us have had to learn to live or work or coexist with men, from our fathers on.

We have recognized and negotiated these differences, even when this recognition only continued the old dominant/ subordinate mode of human relationship, where the oppressed must recognize the masters' difference in order to survive. (Lorde 122).

Women have to accept the master's, that is, the husband's, authority and domination in order not to risk endangering their lives and that of their children. It is in this context, many women uses submission as a tool in order to survive while not realizing that this is only detrimental to their path of striving for leading a better life.

The short story *The Power to Forgive* is written by Avinuo Kire, who is a writer from Kohima, Nagaland and has also authored two other books; *Where Wildflowers Grow* and *The Last Light of Glory Days: Stories from Nagaland*. Her co-authored collection of documented oral narratives is titled, *Naga Heritage Centre, People Stories: Volume One*. Kire is currently an Assistant Professor in English at Kohima College, Nagaland.

The Power to Forgive is about a young woman who was raped many years at the age of twelve by none other than her own uncle. This traumatic incident forced the girl to withdraw herself from the society, avoiding new people or moving freely around other people. The victims of abuse are trapped in isolation, fear and shame and experience a 'poor ability to create healthy relationships' (*Wikipedia*). Although at times, she would forget about her past for some few moments, like when fetching water or washing clothes beside the river along with other girls, she would always be reminded by her mother that people would consider her as shameless, as though it was her fault. The protagonist feels that at some point, her mother blamed her because of the unemotional and detached bond she has developed towards her

after that disastrous incident. Her mother who was once a fearless and warm woman has now become meek and timid. The daughter also feels betrayed by her father and have since resented him when he decides to forgive her uncle who ruined his daughter's life. An air of gloom has set in the family ever since the heinous act of their relative for which they assume was because of their daughter.

Rape in Nagaland is much lesser compared to some other Indian states. However, in such cases, living in a traditional Naga society indirectly puts the affected girl and her family into a degraded position. While being stigmatized by the society, there also exists an uneasy feeling attached with the family forever. The girl feels unfit or ineligible to get married which puts a burden on her parents who feel that an unmarried daughter, let alone being abused, is a disgrace in the society. And therefore, the marriage proposal from a man in his mid- forties for the protagonist's hand who is comparatively young at the age of twenty- eight changed the whole atmosphere of the household. The protagonist was grateful 'that he had asked her at all' as she believes that she would never be able to get married in her life.

Therefore, it did not matter to her that he was unemployed or that he could seldom hold his liquor. He had asked her to be his and that excused all his weaknesses. (Kire 100).

The hectic wedding preparations, with the villagers pouring in and dividing the work simultaneously made the protagonist feel special. Even the mother's antagonistic silent behavior seems to have disappeared with her daughter getting married. Her father had silently accepted the decision of the protagonist that her brother would walk her down the aisle, which she had done as a sort of punishment against her father for 'denying her the right to forgive a crime committed against her', (Kire 108). The father taking all the decisions without even considering his daughter's emotions has led to the young girl living mentally tormented for years which she finally vented just days before her marriage. Realizing that she

has allowed herself to be the victim for so long, she takes out the old newspaper clipping of her past and throws it into the fireplace, with the paper being consumed in a few seconds, ultimately ushering her into a new reconciliation with her father while also no longer dreading to run into her uncle which she does in the past.

She would hold her head high and look him in the eye. He would know that he did not ‘ruin’ her, that his evil had not tainted her’ (Kire 110).

The protagonist emerges as a new person after witnessing her father weeping in his room the night before her wedding. She has blamed her father for being heartless towards her situation in the past that she insists on her brother doing the honor of giving her away on her wedding day. Her father breaking down made the protagonist realize that she herself is the one who has caused grief all these years not only to herself but to her father as well. Although the unfortunate incident has stigmatized her whole family, she was mentally defeated with no hope of living a normal life like others. It was only towards the end of the story, when she was getting married, ‘she finally felt free’ (Kire 110).

4.4 Subjugation and Strength in *NoNoNo Woman* and *Vili’s Runaway Son*.

Rozumari Samsara’s poem *NoNoNo Woman* talks about subjugation of a woman’s identity. Samsara also known as Rosemary Kikon is from Kohima, Nagaland who worked with NGOs and INGOs but she went to study physical theater in Copenhagen and became a poet, performer and an inter- disciplinary artist. Through these few lines, she has highlighted the predicaments of a woman in asserting her own identity. She was told by the Naga nationalist to hate the Indians, the Hindu nationalist to hate the Pakistanis, the Europeans to hate the Immigrants, the Americans to hate the Terrorists. Patriarchy taught her to be an obedient woman, to buy products by the Capitalist, and not to listen to her inner voice by the Media. The women demand her to serve while the men urge her to forget herself. Yet, the

narrator cries out to let her think for herself. She asserts that she is not anyone's slave or toy or doll and is 'not your so-and-so' (Line 16). But that she is herself, / I'M RŌZUMARĪ / (Line 18), refusing to obey the roles expected of her. The last line of the poem, 'And I'm a NoNoNo Woman' (Line 19) reveals her non-conformist ideals in the strict patriarchal society.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes categorizes the different kinds of mother through an illustration of the story of the ugly duckling. One harvest season, a duck was brooding on her nest of eggs until when all began to hatch one by one except the large one which is still intact. An old duck tried to dissuade the duck mother from sitting over that egg any longer. When it hatched after sometime, it turned out to be different from the rest of the ducklings for which he became the center of merciless harassment. Although his mother defended him in the beginning, she soon grew tired of it that she finally sends him away.

The duck mother in the story is symbolic of the different qualities of a mother, the first being, 'the ambivalent mother' who is caught between the demands of the village or her community circle and the preservation of her child. A woman having this trait of the ambivalent mother in her, may find herself giving in too easily, afraid to take a stand, to demand respect and assert her right to live her own way.

The second kind of mothers is 'the collapsed mother', one who can no longer tolerate the torments she experiences and therefore collapses. She may feel that choices between fulfilling outer demands and the demands of the soul are life-and-death issue.

The third is 'the child mother or the unmothered mother' who is much unsophisticated and naïve. She is unbothered about her child and considers herself unlovable even by a baby. She is old enough to have babies but needs the mothering of an older woman to support her in raising her children.

The fourth kind of mother is 'the strong mother' who has gone through tough times and is

hardened through fire. She is the one through whom her offspring or family benefits although she somehow falls.

The fourth kind of mother is the trait which is present in the mother, Vili, in the short story *Vili's Runaway Son* written by Abokali Jimomi. In the story, Vili, the mother needed a huge amount of money to save her husband and son from the underground faction. Her son who has dropped out of school had joined the underground four years ago, and then recently joined another group stealing an SLR gun which costs two lakhs from the previous group. It was protocol of the underground that the family of the betrayer compensates for the loss and therefore, Vili's husband was taken away forcefully the night before she comes to Madam Ela for help. Madam Ela is a government primary school teacher earning a modest salary which she augments by rearing pigs. Vili being desperately in need of money decided to sell off her two pigs asking Madam Ela to give her pigs to sell in return for collecting pig fodder for six months. With the few amount received from selling the pigs, Vili goes to the underground camp to release her husband. However to her horror, the officer refused to release him until the full amount was brought and instead decides to tie her husband to a pillar of the house and give him a hundred lashes every day until the money or the gun is returned. Vili having no option but to go out once more in search of the amount, she turns to her relatives and neighbors, begging the whole day with no help in return. It was Madam Ela who again helps her by borrowing a loan of fifty thousand rupees from her Self-Help-Group and with that encouragement Vili got the remaining amount from the local politician, the headman of the colony and the money lenders.

With the help of a relative who knew someone working with the higher-ups of both the underground groups, a settlement was made with Vili's son tracked down and the gun returned along with the two lakh rupees. After returning home with her battered husband, Vili thinks of the time ahead when she would have to work extremely hard to pay for her

husband's medical expenses and also repay their debts, including collecting fodder for Madam Ela. Although she is very worried, when her husband asks who fixed their door, Vili only smiled saying it was not very difficult to do.

This only portrays the strength of a woman in the face of difficulty and distress. As Estes depicts, 'the strong mother' put asides all her shame and weariness to be able to save both her son and husband. For two months she struggled to obtain the required amount of money so that the lives of her family could be spared. Even though her reckless son has brought in huge trouble for the family, yet even in the end, Vili 'ignored the pang in her heart, thinking of her runaway son' (Jimomi 156).

Hence, Naga traditional society has relegated women through a clear cut demarcation of the roles played by the male and female in the community. The short stories *Cut Off*, *An Old Man's Story* and the poem *I Wish You Were A Man* have been vivid portrayals of gender roles among the Nagas whereby, men are engaged in the so- called outdoor activities and professions while women have been confined to the domesticity of her kitchen and the fields.

The short stories *My Mother's Daughter* and *The Power to Forgive* have been clear indications that Naga women, however independent they may seem to be, yet an insight into the inner realities of the society shows that women silently bear all abuses and atrocities against them. They are 'voiceless' and subjected to untold miseries which is a completely contradictory to many who view Naga society as an egalitarian society.

The poem *NoNoNo Woman* is the voice of an unconventional woman refusing to be subjugated by all the influences which threatens her own identity. The trait of 'the strong mother' is seen in *Vili's Runaway Son*, where Vili despite being helpless, was relentless and gives up her own dignity going around seeking money to save her family from death.

Although her son has brought trouble into the family, her only worry was the safety of her

son, which implies the unconditional love a mother has for her child and family. As such, these stories and poems amply project the subjugation and load of Naga women in the patriarchal society.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

Literature is a reflection of society. It has been assumed that gender inequality is not an issue among the Nagas as the condition of Naga women is comparatively better than women in many other parts of India. In many Indian societies, there are numerous cases of female foeticide which is the process of determining the sex of the foetus and undergoing abortion if it turns out to be a girl, and female infanticide, the practice of killing the infant for the same reason. The main reason behind these ordeals is the patriarchal Indian society and the dowry system, which is the act of giving huge wealth to the groom by the bride's family. The girls who survive often find themselves forced to work for the livelihood of their family at a very young age. The other predicament faced by Indian women is child marriage, where they are married off very early even before they reach adulthood which has profound impact on their health and children. As for the condition of Muslim women, they are fated to have their faces covered at all times with a veil and are also treated as saleable commodities. A Muslim man can divorce his wife just by a mere pronouncement and may take in multiple wives. The condition of Indian women thus, may summarily be assumed as precarious with exploitative violence. However, the situation is undergoing gradual transformation with women's rights now being recognized, their literacy rate on the rise, and women entering into politics, teaching, medical fields, etc and general improvements.

Whereas, Naga women do not face such cases of foeticides, child marriages, dowry, etc. That does not denote the absence of gender discrimination in the Naga society. As discussed in the previous chapters, the Naga society being patrilineal and patriarchal, men have always been at the forefront of every privileges both at home and outside since the ancient times. Traditionally, men are engaged in warfare, hunting, etc, while women are

assigned the domestic chores like cooking, weaving, pottery, and other household chores. It is believed that the idea of distinguishing duties based on gender have started from the time when the Nagas were practicing head- hunting. In those days, men were supposed to be physically fit and defend their village from the enemy's attack and the other works are left for the women in order not to burden the former. Even today, it can be seen that men are the ones who take control in the decision makings both at homes and in the social, religious and political arenas. The transition from a primitive traditional community to a modern Christianized society did not completely eradicate the gender disparities, although it has brought about some changes especially in the education sector. One important illustration is the positions of the head of churches and missions or the Deacon boards who are predominantly male, relegating women to subordinate posts of assisting the men although women pastors are now steadily on the rise.

With the genesis of Christianity in the Naga inhabited areas, parents have also gradually begun to understand the benefits of education and therefore their initial mindset of prohibiting their daughters to avail formal education was replaced by the need to provide schooling for their sons and daughters alike. Education is the main factor for the improvement of the status of women in Nagaland. The experiences and interactions with the outside world have ushered in the realization that women are entitled to opportunities availed by men and that both men and women have equal roles to play in the society. Men being the bread winner have ultimately made women feel helpless and subjugated. Any attempt to change the status quo of the present scenario is countered with fierce opposition such as the huge uproar over the reservation of women in the local bodies. For years, the state of Nagaland has refused to give 33 percent reservation to women in the Municipalities and other Urban Local Bodies citing that it goes against the Article 351(A) of the Constitution which gives power to the Naga customary laws over any Central amendments or laws. While the

Article only states what protects the Naga identity and do not define what encompasses the laws and procedure, there have arose an ambiguity on the interpretation of the Act.

Therefore, the controversy has led to the state government to delay the implementation of women's reservation unlike the other states. It was the Supreme Court order in 2022 to immediately effect the reservation which prompted the Nagaland government to finally agree in conceding to the order. Women who supported the demand for this reservation were accused of undermining the aged tradition which has long been in practice. Dolly Kikon wrote during that time, that the reservation for women has nothing to do with the customary laws under Article 371 (A). It is instead an exercise of propagating male hegemony and authority cloaked in the name of justice.

Despite women having economic independence, Naga women have never been part of the traditional decision making bodies at the village level. Even in electoral politics, there is a lack of women participation. This is evident from the fact that there is not a single woman present as the Member of Legislative Assembly in Nagaland. Further the representatives of Nagaland in the Indian Parliament has seen only two women, the first being Rano M Shaiza in the Lok Sabha in the year 1977, after which there was no other woman representative until the recent elected S Phangnon Konyak to the Rajya Sabha in March, 2022.

Generally in Naga society, after marriage a woman leaves her home and title as well and lives a new life, which is of her husband's. By leaving her home and entering a new home, she has left her own identity as she is considered to belong to the tribe of her husband. Although the Nagas are said to have progressed, the truth lies in the fact that the term 'modern' is more in theory and not in practice. Women may have moved beyond those inequalities of the past, yet they are still not treated as an equal male counterpart when it comes to employment and leadership. There is still a long way to achieve gender equality in all spheres of the society. It

is imperative to understand that the participation of women does not threaten the presence of men but that it should be taken as empowerment of the deprived gender so that both men and women, alike, are represented. Adenuo Shirat Luikham in her poetry *What It Means To Be a Woman III*, laments, “When I can also talk politics and current affairs / But I look best with a strainer in my hand.” (Lines 8- 9).

The perception that women are physically and mentally weaker is still prevalent in the attitude of the people. Although it cannot be denied that women are somehow weaker than men in terms of physical strength, yet in other aspects, they are very much equal to men. In fact, women have now surged ahead of men especially in the field of education and employment. One can notice that as students pursue further in their studies, the number of boys are seen to be declining at every level or stage of higher education. While the reason may be due to the differences in choice of profession, yet even in other fields of competency, women who are generally considered as mentally weak have been achieving success far greater than men. It is in this scenario, one can only assert that women are not weak or inferior to men.

It has been argued that women in the Naga society enjoy better status than many other ethnic groups in India, however an insight into the daily lives of the women portray that the customs and traditions do not give equal rights to women which have been clearly described in **Chapter 1**. At every step of their life, women can be seen bounded by the customs of their community which has an impact on the mentality and attitude of both men and women towards the status of women. Feminism that seeks to redefine and establish equality of sexes in all fields and asserts that the male point of view has been prioritized over that of the female, has had a considerable impact of the Naga writings as seen in the works of Nini Lungalang, Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire and many other emerging women writers.

In **Chapter 2**, through the portrayal of strong women characters in the works of Temsula Ao,

who resisted patriarchy in their own ways, refusing to be subdued by it are seen attempting to rise above all these gender handicaps to assert themselves as individuals both in their own homes and in the society. Women's clever strategies to work out their plans have proved to work on the people around them, allowing them to take control as matriarchs in the patriarchal setting.

Chapter 3 has brought out the predicaments of women in the face of oppression. While most conventional women submit and resign to the barriers which the patriarchal setup has constructed, there are few who are resilient and undefeated by whatever circumstances befall on them and instead surge on to retaliate against the wrongdoings meted out to them. The rebellion and retaliation is, however, suppressed by those in the male- controlled authority and the women who found the courage to do so are thereby termed as 'bad girls'. Women being portrayed as inanimate objects of pleasure and enjoyment and their undue suppression is also presented in the poems selected for this study.

In **Chapter 4**, the ill facets of patriarchy are seen manifested in the allocation of gender roles, domestic violence and abuse and the subjugation of women in various forms. While the Nagas have been considered to have transitioned into a modern society, the deeply rooted tradition of patriarchal bias is still in practice even today.

In the studies undertaken in the four chapters, it has come to light that the marginalization of women has forged an understanding between women which have enabled them to remain steadfast and strong as in the case of Aosenla and her daughter Chubala in *Aosenla's Story*, between Martha, Medemla and Lipoktula in *Three Women*, the narrator and her mother in *My Mother's Daughter* and Vili and Madam Ela in *Vili's Runaway Son*.

The selected works in this study have proved that, with education being the foundation of many changes in the society, educated women have taken to writing to express their anguish and resentment of the patriarchal society in which they live in. Writing as a form of silent

protest has made them feel empowered and feel at peace. Through a room of their own, they are beginning to form an identity of themselves which were once defined by the structures constructed by the society. The common goal of almost all the women's works was to vocalize their inner as well as physical experiences. It was considered to be the means through which women can be elevated from the current status to a position where they can explore not only their own unique and autonomous identity but also establish a literary canon of their own. The context of the Naga women's writings have been first-hand experience of oppression and exploitation set against the backdrop of the patriarchal tradition. They have explored their own crisis and expanded their imagination to put these into writings. Aduo Solo who is an emerging writer has evidently pointed out through her poem *Thank You, Artiste*, how writers outrightly expose and bare their own souls into their writings, as a form of freeing themselves from all that constraints that bind them.

"To be an artiste is... To be under constant scrutiny, / Of where you came from and what made you... / You added to your creative art, a piece of you." (Lines 3- 8).

To venture into the necessity to break free from fixed orders of cultural codes and practices, women's literature in the form of writing is an attempted possibility to secure freedom that is denied in real life. Apart from literary production where Naga women have exceeded their male counterparts, there have been most publishing houses owned by women in Nagaland, such as PenThrill Publications, Barkweaver and Heritage Publishing House.

The principles of patriarchy are still firmly rooted and strictly adhered to even today and, therefore, it is imperative to critically understand the conflict between tradition and the dynamics of the contemporary Naga society. This study thus presents the female Naga writings as a strong opposition to the traditional patriarchal setup prevalent in the Naga society in the past and has still been a continuing trend in the present. The Nagas are yet to achieve uniformity and equality in all sectors of political and social participation and

therefore the selected texts have been utilized to depict the rising demands of the women to be heard, recognized and represented. Women, especially from the urban areas, are managing their careers outside their homes and family, as depicted by the protagonist Aosenla in *Aosenla's Story*. Violation of the patriarchal code of decision making and role of the protector by Lentina, Imdongla, and the three women, Lipoktula, Medemla and Martha, in the collection of short stories *Laburnum for My Head* have depicted the gradual changing status of women. The poems *Woman*, *The Creator* and *The Edge* by Temsula Ao have also shown the rebellion of women to the male- constructed structures.

Easterine Kire's novel *A Respectable Woman* which has been based in the post Second World War scenario has strong women characters like Kevinuo, Azuo Zeii and Uvi as against the other feeble women like Beinuo, Khonuo and Atsa Bonuo. Although the novel *When the River Sleeps* presents a rural and primitive setting in the forests of Nagaland, the character of Zote is said to have been a feminist figure refusing to be subdued and repressed, while Ate displays the typical traditional docile woman. The depiction of women as inanimate objects is portrayed in the poems *David and Bathsheba- I*, *Snow Ballet* and *At St Xavier's*.

In the collection, *The Many That I Am: Writings From Nagaland*, women have vocalized about the social ills perpetrated by the patriarchy, such as, gender roles and discrimination through the short stories *Cut Off*, *Old Man's Story* and *Vili's Runaway Son* and the poems *I Wish You Were A Man* and *NoNoNo Woman*. It has also portrayed the domestic violence and abuse faced by most silent Naga women in *My Mother's Daughter* and *The Power To Forgive*.

Thus, through their works, the women writers have attempted to bring about a change in the mindset and attitude towards the woman community in the Naga society. It is hoped that this research will provide an understanding of the workings of patriarchy in the Naga

community and the emergence of a new literary trend wrought in female consciousness which can lead to further critical readings and analysis.

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