

name. And work-work if you want others to take you seriously."(148) Jaya discovers Kamat's assessment true to her and realizes herself as a creative writer. In Showalter's context she can be placed in her Female Phase' which is "a phase of self discovery, a turning inward freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity." (Showalter, L.T.O. 13)

Jaya's awareness of her own incompleteness makes her realize that without Mohan she can't face this society. Her life is meaningless without him, she feels herself socially insecure so she moves to accept the mutual responsibilities of marriage. Though she knew that her husband has cheated her. She speaks, breaking her silence: "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone I'm Mohan's wife." (191) After reevaluating her life she feels, she can have her own identity only when she is with Mohan. Having realized her position, she rejects the image of the two bullocks yoked together and considers herself and Mohan as confident individual. Further she realizes that fault is her own as in *Bhagwat Gita* Krishna gives knowledge to Arjuna "Yatheccchase tatha Kuru" (192) knowledge is given and it is for Arjuna to make choice in the same way Jaya also believes that women should not perform the role cast upon them "in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices." (192)

Finally breaking her long silence, she decides to establish her identity within family or within the sphere which is dominated by male. She believes that there is always room for discussion. Elaine Showalter denies the possibility of wholly feminist structure: "there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structure □ women's writing is a double voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant." (Showalter, F. C W.265) More or less Jaya also mean the same thing by the last line of the novel: "Life has always to be made possible"

III

The foregoing analysis exemplifies that Showalter's female is of genuine nature, creative, viable, independent and different. Her categories are assimilable within the boundaries of a female textuality. Jaya as the protagonist of the novel is also a symbol of a collective female: as her name justifies she overcomes problems and is able to take her decision of own which are not only female centered but also men-inclusive. Showalter inclines to an inclusive theory rather an exclusive for she believes in a mediating junctural point that partens of the best of men and women both that is what Jaya realizes in the novel. Identity and differences are contextually submissive to each other; they cannot be taken as mutually subversive that is precisely the message of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. The general import of Showalter's categories is trans-cultural, of course and this again justifies that the female problems are same, cultural differences notwithstanding. The context of the women all over the world carries more identity than differences.

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The Tree of Life

- Jaydeep Sarangi

Barefoot
She walks on tall grasses
From the other land
In diffused light
As the north city sleeps.
She is pierced by the early light
The grass looks greener than green
Wild green growing
In bed.
As she smiles
The Sun is up in the East.
Mysterious Yogis in the East chant
Holy songs.
Somewhere a naked child
Cries out of hunger.
His mother offers
Breasts of no milk,
The child sucks water.
Reason in me spits in disgust.
She moves back
As all her nerves vibrate,
Her Hari is in hunger.
She emits golden light
The mother and the child look bright.
A rainbow colour hope
Or a letter from Mumbai
Leads them to the Christmas tree
And their faces re-tell the history.



...self-imposed exile: Contemporary Poetry in English from Nagaland

- Nigamananda Das

Abstract

Four major contemporary Naga women poets have explored the ecological glory of their land, their predicament as subaltern being tribals and immense suffering of Naga women under heavily dominant patriarchy. The poets besides exposing their momentary impressions on many incidents in life have concentrated on values in life and deeds/misdeeds which have imposed exile on them.

Keywords: Incongruous proximity, Woman, Angel of mercy, Obsessions of self, *Kelhoukevira*, *Lungterok*, Ecological inequilibrium, Eco-mystery, Ecofeminism, Postcolonialism.

Contemporary Indian Writing in English is a large body of literature in the Commonwealth literature with brilliant world-famous writers. Indian poets have been publishing their poetry in English since the third decade of the 19th century. Though a large number of 19th century Indian English poets hail from West Bengal, such poets in the North-eastern part of India could not be obtained. Only in 1980s a few poets started writing in English in Northeast India. Easterine Iralu (1959-) is the first Naga poet to bring out her collection of poems entitled *Kelhoukevira* in 1982. In 1988 Writers Workshop, Calcutta published a collection of English poems entitled *Songs That Tell* by Temsula Ao (1945-). Monalisa Changkija (1960-) published her first collection of poems entitled *Weapons of Words on Pages of Pain* in 1993 and her second collection entitled *Monsoon Mourning* in 2007. Nini Vinguriau Lungalang (1948-), brought out her collection of poems in English entitled *The Morning Years* in 1994. Temsula published her second book of poems *Songs That Try to Say* in 1992 from the same publisher and her third work *Songs of Many Moods* was published in 1995 by Har-Anand publication, New Delhi, in association with Kohima Sahitya Sabha. Her fourth book of poetry *Songs from Here and There* (2003) was published by North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. Her latest collection of poems is *Songs from the Other Life* (2007). Besides many minor Naga poets the aforesaid four women poets are major voices who explore values, postcolonial/postcolonial realities and surreal entities in life.

Temsula Ao, *Padmashri* 2007, who joined the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong as a lecturer in English in 1975 was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Minnesota (1985-86). From September, 1992-97, she was on deputation as the director of the North East Zone Cultural Centre,

Dimapur. At present she is a Professor of English and Dean, School of Humanities and Education at the same university. Temsula's *Songs That Tell* (1988) voices her search for roots, the trend which has been prevailing since the earliest days of Indian English poetry. Though the collection contains many momentary impressions, yet the poet's legitimate voice of her reactions to our conditions and the vision thereof are the important concerns. 'A strange place', 'Woman', 'Mother Teresa', 'The Healing Touch', 'Requiem', 'Lament for an Earth', 'My substance' are some important poems of this collection which reveal the obsessions of the poet. In the very first poem of the book, the first person-narrator relates how the book of poems came into being and about themes of the book. In response to the inspiration of the poet's mentor addressed as 'he', she composed 'songs' collecting her stray thoughts. So she says—"And so I sing these songs/ for him who said,/ "Give me a book of your songs"(1988:10). The book has been dedicated to Temen, the poet's source of inspiration. About the composition of these songs the poet says,

These are songs which / Sometimes come
On lonely nights / And make bright
The fading lights / Songs
Which sometimes / Imitate
Greater bards / To indicate
Similar response / To corresponding chords. (ibidem)

Here the occasion of the songs and the influences for them have been indicated. As an academic, the poet has been in constant touch with the greater bards and as such her reactions to the happenings in her life and surroundings have been similar with that of the greater bards or poets. But still the poetic exploration of her feelings sometimes have been different which are distinctly her own that voice her response to them. In this connection, she again says in her 'Songs Dedicatory':

These are songs which / Sometimes
sing in ecstasy / And weep in agony.
Sigh for memory / And sometimes
Laugh with fantasy. (ibidem 9)

Many of the songs are tragic, exposing ecstasy, agony, and sad memory of the poet. The 'coming-of-age' troubles the poet's vision. So she has been disturbed by the thought of ageing and the decadence of self due to that:

At forty /the silver streaking / through my hair
And lines invading / My face with care
I often contemplated / My coming-of-age
At twenty-one. / "How terrible it would be"
I had thought / "to be forty" / An age so remote
And so removed / from youth. (ibidem 13)

The sorrows and sufferings of the youthful dream of Love have been voiced in 'A Lover's Prayer':

If some-times you dream, sweet heart
Of flames that burnt for you, / May be scorched you,

Or some that never sparked, / --- / But when you wake
 To find / The dreams gone / The regrets done
 You may need someone / To light your way. (ibidem 15).

The familial or social relationship which has made the worldly co-existence cordial or which has been the staple source of our solace in this world has also been an important concern of the poet.

Father and sons / Antagonists and intolerant
 Struggling for supremacy / over an earth
 Both want to straddle...
 Mothers and daughters / Rivals, suspicious
 of the blooming / And the fading
 of an evanescence. (ibidem 17).

The quest for roots, and pondering over miserable conditions of the downtrodden tribes, social inequities and injustice have made the poet ruminate their maladies:

This is a place where / A Berlin wall divides
 The haves and have-nots / Into tribal enclaves
 with skyscrapers and slums / Co-existing
 In incongruous proximity / Each insulated
 Against the other / By self-imposed exile. (ibidem 19)

The poor downtrodden sufferers (as eternal subalterns) are the blessed beings in this world because of their non-involvement in the selfish race of the world of injustice. The poet reveres them in her poem 'Blessings':

Blessed are the poor, / In rags, / For they shall inherit
 The crumbs / from the rich / who knowing no hunger
 cannot savour / of their plenty / Though they possess
 the granaries of the earth. (ibidem 20).

The injustice done to women since the time immemorial by various agencies has been reacted upon by the poet. The conditions imposed upon her by Nature, Time, Man and Religion have been referred by the poet in the poem 'Woman', which pronounces her firm eco-feminist ideology:

Nature fashioned her thus / To bear the burden
 To hold the seed / And feed / Every need / But hers
 But woman / Thus fashioned / Thus oppressed
 Beguiled and betrayed / sometimes rebelled
 To break the mould / And shake off the hold
 That nature devised. (ibidem 22)

The extremely self-less solemn devotion of Mother Teresa has enticed and elated the poet and as such she has glorified the sacrifice of the divine lady describing her 'angel of mercy'.

The living skeletons / Are her lovers / And the stench of sores
 The only perfume, she knows. / ... / The energy is unfailing
 The faith unyielding / In this "angel of mercy"
 Bringing new light to humanity. (ibidem 33).

The poet's complaints against the suffering of women and her own womanhood have been a constant obsession with her and she reacts to that sorrowfully:

For twelve long miserable years / My life coursed away

At the core of my womanhood / Draining all joy and hope,
Tainting existence / With the leprous out-pouring
of unhealing emanation. (ibidem 37).

The deforestation activities continuing in the hills and valleys of the Northeast India has obsessed the poet. The destruction of nature which has been a menace to the mankind is reacted upon by her:

Once upon on earth / There was a forest,
Verdant, virgin, vibrant / with tall trees
In majestic splendour / / Alas! for the forest
which now lies silent / stunned and stumped
with the evidence / of her rape.
As on her breasts / The elephants trample
The lorries rumble / loaded with her treasures. (ibidem 45).

The 'academic self', 'domestic self' and various obsessions of 'self' are also the significant concerns of the poet. The life has been a burden and in spite of all such burdens, living is a journey in quest of better possibilities. In the following lines the poet refers to her 'domestic self' at Shillong:

The domestic self at Bara Bazar / Eyeing the rahu and the hilsa
But finally setting / For the common carp,
And haggling / Over the price of tomatoes
In the cheaper side of the mart. (ibidem 59).

Temsula's second book of poems, *Song that Try to Say* explores her visions of tribal life, human relationship, her own life, Naga ethos, religion and some momentary impressions. Above all the poet's love of lyric and deep aesthetic sense and rhythmical lines reveal her fine serene sense of symphony and mellifluity. Her inquiring voice in the poem "why do songs live" is very appealing:

Why do songs live / long after songsters
Are gone and forgotten?
Why do songs speak / Though sung in alien tongues
And unfamiliar tunes?
Why do songs appeal / When children squeal
In shaky voices and broken rhymes? (1992: 9).

Contemporary happenings like air-crash of Kaniska, love, sex, earthquake, religious rites have been the major concerns of the poet in this collection. Timelessness being an obsession has been reacted upon sympathetically:

There are so many songs / I want to sing,
But so little time / To sing them in (ibidem 39)

Sex in the personal life for child reproduction or as a biological need has been referred in the poem 'Rites' and has been prioritised as the "self-giving rite":

Every time we enact / The self-giving rite,
I hold you deep within / the very best of you in
Primeval contact. (ibidem 42).

The system of living has been defined by the poet in her poem 'The

System' and the transactions in life have been called as bargains, barter, etc.:

The art of living / According to some / Is but a system
of bargains and barter. / Buying and selling
Sales and jumbo sales, / Are part of the fun
And fan-fare of living. (ibidem 43).

The religious creeds of the monks and preachers have been revered by the poet. The selfless contributions of the religious preachers have been considered sympathetically by the poet:

Monks / Pious preachers / learned in scriptures / selfless servers
and renunciators / who are but
Humans too. ('On Monkish Creeds', ibidem 44)

The poet also celebrates the glory of places in Assam, Nagaland and the like with her impressions on their importance. The poet's race and place consciousness are evident from this. For example, in one poem entitled 'Jatinga', she tells about the birds which commit suicide there. Jatinga is a mysterious place in Assam. Every year birds come here and commit suicide en masse. The poet in her rhetoric question wonders about the mystery and feels that the suicide perhaps immortalises the birds. Hence their recurrent practice of committing suicide remains an eco-mystery:

What leads you there / O you immortal birds?
The strength / of your tiny wings
or the dying cries / of your singing throats?
... / What compels you / O you immortal birds?
To willingly dare / To ultimate snare
Only at Jatinga? (ibidem 48)

The ethos of Ao Nagas has been revealed in the poem 'Stone-people from Lungterok'. *Lungterok* in Ao language means six stones. According to the Aos, their first forefathers emerged out of the earth at the place called *Lungterok*. There were three men and three women. Some of the stones are still to be found near a village called *Chungliyimti* in the Ao area of Nagaland. Ao myths, legends and rituals have impelled the imagination of the poet. The 'stone people' at Lungterok were the progenitors of Aos. They were poetic, politic, barbaric, balladic, polyglots, knowledgeable in birds language and animal discourse, romantics, who believed in "the sun can sulk", the potters, weavers, planters, growers, hunters, carvers, singers of songs and takers of heads, gentle lovers and savage heroes, builders of homes and destroyers of villages. These stone people were "worshippers of unknown, unseen spirits/ of trees and forests, of stones and rivers/ and believers of soul and its varied forms, its sojourn here/ and passage across the water into the hereafter". The same 'stone people' were the savage and sage of the race of Ao. (ibidem 49, 50).

In this collection of poems, there are poems on the time of the year like 'Dread of Winter', 'December', 'October', where the poet gives her impression on the time:

Winter is not the season / for the aged or the desperate
with decay in their bones

And despair in their souls: ('Dread of winter', ibidem 25)

December is a bad month / For lonely hearts

When the ground frost

Quickens the dull ache Within. (December, ibidem 26)

October is the month / which has a way / with my heart

And turns it nostalgic / with its magic ('October', ibidem 57)

Temsula's third book of poems *Songs of Many Moods* (1995) like the previous volumes contains poems of tragic vision. The introductory poem is about the craft of writing. The first poem entitled 'Words' refers to the art of the poet:

Words are trying to escape / My efforts at articulation

They refuse the confines / of defined languages

And phonic systems. (ibidem 9).

Transition of environmental conditions over the years has made the poet unhappy. She has been nostalgic about the early days of her life when she was overjoyed with the gorgeous natural environment. In the poem 'My Hills', the poet's nostalgic view of the past has been exposed:

The sound and sights / Have altered / In my hills

Once they hummed / with bird-song

And happy gurgling brooks / Like running silver

With shoals of many fish. / The trees were many

Happy, verdant, green / The seasons playing magic

On their many-splendoured sheen....

But today, I no longer knew my hills / The bird song is gone

Replaced by the staccato / of sophisticated weaponry

The rivers are running red, / The hillsides are bare

And the seasons / Have lost their magic. (ibidem 49).

In her *Songs from Here and There* (2003) Temsula explores the multi-ethnic scenario of her region and the current ecological imbalances and waste colonialism prevailing everywhere, which have made the denizens nostalgic of the glorious ecological paradise of the region. She feels how the elements of nature protest against man's insensibility. This shows her sympathetic responses to the nature. A monolith, which now stands at a village gate or somewhere else claims of its dissatisfaction and ignominy. So in its prayer, it says to other elements of nature not to tell its beloved about its outcast state:

O you elements / When you pass by the forest

And my beloved queries / Just tell her / I have gone to my glory

But please, please, never / Tell her the story /

Of my ignominy (2003:5)

Temsula is a social chronicler and eco-humanist. The women's suffering in Nagaland and everywhere else has troubled her. Hence she has never forgotten to reveal women's responsibility and sincerity in spite of their suffering:

She steps nimbly over huddled figures

And puts rice into boiling water / In careful measures

The hut is soon filled with the aroma

Of wood smoke and cooking rice (ibidem 13)

Her latest collection of poems entitled *Songs from the Other Life* (2007) makes her a homebound pilgrim. The myths of various clans of Naga tribe and many of Ao-Naga myths have been explained in the poems. Through these explanations she seeks to explore/search the identity of her tribe. The loss of script of her Ao-Naga tribe, the Tiger soul, the Soul-bird, the boatman in the river between the land of the living and the land of the Dead, the Tiger man/ woman, the Sangtam legend of Mamola, the legends of head hunting and the like are the many mythical/legendary tales which expose the identity of Nagas as a ferociously chivalric tribe who are honest and truthful in their attitudes to all. The Naga oral tradition is very powerful. The whole system of social, historical, religious and ethical knowledge has been retained in the memory of the people through the oral tradition. It is because they had a script inscribed on a hide and hung on a wall for all to see and learn. Once a dog pulled it down and ate it up. So since then the whole system of knowledge has remained alive in the oral tradition. Temsula refers to this myth in her poem "The Old Story Teller":

So when memory fails and words falter
I am overcome by a bestial craving
To wench the thieving guts
Out of that Original Dog
And consign all my stories
To the script in his ancient entrails. (2007:13)

Temsula Ao's mystic sensibility has been exposed in some of the poems. Most of the poems seem to be the intellectual exegesis of our situations and conditions. Lyricism, verbal melody, economy of expression and mellifluous language make her poetry much enjoyable. Expressions of stark realities of life in romantic overflows of songs have been excellent in her works. For her melodious writings and songs, she may be called 'the Nightingale of North Eastern India.' (Das 1998:26)

An autochthonous poetess, Nini Vinguriau Lungalang (born 1948) who teaches at Northfield School, Kohima, exposes the tragic conscience, tribal way of life, neglected people, her concerns for her father, the space of Kohima, the heritage of Naga people, youthful days as some of the obsessions of her early life:

I look back on the morning years / That have trickled like water
Through my uncaring young fingers.
When I only delighted in the touch and taste / Warmth and coolth
of those sunlit, perpetual-seeming days (1994: 1)

The same nostalgic memory of past rituals and serene environment is aroused in another poem 'chapel':

I come to light the candles. / In the serene gloom of the sanctuary
The saints stand tranquil.... / ... /
Faint scent of incense and faded flowers
Nostalgic of past rituals. (ibidem 9)

The similarity of appearance between mother and daughter has moved the poetess emotionally and she thinks over it through the metaphor of

mirror:

So you see, I look a lot like my mother. / She's stamped herself soul-deep in me

With things that are of hers / / Yes, I look a lot like my mother

And my daughter looks / A lot like me. (ibidem 11)

The poet has deep sympathy for the downtrodden and desperate sufferers. So she writes about street sweeper, the persons killed and maimed in an accident, old tribal woman suffering in a city hospital, etc.

A ragamuffin / Snot-nosed little sweeper

watches the giddy traffic / with enormous wonder-filled eyes.

Task forgotten, her arm drags / The broom with mechanical reflex.

('Street Sweeper', ibidem 12)

On 20th March 1989 at Kohima, two people were killed and eighty others maimed in an accident which the poet witnessed. For these sufferers the poet writes a dirge sympathising the great loss:

Black flags flap in macabre frivolity

On the ribald wings of spring. / ...

We returned home, / But without them

we left them there, at the crossroads. / ...

Our sons, our brothers /

their ardent beauty, their young strength

Unripe, untried / Fallen. (Dirge, ibidem 26).

A spark of Indian mysticism could be seen in her poems. The poet makes herself Gopi and exposes her love for her Krishna in a poem entitled "To Krishna 'S':

Shri Krishna / Bliss in your presence, tranquility.

Once upon an enchanted time / I, the Gopi

My hands lifted / Resistless at the bidding

of the insistent flute. (ibidem 20).

The claim of ancestry of the Nagas from the mountains has been revealed in her poem "*On Puliebadze*". Puliebadze is a mountain about ten kilometres away from Kohima. In this poem the poet cautions her race to revere the mountain Puliebadze:

Stern sentinel trees silently guard

The secret pulse that throb beneath the skirts

of ancient ancestress Puliebadze.

Walk with care: for here is holy ground,

Let not your footfall sound farther

Than the crisping crush of twig or leaf!

Let then the wisps of mist that stroke

The flanks of old Puliebadze! (ibidem 46)

Nini as a poet is the priest of nature, precursor sentinel of safeguarding ecology depletion and the cause of the subaltern.

Easterine Iralu (1959–) who taught English at North Eastern Hill University, Kohima Campus and at Nagaland University, Kohima and is at present teaching in Norway, published her first collection of poetry when she was twenty three. She mingles her vision of past with the current realities and reflects the erosion of environment sincerely. She

envisions the decadence of time and is nostalgic of the glorious heritage she inherits. The Naga myth of the Utopia (*Kelhoukevira*) haunts her and makes her passionate of the glorious world of the past:

Keviselie speaks of a time
when her hills were untamed
her soil young and virgin
and her warriors worthy
the earth had felt good
and full and rich and kind to his touch.

Her daughters were seven,
with the mountain air in their breaths
and hair the colour of soft summer nights
every evening they would return
Their baskets overflowing
with the yield of the land
then they would gather round
and their songs filled all the earth.

["Genesis":1982:1/Nongkynrih & Ngangom 2003: 219).

In this poem the poet has made 'Plague', a personified malady responsible for the ecological devastation that has swept over her glorious land. The patriot in Easterine mourns aloud to see her eternally heroic clan cold and coward:

The night of the flame flower, all desire turns
Alien around me; and I stand unrequited
By waters that no longer move to my name.

...

My golden people are grown cold
They wound my lips, my hands, my eyes
They bleed my poems / In the quiet of the afternoon
And blind my songs / On silent, starless nights,
Cry, cry my beloved hills
And let me feel no more. (1982:9)

She finds glory of the virgin land and ecology in the conscience of her iconic hero, Keviselie and glorifies him:

The spirit of the hills have found / An answering spirit in thee
Thy nature noble, mirrors / Their rich heritage
And their songs of resistance / Echoes in thy pilgrim soul; ...
It is thee, Keviselie, it is thee. (ibidem 6)

The ecology-depletion is occurring so fast that the persona in a poem feels the need of keeping an imprint of it and she speaks to her son about that and draws and paints a glorious picture to at least preserve a picture to view and memorise the glorious ecology:

Before you are born / into an ever changing world
before the green pines / Fall prey to the woodcutter's axe
and stumps stand, gory / remains / of once beautiful trees;
before the gloriously / setting sun / is veiled in city smog
and all I have viewed tonight / fade into memories irrevocable
before the changing world / churns itself into ashes
let me imprint (2001:111)