

## **ASSAMESE LITERATURE AND CULTURE: FEATURES UNKNOWN TO THE WORLD.**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In the past, Assam had the most valuable assets of literature and it is no more the less now but its worth is more or less hidden from the world at large. Feminism is still prevailing in Assam as it was years ago and it requires ERA as in United States is [the need of our country]. The freedom of imagination individualism and sense of humanism was the hallmark in Romantic Period. The characteristics of romanticism were first visible in Assamese literature and since a long time.

Temsula Ao a well known writer , talks about her life, books and contemporary society. She is one of the women writers of Northeast India who writes about her own traditional belief. She delineates them with their swing of mood and flow of joy and sorrow. The first story of this collection Laburnum for My Head' shows a strong obsession of women. In North East India a good number of novels have been written based on life and society of the tribes. Temsula believed that only women sensitivity would be the fit vehicle to advocate such revolutionary concept in patriarchal society.

Key Words: Feminism, Patriarchy, epiphany, ecofeminism ,Regional and cultural identity, ethnical heterogeneous, alienation, responsibility

### **Aims and Objectives:**

This article is written to validate that the cultural objective is always energetic. It is to show the impact of an idea that can transform the complete identification of a clan. It is to focus on liberal, cultural, social and eco -feminist perspective .It will present how Temsula, Ao points out the questions of religious identity and also the prolonged rules of the gun. It will show that the advent of modernity, the past tradition and culture are being forgotten with the dilemma that has been faced by everyone due to the political effects. It aims to identify, why the northeast has long been on the fringe of mainstream of literary consciousness by its crises of identity.

## Literature Review:

Temsula Ao's , in her book "Laburnum for My Head", collects the myth, folktales, rituals, law and belief system. She describes the agonies and aspiration of the Nagas with deep understanding and compassion in her fictional work. She believed, only women sensitivity would be the fit vehicle to advocate such a revolutionary concept in patriarchal society.

Dr. Nizara Hazarika , in his book "Colonial Assam and Women Writing" , explores the colonial period and various issues pertaining to women lives and how they started their literary articulation . He presents the advent of colonialism and emergence of a gradual change in socio – political sphere of Assam. It created a new mind set for the women who can easily move from private sphere to public sphere.

### INTRODUCTION:

Temsula Ao is a short story writer and ethnographer. She is a retired professor of English in North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), where she taught since 1975 .In 2013 she received the Sahitya Academy Award for her short story collection, Laburnum for My Head. She has published five poetic works. She collected the myths, folktales, rituals, legal ideas, and custom based system. This ethnographic work was published in 1999 as Ao –Naga oral tradition from Bhasha Publication, Baroda. She is presently the Chairperson of Nagaland State Commission for Women.

She delineated the agonies and aspiration of her own people the Nagas with deep understanding and compassion in her fictional work. Her terms refer to tragic circumstances that were faced by our families while we are very young. She came in contact with the Native American and she learned about their culture, heritage and especially their oral tradition. Laburnum for My Head is not actually about any protagonist but an idea and commentary on an evolving society's treatment of death and all related pomp and ostentation attached to it. The character Lentina is not based on any real person, it was created because Temsula Ao believed that only women sensitivity would be the fit vehicle to advocate such a revolutionary concept in patriarchal society.

The representation of the cultural identity is always energetic; it can never be isolated because her every story creates a new meaning and new construct. It identifies the transforming which

makes a change. Her writing address important issues like question of regional and cultural identity in a land with ethnic diversity. The North East has been on the mainstream consciousness by its complex socio politics and crises of identity and prolonged rule of the gun. Weaving her magic in the art of storytelling, her stories run the gamut of emotions. She intricates relationship between nature and women in her short story collection *Laburnum for My Head*. Her analysis of women characters would remain incomplete if we fail to realize what the nature wants.

Just there is not one feminism or ecofeminism. It shows the basics of feminism nature, and the understanding of which is crucial. Liberal , cultural, social and socialist feminism have all been concerned with improving the human nature relationship and each contributed to an ecofeminist perspective. In North East India a good number of novels have been written based on the life and society of the tribes. Assamese novels, representing different tribes of the North East fetched various regional and national recognition.

In Assam the handloom sector contributes significantly to the economy of the states. In 1946, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Sualkuchi village, he watched the weavers in their looms and said, "Assamese women weave dreams on their looms". Besides all these Assamese were well expert and rich in traditions of craft like bamboo craft , ivory work, wood craft , jewellery making; and as we all know that Tea is the major crop in Assam. Assam contributes about 51% of tea produced in India. The Assamese culture is rich and exotic and of many races which evolved after a long assimilative process. Bihu is the most popular festival of Assam and it gives the special essence also. Their supreme God is 'Brai Shibrail' wishing of peace and property. Another dance form during Bihu is 'Husori' ;it is a kind of carol singing by a group of young man and woman .This dance party visits the houses from one end of the village to the other, singing Husori songs with the religious themes on the beat of drums, cymbals and a bamboo instrument called 'toka'. Bihu dancer wear traditional colorful Assamese clothing, the women wear mekhela- sador, riha and the men wear dhoti kurta made of muga silk. The Assamese attire come out live here.

In language and literature folk tales and folk songs among various tribes provide foundation to the Assamese literature. Some literature based mantras also contributed to the process Bangeet, Bihu geet, Diha Naam and Biha Naam in written form have become a part of Assamese literature. On the other side, Ojapali, Dhulia Nach and Putala Nach helped in dramatic literature. In the Old Assamese literature, several writers of the thirteen century brought the Vaishnava Renaissance in Assamese.

Further , the Ahoms encourage writing of chronically entitled *Buranji* and introduced new kind of prose literature. The first Assamese journal *Orunodoi* (1846) inspired new writer. Another

journal Jonaki published in (1889) which helps in the progress of Assamese Literature. Late Chandra Kumar Agarwal with his weekly Asamiya (1918-58) followed by its daily editions under the editorship of Debakanta Barua and published from Guwahati contributed to Assamese literature.

The modern Assamese Literature has also been enriched by the work of Jyoti Prasad Agarwal, Nalini Bala Devi, and many others. The complete work of Jyoti Prasad Agarwal translated into Hindi by Devi Prasad Bagrodia and she also translated Srimanta Sankardevas Gunamala into Hindi. Many Assamese writers have secured national awards for their literary works from Sahitya Akademy. In 1917, Assam Sahitya Sabha formed an Assamese society and forum for development of Assamese Language and Literature.

.The writer contemplates markers of existence in Laburnum for My Head stories. She delivers the almost first experience of the happening in the region in the writing at the same time. The writer expressed the strong political, crises of identity and the rule of gun. It is an attempt of looking back to find the answer to today's troubling questions.

Stories live in every heart, some get told ,many others remain unheard- stories about individual experiences made universal by imagination; stories that are joke, and sometimes prayers ;and those that are not always a figment of the mind but are at times, confession because stories live in every heart, some get told, like the ones of these page ..(Ao Temsula. Laburnum for my Head, 1)

Weaving her magic in the art of storytelling, her story runs the gamut of emotions. Ethnicity is fundamental in human life; it is phenomenon in human experiences. These experiences direct at the issues impertinent to the heart. Issues like nation, nationality, identity, home, country and belongingness increases its demand in acknowledgement with the onset of modernity. It is rich in culture and lifestyle that still in trivial matters illumines the hidden fact of life.

The representation of the culture is always dynamic. It can never be isolated identity behind the particular world views. Every story, every learner has different point of views and their different opinion, but their ideals are constantly transforming. The representation of culture is always dynamic. It can never be isolated identity.

Dr Temsula Ao contemplates between two main existences in Laburnum for my Head Stories (2009). Her writing always points out the questions of regional identity and cultural identity in a land that has been in continuous wrap with ethnic diversity. She delivers extremely reasonable almost first hand like experience of the happening in the region in her writing that is so suggestive. Hailing from the region, she delivers an extremely sensible almost her first experience of the happening in her writing which represents the same time.

The Northeast has long been on the fringe of mainstream in literary consciousness by its socio-politics, crises of identity and the prolonged rule of the gun. Myth of common descent is powerful inducement to ethnic identification. Myths have given the elites a theme to ponder on. The Assam Movement had the support from different entities under the leadership of educated elites. Nagas do not have common myth of origin and migration. They lack common language, identical, social and cultural elements. The literature from the region is a mirror of sorrow. Issues such as ethnicity are being addressed violently today. The writer expresses the strong political awareness to interrogate the violence

In the story 'The Letter' she presents before us a complete new understanding of the so called 'national workers' by pointing out the gravity of their stand as well. There was uneasy quiet in the village; the underground extortionists had come and gone and along with them the hard earned cash the villagers had earned.

An 'armed man' who remained unnamed in the story ventures out on an emergent tax extortion in a village alone only to meet the revenge that ended tragically. Just before the visit this village had resolved that they would cease to pay the tax to the armed man and would refuse to do free labour for the government and would deject army visit by refusing to sell any of their produce to them. The situation was to be unfriendly to any outsider in order to attain the calm, placid of the simple village life.

'In the story 'Death of Hunter' Ao searches the combination of mythical views with modern. The hunting season was on and the hunters were oiling their much-used gun. The hunter was quietly humming a tuneless song, the reason for the suppressed giggled coming from adjacent shed where his daughter and niece were husking paddy. The hunters took deep breath and replied, 'who knows, May be the big boar that has been eating our best paddy these past years will make an appearance soon. I am giving my gun a thorough cleaning so that this time I do not miss his heart'.

Imchanok was teacher in the Village of Lower Primary School but that identity was long eclipsed by that of the hunter. He was trusted skilled hunters and a reputation as top hunter of the region. He had also been rewarded from the government when a rogue elephant had to be shot after it had destroyed several acres of farmland, many homesteads and walked over a number of persons to death. There were other hunters in his village and neighboring ones too, but every single one of them had declined the offers from the government. He was questioned why he was placed at the centre of the eternal contest between man and animal for dominion over the land. After that incident something remained and different behavior of Imchanok. Though entirely giving up on hunting there was an irregular doubt about hunting. Then came the rampaging boar that had become the bane of all the villagers. After some issues his health suffered and he had nightmares. They vanished only when he went to ask for forgiveness from the dead creature and connected to the pervading presence of its spirit. The role of the wife Tangchetla behind the

scene is very important. She backs her husband's every move and understands his temperament. She is the one brings him back to her embrace. The humanitarian side and love for nature is expressed in the 'Death of Hunter'.

Only Tangchetla knew what went on at night. Imchanok, the fearless hunter, would shriek out in his sleep crying, look at him, 'he is as big as barn and as a black charcoal.' Then he would begin to whimper in Tangchetla's arm 'I am afraid woman, he is going to come after me'. It took all her cajoling and consoling to coax him to sleep.

Tangchelta plays an important part in bringing her husband back to the reality from the illusive world. The supernatural atmosphere created by the supernatural existence of the dead boar changes the life of the fearless hunter, Imchanok. Never in his life he had felt any fear or for that matter felt the need of his wife comforting. Tangchelta does not overdo her duty. She plays the perfect woman in supporting husband and his anchor to bring him back to shore of life. Gayetri Chakravorty spivak uses the term 'ethnic responsibility' 'when we engaged profoundly with one person and the responses come from both sides.

Northeast India has always been mystery. Tamsula Ao gives the reason that the subsequent literature that has evolved from it as colonial construct hence is an artificial construct.

There are arguments that there is nothing called 'north eastern' as the concept which is purely geographical; it is extremely heterogeneous cluster of people and there is no existence of common history and heritage of the people in North east India. After the colonial rule there is interplay of power politics, evident even in the literature produced. Any form of writing has included a state of alienation and theme of rootlessness and to be autobiographical with the authorial intention evident. Women's writing from this area emerged very late. The space of women has drawn much attention and has been discussed. Inequality, the fact of women as being suppressed uneducated, illiterate, not emancipated underprivileged are the major issues ticking woman who has always been the victim – taken to be satisfied in her small domain of home and family at being a wife and mother. It is a universal fact.

The book of Laburnum for My Head does not shy away from such concern; it rather emphasizes the female quotient in more than one story. Every may extraordinarily happens in the cemetery dotted with concrete vanities, both ornate and simple; the humble Indian laburnum bush erupts in glory with all its blossom of yellow mellow beauty. This is how the story first begins in the book. In this Lentina was widowed after her husband passed away quietly in his sleep before any proper diagnosis could be made of his strange disease. She befriended her driver babu who had been employed for more than a year than she could remember and made him her confident. Her secret was an epiphanic sensation to have a laburnum tree planted at her grave, one which would live on over her remain instead of a silly headstone. Lentina broke all convention in confiding in an outside rover own sons and daughters about the spot where she wanted to be buried in the

cemetery. This crucial decision followed by her stretching of to Babu and leaning to him on their way back home as if they hint that a beautiful bond of intense understanding between the other was in the making. Their mother crazies did not go down well with her children ofcourse. The usurping of right by a mere driver left them sulking. Lentina pacified them with deft and crafty manipulation of her knowledge. Likewise; she also satisfied the members of town committee over issues about 'ownership' of her plot, settling it on her own terms. Later, in ripe old age after bouts of illness which could not deter her determination to see the laburnum for her head bloom before she breathed her last; she proceeded on her apparently routine outing that eventually turned out to her last to see the phenomenon she had waited all her life; the sight of the luxuriant blossom on her small laburnum tree. On reaching home shakes hand with babu, thanking and blessing him, as it is a symbolic gesture to endthe bond which had bonded the two because after that day, Lentina had a self- imposed isolation for five days and retired from life, a satisfied 'patriarchal women' whose self confidence and assertiveness undermined the qualities of women as self effacing and being submissive.

The next morning when she knocked on Lentina's door with the morning tea, there was no answer. She knocked again but again it is silence. She entered the room and found Lentina stretched on the bed; she seemed to the sleeping soundly. Putting the tray on the bed side table, the maid said gently, 'Madam, I'vebrought tea.' She went and drew the curtains as usual but when she came near the bed, she noticed certain stiffness in the body and an unusual palouron the lady's face. Distinctly alarmed, she went out urgently called the others, the sons, their wives and the entire servants. They all came rushing, except Babu who stood near a post, crying like a baby.

Lentina attempted at self representation , to be understood "a transaction between speaker and listener",the subaltern speaking, which is indeed 'something extraordinary'. So, ends the story of the un- dramatic life of an ordinary woman who cherished one single passionate wish that a humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown.

More than half a century of bloodshed has marked the history of the Naga people who live in the troubled northeastern region of India. Their struggle for an independent Nagaland and their quest for identity provide the backdrop for the stories inAo' s earlier book *These Hills Called Homes* and also in *Laburnum for My Head*. Ao's work comes as both refreshing and daunting. She details a way of life that has embraced modernization yet considering not losing the tribal context. It accounts a crucial period in the history of the Naga people that almost reshaped it. Most of the culture and lifestyle have indeed undergone a tremendous change. However, the rich legacy is carried on through her work. The crux of the book is its role as a cross cultural bridge, the indigenous flavor that its reader may have deeper experience of the culture and of life style of naga people. It holds on to the ethnic sensibility without giving away the modernization effects

in life. This crisis is what Ao's characters in the stories face repeatedly affecting their lives, relationships, their belongingness and their identity. The writer has taken note of the changing trends in the tribal society as it comes into the contact with modernity. The changes are brought about by modern education and political system coupled with new culture influences through different forms of life and its representation. There are multiple layers that the writer brings out about her belief in cultural identity who is enlightened Ao nagas. The book gives inspiration, providing details of what made the person what she is. It is almost like running commentary of a life in a society, at particular time. The book also is like a guide to that particular period of time, an illumination of the society, in the backdrop of every character's association with time and society, with ritualistic details at some points to attempt the projections of the tradition and ancient customs. With the advent of modernity, the past tradition and culture are being forgotten with the dilemma facing everyone being a political one. The wish of the Naga tribe to live as a homogeneous tribe faces an uncertain future. Ao reasons the practice adopted by the 'national workers' and a common people alike survive and be known as a unique ethnic entity. Due to lacking of resources she tries to portray and make her reader to understand. Using the process of fiction writing, her works may be inspired by facts or certain events, she maintains a certain amount of freedom that fiction writing gives. Her fiction mirrors Assamese literature in multi dimensional colour and universality.

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