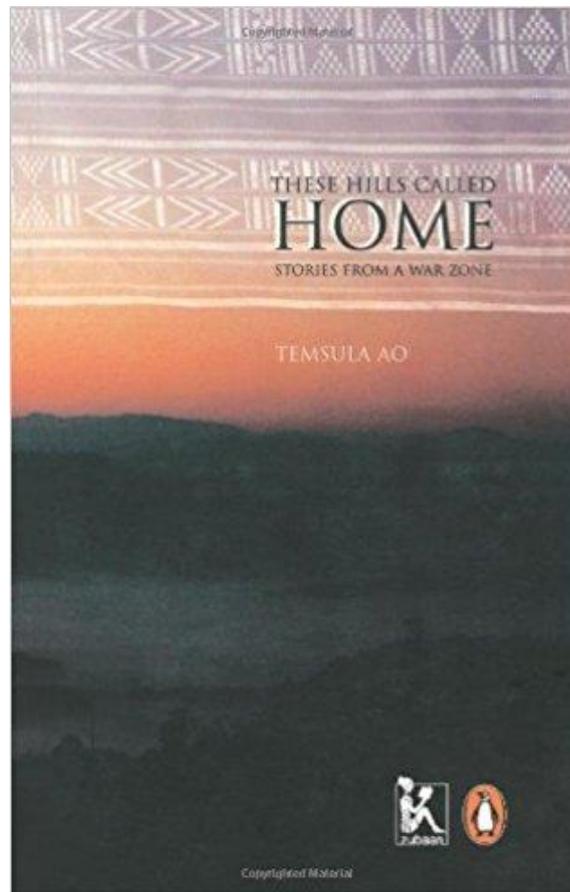


**Nationalism Vs Nationalism
with reference to Nagaland in
Temsula Ao's *These Hills called Home***

Arbina Phonglo, Research Scholar



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/These-Hills-Called-Home-Stories/dp/8189013718>

Abstract

India is a multicultural nation-state and the largest democracy in the world. Since the Independence, the demand and re-organization of states or in a simpler language, creating new states is quite common. Being a nation of many distinct group of languages, communities, cultures, etc. it has to accommodate the demands and aspirations to a certain extent for a

peaceful co-existence of these groups. In case of Nagaland, the scenario is a different one, that is, secession, the demand for a Greater Nagaland. This demand for a separate country altogether started in the pre-Independence times itself. This paper aims to examine nationalism in context of Nagaland and how the clash between Naga nationalism and the greater Indian nationalism has affected the common lives with the help of Temsula Ao's collection of stories *These Hills Called Home*. This paper will also seek to analyse the emergence of a separate nationalism outside the umbrella of common Indian nationalism.

Keywords: Nagaland, Naga tribes, Nationalism, Northeast India, multiculturalism, insurgency, AFSPA.

Naga Nationalism

This paper is an attempt to introduce and study the Naga Nationalism and its direct confrontation with the Indian government and their struggle for a separate sovereign state from the pre-Independence times. It also focusses on the situations of the common people during this time and emergence of a new opportunistic class. The text taken for the purpose is *These Hills called Home*, a collection of short stories by Temsula Ao.

Nagas and India

As found in Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'nationalism' suggest 'patriotic feeling, principles, or efforts.' The strong feeling of nationalism among the Nagas emerged with the foundation of Naga Club in 1918. The nomenclature "Nagas" addresses the unification of the different tribes of Nagaland, for example, the Aos, the Angamis, the Zeliangrongs, etc. This club unified all the Naga tribes under one umbrella and instilled a common sentiment for a common cause, that is, a separate country for the Nagas. The treatment of Indian government through its military force also played a role in strengthening the nationalistic bond among the Nagas.

The multicultural environment of India led to the creation of nation states and therefore, Independent India was divided into many states. It is important to note that Northeast India's history is set apart from that of the rest of the country. The Treaty of Yandaboo of 1826 between the Burmese and the British brought this land to the notice of British administration and later,

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India. Nagaland then, was a part of the erstwhile Assam along with NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh), Meghalaya and Mizoram. Manipur and Tripura were princely states.

No Sense of Belonging Towards Assam or India

The Nagas never felt a sense of belonging towards Assam or India. When the British introduced the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in 1873, it did not allow people from other parts of India to enter this region without a permit. ILP made these hills inaccessible without a permit.

In addition, there was no participation with the other parts of India in the struggle for Independence. There was least effort of a unified mobilisation in this area. The nationalistic ardour for freedom in other parts of India was not communicated. All these factors had contribution in the feeling of separated-ness and non-inclusiveness on the part of the Nagas. Therefore, a conscious will and struggle for a separate State intensified prior to India's Independence.

Further, the Akbar Hydari nine-point agreement of 1947 which proposed the decentralisation of administration to the Naga National Council (NNC), with special powers regarding land and its resources, though considered saw a major opposition from a section of members of the NNC. This pacification project of the Indian government to erase the secessionist growth proved unsuccessful.

Possible Factors for Any Secession

Viva Ona Bartkus in *The Dynamic of secession* says that the foremost essential factors for secession are - "distinct community, territory, leaders and discontent." The secessionist struggle of the Nagas is coloured with all these four elements which helped to create and maintain a unifying force amongst them.

These Hills Called Home

Ao's *These Hills Called Home* transports us to the crucial times of the Naga struggle followed by the emergence of insurgency, the assimilation project of the Indian Government in relation to Nagaland and unprecedented violence. The subtitle of the text is "Stories from a War Zone." It declares that it was not merely a clash or conflict but a war on a greater plane

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between the Indian Government and the Nagas. This directs the reader to understand the severity of the tension and situation with the help of the stories. The role of force and power employed by the Indian Government to counter the “Naga problem” becomes animate in these stories. Through this text, Ao has showed the nationalistic sentiment that blew in the heart of and mobilised every Naga- men, women, old and young for a unified struggle for independence from India.

i) Adoption of force for the sake of the greater assimilation project

The boycott of Nehru’s visit in 1953 resulted in the deportation of Indian army in the 1950s in the Naga Hills. Harish Chandola writes that when members of Naga National Council arrived to welcome Nehru, the police drove “the Nagas away with their whips...The whiplashes of the mounted police had broken the link of fellow feeling between the Naga and the Indian people.” (Chandola 17)

More and more armies were sent to counter the “Naga problem” and the atrocities committed by the Indian army heightened. The arrests, burning of villages, encounters and rapes turned the day to day living of people into a grotesque atmosphere. In retaliation to these exploitation, many Nagas went underground to fight the unjust treatment and brutality.

The Jungle Major

In The Jungle Major, Punaba, a mere driver, who lives a happy life with his wife, Khatila, goes missing one fine day only to return as the “Jungle Major.” Through the character of Punaba, the rush of nationalism which touched the most remote part and the ordinary life can be seen. Khatila also projects the strength and courage in dealing with the questions and suspicion of the army officials being a wife of an underground Major. The strength of her character becomes a representative of any woman whose life is touched by the presence of an underground member, faces frequent visitations by the Indian army and at any point refuses to give in to their pressure by crafting words devoid of information without enraging them.

Disturbed Areas Act

The project of assimilation after Independence was crucial to the foundation and survival of India as an Independent State. Naga nationalism was seen as anti-nationalistic

movement by India and it declared this hilly region as “disturbed areas” in 1958 with AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in effect. This gave a license to the Indian army to shoot, arrest or interrogate anyone on ground of suspicion and no warrant was required. With AFSPA, situation worsened, and chaos engulfed the region and this resulted in losing complete faith in the Indian Government.

Saoba

The story, Saoba portrays a character called Saoba as an idiot, who is unaware of the world and disinterested in everything except for food, shelter, and clothes. He is employed by the writer as a witness to the tortures that his fellow Nagas underwent during interrogation by the army. Through a hole in his room, he “heard the agonised screams of the detainee.” (Ao 14) Saoba could hear the screams alongside music of a record player emanating from the same room. The music was played to whitewash the tortured screams. This picture is not only brutal but sadistic.

Futility of Armed Forces

Harish Chandola in his book, The Naga Story, tells us about the futility of the armed forces and their existence as perpetrators of violence rather than peace agents as they were unfamiliar with the region and the people. A sense of confusion gripped them and they sought “reign of terror” by burning villages and torturing young boys, who never returned home.

An Old Man Remembers

Imli and Shasi in **An Old Man Remembers** are one of the many instances where, fear of Indian army leaves no option for young lads but hide themselves and become a part of the jungle. There existed a section of youth, who joined the underground willingly for the cause but the rest who joined it were etched by the Indian army phobia. There is no choice but a question of survival.

Naga Independence Movement

The violence in these hills confused the people regarding the plans of the Indian Government. They were afraid, infuriated and doubtful. The underground group grew stronger with more and more Nagas joining the cause and with the support of the villagers... “The

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Independence movement was gaining momentum by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved...” (Ao 25)

Force as a medium to assimilate the Nagas was not only a failure but it marked the emergence of one of the existing problems in the Northeast, that is, insurgency. Violence breeds violence and the emergence of Naga underground group, NSCN (National Socialist Council of Ngalim) proves it. It emerged as the first armed struggle in the history of Independent India. The inadequacy of understanding on the part of the Indian Government has filled the Naga struggle for Independence with bloodshed and terror... “The subject of independence became a public talk; young people spoke of the exploits of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of “patriotic” warriors to liberate their homeland from foreign rule.” (Ao 3) These lines clearly reflect the sentiment of the Naga people and their eye for India as “foreign.” The struggle of the Nagas was reckoned as insurgency, sub-nationalism and to an extent, anti-nationalism. It is however, a matter of perspective and convenience. In the same manner, as India wanted freedom from British rule, the Nagas were ready to fight for their independence from Indian rule.

ii) **Force against force and the common lives**

The Naga Underground group became active extensively to counter the violence unleashed by the Indian army. Therefore, the former and the latter had spies of their own, who brought news to them of the ongoing or next movement of its adversary.

The Curfew Man

The Curfew Man is one such instance. Satemba, the tale carrier worked at night and informed the Indian army about the upcoming plans of the Naga “freedom fighters” during the curfew time. There were many akin to Satemba on both sides during the war times on whom, the dependency increased to keep a vigil so as to minimise one’s casualties and maximise other’s.

In this atmosphere of unrest and vigilance, the common people were the one to suffer the most on everyday basis continuing a chaotic and absurd living. New words entered their vocabulary – curfew, interrogation, encounter, convoy, concentration camps, etc. Such

treatments by Indian government alienated the Nagas further. The trust pillar collapsed before it was built.

The villages which were suspected to help the underground group were punished severely to the extent of forcing the villagers in concentration camps surrounded by barbed wires. The Nagas were denied freedom in their own land with a bonus of punishment. Their lives were confined with no access, their freedom was out of question and the uncertainty of life hovered, which could end at any point. The whole picture can be viewed as humiliating and dictatorial.

Dignity Crushed

The Chiefs and representatives of different Naga clans were given an equal treatment. Their dignity was crushed under the boots of the Indian army... “They pushed and shoved the pastor and the gaonburas, prodding them with the butts of their guns toward the waiting jeeps below the steps of the church.” (Ao 26). Therefore, problem solving discussions were not initiated as the answer to every problem was force. The Indian army saw the Nagas, whether underground or a commoner with the same eye, to be controlled. Another important issue was the safety of the youths in the presence of the suspecting Indian army. The youths were not safe in their own land. The story, *An Old Man Remembers* shows how fear of the army pushes two young boys from their homes to the jungle. Imli and Shashi never considered joining the underground group but the only survival decision left was to join.

The Last Song

In addition, the inhuman act of the Indian army against women is projected in *The Last Song*. Apenyo, a musical prodigy was born to sing and was called the ‘singing beauty’ of the village but growing up in the “troubled times” didn’t greet her talent well. The forces of Indian army “were determined to ‘teach’ all those villages the consequences of ‘supporting’ the rebel cause by paying ‘taxes’.” (Ao 26) At the occasion of dedication Sunday of a new church building (declare formally), Apenyo’s village was the target and the villagers had no warning or knowledge about the disaster that was to follow. The pastors, gaonburas and the villagers were assaulted. Bullets were shot in every direction but the dissatisfied army finally reached a decision to set the church on fire, where the villagers took refuge.

The most moving scene, however, was the leader of the army dragging Apenyo by the hair and raping her “while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn.” (28) Libeni, Apenyo’s mother arrived for her daughter and was raped too and “by the time the fourth one mounted, the woman was already dead.”(28) These were how the Naga people were punished, which was an attempt by the forces “to demonstrate ...what happens when you ‘betray’ your own government.” (Ao 26) The rape of Apenyo and Libeni shows not only violence against women but the vulnerability of women in troubled times as the easiest target and also, the assertion of power on the part of the rapists. The bullets, assaults, rape and burning of church is an evident working and assertion of power through force.

Victimized from Both Sides

The villages however, became victimised not from only one side but the other too. The villages were burnt, the villagers were tortured, and the chiefs stripped off their honour for housing and supplying food to the underground group. But if they stopped fearing the army, their heads were at the gunpoint from the jungle.

The solution to the agenda of assimilation became the inclusion and effort to murder the Nagas, burn their villages, rape the women, chasing the youths to the jungle and in the process, strangle Naga nationalism. The focus seemed not on finding a solution for the Nagas but to increase their problems by restricting their everyday routine and assimilate them through forcible means until they submit to the wish of the Indian government and give up their demand for secession.

iii) Emergence of a New Class

With the arrival of army and for their convenient movements, roads were built, outposts and camps came into existence. Therefore, the need for contractors, food suppliers and spies was born. A new class of Naga emerged — contractors, suppliers, beauracrats, etc. who highly depended on the Indian government for prospering economically. A few educated Nagas turned bureaucrats and acted as administrative and political pawns of the Indian government, lured by position and money.

A New Chapter

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A New Chapter deals with such development in this war zone, called “army contractors.” This new class “were poised to make their fortunes from the spoils of the war.” Bendangnungsang delivered supplies to army and was the person who had the right “connections” in that circle. This story also churns out the corruption that runs in an army establishment. When Bendangnungsang fails to profit much, his friend Bhandari fixes his meeting with the N.C.O. in- charge. Bhandari tutors and tells him that the tender items are for army officers whereas, the supplies for the army soldiers are of low or substitute quality. The N.C.O. was convinced with the arrangement “for a considered sum.” This doubled the profit of his business.

The Night

Alemba, the young contractor in **The Night** stands as a representative of “that new breed of high school dropouts who mingled with young engineers and were given small contracts.” (Ao 47)

Boss in Saoba

The character of Boss in *Saoba* is another instance of an opportunistic attitude in times of unrest. The promise of good fortune and power has turned Boss against his own fellow Naga people by developing a mutual friendship with the army. The army uses him to curb “the influence of the rebel movement.” Boss’s house was used for “proper interrogation” and was visited by “Army bigwigs and senior administrative officers.” Satemba in *The Curfew Man* works as a spy for the army and moves around regardless and fearless during curfew hours. He is an asset for the army and in return, he receives favours.

These groups were the one whom the war affected the least and emerged as the most safe and prospering class away from nationalistic fervour, closer to personal gains.

Political vs Military

Indian Government perceived the “political” problem as “military” and its effects in Nagaland has been recreated in detail by Ao in her collection of stories. As a writer from Nagaland, these turbulent decades become a responsibility to be depicted rather than a material for her work. These situations take us back to the war times — India’s nation building process,

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the related budding pressure and apprehensions, effects of the actions undertaken without understanding, the resulting gap widening between the Indian government and the Nagas. The most important being the lasting traumatising impact on the Naga psyche regarding the government. Ao has captured in her book the most essential and important shades of the struggle of Naga Nationalism, its effect on the Naga way of life, Naga psyche and its attitude towards Indian government.

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