



High Impact Factor 8.1458 ISSN



Vol. 9, No. 1

CLRI Feb 2022



Double-blind
peer reviewed



Referred Journal



GENERAL IMPACT FACTOR

& More

Page 99-113

An Intersectional Approach to Gender in the Select Short Stories of Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*

L. Priyadharshini¹

PhD Research Scholar, Department of English & Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. B. Padmanabhan²

Assistant Professors, Department of English & Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Tamil Nadu.

Abstract:

The conceptualisation of examining the layers of multiple societal identities, behaviors and social meanings associated with men, women, or transgender binds to construct the entity “gender”. Gendered stereotypes are socialized across cultures thus, inducing subjugations and oppressions at various levels of the society. The primary objective of the paper is to investigate the chosen literary text with different aspects of intersectionality, under the perspective of gendered subalternity, experienced by the female characters of Naga tribes portrayed in the work. Further, the article interprets the horrendous turmoil of gendered marginalisation and discrimination imposed by the authoritative bureaucrats of the nation state through physical abuses and social customary laws against tribal women. The ways that the patriarchal view and the prevalence of unbalanced power relations in the society shatter the intersectional identities of tribal women are discussed in detail. Temsula Ao's short stories “The Last Song” and “The Night” from the collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* are chosen to construe with the thematic notions of intersectionality.

Keywords: Gender, intersectionality, Naga tribal women, gendered subalternity, power relations.

Introduction

The notions of gender as a constructed entity attribute to perform divergent facets of femininity, masculinity and queer. “...gender is culturally and socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women and men” (Niumai 347) that determines the gender disparities in various levels of the society. In the hierarchically structured system, gender difference is inevitable in order to impose power and authority. The patriarchal system of subordinating women in all aspects shatters their various

intersectional identities such as gender, race, class, nationality, sex, age and other dimensions of subordination. The present paper focuses on the tribal women of Naga society to uncover the intersectional discrimination committed to them by the society. Nagaland is identified as a zone of insurgencies and conflicts comprising of numerous tribes practicing their ethnic, cultural, and traditional values. These tribes sense that they are socially excluded from the main land because of their complex cultural patterns. Though the tribes are subjected to multiple forms of oppression from both the nation state and the armed rebels, it is the women who are doubly subjugated. Women of indigenous communities are more prone to gendered marginalization both within and outside of their groups. The article employs the concept of intersectionality to discuss the gendered subalternity experienced by the female characters from the select short stories in *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. Women characters are portrayed with multiple identities that overlap with one other which leads to their yielding to the dominant power structures to take control over them. Stephanie A. Shields states, “Intersectionality first and foremost reflects the reality of lives. The facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others” (304). Therefore, focusing from the perspective of gender, the intersectional aspect of a woman is the representation of her various forms of realities, of numerous identities in association with that of the social environment and behavior. The predicaments faced by the women characters in the chosen short stories, “The Last Song” and “The Night” are intersectionally approached to understand the gender disparities obtrude invariably by the strangers and by their own clans men, at different levels of the society.

Review of Literature

The short story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* projecting the tumultuous lives of the Naga tribes has

been subjected to interpretation from diverse perspectives. The customs, traditions and living conditions of the Nagas, the indigenous tribes of poor economical and social status, were studied with the notions of subalternity, cultural imposition and political domination. A research on the unheard voices of the Nagas was conducted under the aspect of political violence through the characters in the stories. The female characters were also discussed in particular. The insurgencies and identity discourses embedded in the stories were explored. The act of social exclusion and ethnic crisis confronted by the Naga people were discussed. The review of literature clearly expounds that the chosen work has been studied under the general concepts of insurgency, subalternity, marginalization, hierarchal oppression, and societal exclusion. Thus, a suitable research gap has been identified to approach the chosen text with the conceptual framework of intersectionality to locate the dimensions of gendered social inequalities confronted by the tribal women at various levels of the society. This study of intersectional investigation of the select short stories is to understand the overlapping of the orientations of gender, class, religion, and other social and cultural identities as collective factors for the supremacy to foist their power over the impoverished tribal Naga women in India's north Eastern region.

Intersectionality – A Theoretical Approach

The term 'intersectionality' is a concept propounded by Kimberle' Crenshaw in the year 1989, drawn from the Critical Race Theory and Black feminism movement to explicate the colour discrimination and marginalisation confronted particularly by Black Women. The formulation of this concept has become the catalyst in the field of gender studies. Crenshaw in one of her essays articulates that,

I have used intersectionality to describe or frame various relationships between race and gender. I have used intersectionality as a way to articulate the interaction of

racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism. (1265)

Patricia Hill Collins defines intersectionality as “matrix of domination” (231) that emphasis oppression and power imposed over minority and subjugated women communities is not a linear process, rather it involves multiple societal ideologies of race, class and gender. The overlapping of these elements delineates to hierarchal disparities in the society contributing to victimisation of the marginalised women. Later, this notion took several shapes by various critics and theorists. Though the movement initially sprouted to claim justice for women as a feministic approach, gradually it gained attention in all interdisciplinary domains to claim equivocal rights for every human who remain prone to social and political vulnerabilities. The layers of the focal point of intersectional discourses are not only restricted to race, class and gender of an individual or a community. But also encompasses nationality, religion, sex, citizenship, politics, socio-economic status, ethnicity, etc. The intersection of these multiple identities of an individual or a group can facilitate both empowerment and persecution. While empowerment is the representation of the growth of a nation, the dimensions of persecution initiate imbalanced turbulences in the society. In India, tribals are considered as the most primitive inhabitants of the land and they possess rich ethnic patterns but, unfortunately excluded by the mainstream society because of their innocence and unfamiliar cultural practices. The cases of indigenous women are more pathetic when viewed under the lens of gendered aspects. Hence, this research employs intersectionality as a research paradigm to explore the gendered oppression confronted by the indigenous (Naga) women because of the differences in power relations and diverse intersecting elements of subjugation both within and outside of their community.

Indigenous Women and Intersectionality

Tribes and indigenous clans are scattered across the world and their experiences of hardships for their survival and equivocal justice from the hands of the power holding agencies in the societies are innumerable. Tribes of a nation are always at the periphery of the society because of their poor social and economical status. The mainstream nation neglects their participation and contribution to the society owing to their distinct cultural and traditional patterns. India's north east is one such geographical area comprising of multiple indigenous communities whose lives oscillate within the political wickedness of the nation state. Viewing through the prism of gendered subalternity, tribal women being trapped in the conflict zones of northeast India are doubly oppressed than tribal men. This is due to the unbalanced power relational systems, under the category of gendered difference as men and women. Patricia Hill Collins states "In particular, gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities" (qtd. in Shields 301). Thus, an individual's social identities are deeply dependent on the networks of intersectional configurations of power at various spectrums of the society. In the cases of Naga tribal women, their everyday experiences of patriarchal upheavals are innumerable, both within their familial sphere and of insurrectional consequences. Insecure and subjugated lives of these women's social and personal identities are shaped by the hierarchal systems rather than women themselves. Kimberle Crenshaw remarks that "Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination-that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different" (1242). Hence, these biases anchored on various identities of women often tend to suppress them in all possible ways thereby, threatening their identities.

The Last Song

In the short story collection, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, the third story “The Last Song” is all about the brutal struggles of the young Naga tribal girl Apenyo and her widow mother Libeni. Apenyo is a girl of strong determination and extremely passionate for singing songs. Widowed Libeni was forced by her own relatives to get betrothed with another man for their security in future. “But Libeni would not listen and when they repeatedly told her to think about it seriously, she asked them never to bring up the subject again.” (Ao 24). Forcing the widows to remarry itself is an aspect of gendered subjugation built by the societal taboos. The patriarchal idea that women’s life should be at the shadows of men is highly a constructed phenomena shattering the self and social identities of women. An individual’s social identity has immense influence on their perceptions, understandings and experiences of gender making it fundamental to study gender within the framework of power relations deep-rooted in particular social identities” (Dey 4). Gender as one of the specific social identity, constructed by the ideologies of power relations echoes the inequalities in gender.

In the case of the fictional characters Apenyo and Libeni, their fate is decided by the nation state’s aggressive political take on them and their fellow villagers. Their lives are monitored and controlled based on their gender, race and sex. It was the troubled times of Naga insurgency which caused brutal violence between the Naga rebels and the nation state. The armed soldiers treated the Naga tribes mercilessly and caused irrevocable damage to their lives. Though, both men and women suffered horrendously, it was women whose agonies were massive solely because of their gender. Gender in the views of Laura Sjoberg is “...often described a social construct, an institutionalized entity or artifact in a social system invented or constructed by a particular or society that exists because people

agree to behave as if it exists or to follow certain conventional rules” (5).

Rape and physical abuses were the tools, the patriarchal men impose, to marginalize women and to flag men's social power. In the chosen story, when the villagers gathered to celebrate the ceremony of inaugurating the new church building, military men barged into the location to “arrest all the leaders for their ‘crime’ of paying taxes to the underground forces.” (Ao 26). The chaotic village was left insecure encountering beatings and gun fires. The scene of Apenyo and her mother being treated brutally was horrible as the superior power deconstructed the identities of these two characters from women to bodily disabled creatures. “When she came upon the scene at last, what she saw turned her stomach: the young Captain was raping Apenyo while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn”(Ao 28). Apenyo has become a bodily paralyzed girl that she could not resist the cruel violence imposed on her. Libeni's effort to rescue her daughter ended in vain. The officials “bashed her head on the hard ground several times knocking her unconscious and raped her limp body” (Ao 28). Bell Hooks observes, “Being oppressed means the *absence of choices*. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor” (Hooks 5). Because of the lack of resistance against the crimes committed to them, a weak gendered space is produced that becomes the medium for the superiority to suppress them. Gendered discrimination is sprouted in the society because of

... the belief that women are lesser than and should be subordinate to men leads men to feel entitled to rape women. Additionally, the patriarchal view of women as men's property underwrites the notion that rape is simply part of the legitimate bounty of war: the winners would be seen as entitled to take their opponents' women, just as they would loot other property. (DeLargy 61)

Thus, rape is construed not as a crime, but as a tool of patriarchal domination to be enforced during the time of conflicts or war to exert their power over women. More than being a woman the other dimension of class system becomes the parameters for the social power to construct gendered subalternity. The violence and predicaments faced by Apenyo and her mother are not only because of their identity of gender but also the social class of impoverished tribal nature. The superior powers are constructed based on the existence of pluralistic gendered endeavours.

The intersectionality perspective emphasises that an individual's social identity exerts particular influences on the individual's beliefs and experiences of gender making it essential to understand gender within the context of power relations. (Dey and Orton 3)

The network of power relations in the society are experienced through gendered perspective of intersectionality which “create both oppression and opportunity” (Shields 302). Unfortunately, the opportunities of women are muted by the hegemonic structure. Thus, the overlapping of intersectional categories of gender and class tend to locate women at the periphery of the society solely because of their physical embodiment as women.

The Night

Nagaland is a state of distinct indigenous clans and strictly follows the patriarchal patterns of social and cultural laws within the communities. The power relations are distributed unequally among the tribes; hence the Naga men hold dictative authority over their women folks. I Watitula Longkumer remarks,

... indigenous Naga woman is twice subjugated: by the patriarchal social system on the one hand, and on the other, by the stringent tribal laws and customs that restrict her participation in larger social activities by limiting her resources and opportunities. (8)

Restrained from freedom, Naga women are allowed to perform only their household chores and are detained from taking part in social scenarios. Dr. Kc Adaina in an essay mentions that,

A Naga woman lives in silence for most part of her life. She is the daughter in her father's home, a sister to her brother, wife to her husband in her husband's family, mother to her children and so on. In most of these roles, she has no voice of her own. (7-8)

Hence, Naga women are tuned to the laws of their communities because of the socially preordained structure of unequal power which has become the source of differential treatment for women and men. Shields rightly points out that intersectionality is “the mutually constitute relations among social identities” (301).

The short story “The Night” is one such story that revolves around the young Naga woman named Imnala, who is cursed with the illegitimate child by one of her own clansmen who abandoned her as a destitute woman. Bearing a fatherless child in such a conditioned society and its consequences had twisted her future as topsy-turvy. “Imnala became pregnant out of wedlock for the second time. The village was agog with the news and tongues began to wag: ‘What can you expect from a girl like that? The old man’s greed has landed him with a second bastard grandchild’” (Ao 50). It was twice that the unfortunate situation transpired in the life of Imnala at different stages of her life, which are not only her subjective sufferings, but greatly haunt her family members also. Imnala’s father with heavy heart utters “My family has once again become the object of ridicule.” (Ao 51). Nilda Rimonte observes that, “in the Asian community, saving the honor of the family from shame is a priority” (qtd. in Crenshaw 1257). But Crenshaw reinstates that, “Unfortunately, this priority tends to be interpreted as obliging women not to scream rather than obliging men not to hit.” (1257). Though Imnala’s family was subjected to shame; they prioritise their family’s honour by condemning Imnala by saying “Keep your mouth shut tonight girl if you don’t want the sky to fall on you and

the child in your stomach” (Ao 53). It is the societal stereotype that intrigues people to condition and suppress women but not men.

In Naga practices, it is only the men have the power to take decisions for all issues. Monalisa Changkija in a newspaper article mentions “you can take the man out of the village but you can’t take the village out of man!” (qtd. in I Watitula Longkumer 23). In the case of Innala, the decision making was left to the village administration. The family was much worried about the words and decision of the village. It indicates that the cultural and traditional practices also delineate to the oppressions in the society. “There were instances where under similar circumstances a girl’s hair was chopped off and her clothes striped off ‘to shame her’” (Ao 55). These kind of cruel practices are imposed only on the female gender of the community exerting their patriarchal power over them. Though both the genders involved in the illegitimate action, it is only the female which is subjected to blame.

“Come what may” (Ao 54) Innala busted out with rage that she is determined to bring up her children who are born out of wedlock. But her mother’s words “Remember, in our society a woman must have the protection of a man even if he happens to be blind or lame. A woman alone will always be in danger.” (Ao 53) are a caution towards female gender thereby, projecting them as dependent and weaker section in the society. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir 281). Therefore, the social laws and justice patterns coerce women always to be dependent on men and to live with the identities of men. The constructed gendered discrepancies manipulate the intersectional identities of women and the overlapping of these entities forbid them to shape their lives.

Conclusion

The network of social experiences has its influence in shaping the identities of an individual. Every human being has equal rights in uplifting the society. But the spread of unbalanced power relations

in the society has lead to gender disparities and subjugation. Men and women differences always exist in every sphere of human lives. Therefore, analyzing the lives of tribal women, their experiences are dreadful forced by both outsiders and insiders. The intersectional marginalization and oppression of these poor women are due to their multiple identities of race, class, gender, nation, sex, etc. The brutal physical violence and customary laws that dehumanize the values of women of a particular community are the representation of patriarchal systems of injustice. Crenshaw opines that the “Intersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment” (1249). Thus, the overlapping of the preordained burdens of a woman is established to dominate and exclude them socially by the hegemonic power. Any illegal or unlawful acts committed by a man are not investigated seriously and did not impact their family. But, as Senator David Boren remarks that the

Violence against women affects not only those who are actually beaten and brutalized, but indirectly affects all women. Today, our wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and colleagues are held captive by fear generated from these violent crimes-held captive not for what they do or who they are, but solely because of gender. (qtd. in Crenshaw 1260)

From the above statement it is understood that the “gender” plays a crucial part in the society which is ineliminable and discriminations against women not only affects the particular victim but the whole community of women gender. Men are always groomed to subjugate whereas women to be subjugated thereby strangling their multiple intersectional identities.

References

1. Adaina, Kc. "INTRODUCTION - Engendering Development Issues in Naga Society." *The Place of Women in Naga Society*, by Naga Women's Union, Guwahati, Christian Literature Centre, 2018, www.iwgia.org/images/documents/Books/The_Place_of_Women_in_Naga_Society.pdf. Accessed 5 Aug. 2021.
2. Beauvoir, Simon De. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M Parshley, edited by H.M Parshley, London: Vintage, 1997.
3. Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, pp. 1241–1299, www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?seq=25#metadata_info_tab_contents, [10.2307/1229039](https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039). Accessed 5 Aug. 2021.
4. DeLargy, Pamela. "Sexual Viloence and Women's Health in War." *Women and Wars*, edited by Carol Cohn, UK, Polity Press, 2013.
5. Dey, Adrija. "'Others' within the 'Others': An Intersectional Analysis of Gender Violence in India." *Gender Issues*, vol. 36, no. 95, 21 Mar. 2019. *Research Gate*, www.researchgate.net/publication/331938948_'Others'_Within_the_'Others'_An_Intersectional_Analysis_of_Gender_Violence_in_India, [10.1007/s12147-019-09232-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-019-09232-4). Accessed 1 June 2019.
6. Dey, Adrija, and Bev Orton. "Gender and Caste Intersectionality in India: An Analysis of the Nirbhaya Case, 16 December 2012." *Gender and Race Matter: Global Perspectives on Being a Woman*, vol. 21, 24 Aug. 2016, pp. 87–105. *SOAS Research Online*, core.ac.uk/download/pdf/161529497.pdf, [10.1108/s1529-212620160000021006](https://doi.org/10.1108/s1529-212620160000021006). Accessed 23 Aug. 2021.

7. Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory : From Margin to Center*. Second ed., London, Pluto Press, 2000, p. 5.
8. Longkumer, I Watitula. *Naga Wome's Perspectives on Gender Roles: An Analysis of Literary Narratives*. New Delhi, Zubaan, 2019, zubaanprojects.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SPF-2018-Grant-Papers-Naga-Womens-Perspectives-On-Gender-Roles.pdf. Accessed 23 Aug. 2021.
9. Niumai, Ajailiu. "Gender among the Nagas of North East India." *Gender Lens: Women's Issues and Perspectives*, edited by Rekha Pande, India, Rawat Publisher, 2015, pp. 346–376.
10. Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Abningdon, Oxon ; New York, Ny, Routledge, 1990.
11. Shields, Stephanie A. "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective." *Sex Roles*, vol. 59, no. 5-6, 18 July 2008, pp. 301–311, link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11199-008-9501-8, [10.1007/s11199-008-9501-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9501-8).
12. Sjoberg, Laura. *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*. New York Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 5.
13. T Ao. *These Hills Called Home Stories from a War Zone*. New Delhi Zubaan, 2006.

Ms. L. Priyadharshini

Ms. L. Priyadharshini is a doctoral scholar in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Tamil Nadu. Her area of specialization is Indian Indigenous Studies (Northeast Literature). Also cleared the Nation Eligibility Test conducted by UGC on December 2018 and June 2019.

Dr. B. Padmanabhan

Dr. B. Padmanabhan is currently serving as Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University from 2011, teaching post graduate students and doing research in cognitive literary studies. His other research interests are ethnic and area studies, theatre of absurd, post-colonial and subaltern studies and digital humanities.



PRIME AT
₹ 999
PER YEAR*

amazonprime

Original Shows 1-day delivery* Ad-free Music

Join now

*T&C Apply

The advertisement features a light blue background. At the top left, a white starburst shape contains the text 'PRIME AT ₹ 999 PER YEAR*'. In the center, the 'amazonprime' logo is displayed on a dark blue rectangular background. Below the logo, three white boxes with blue borders contain the text 'Original Shows', '1-day delivery*', and 'Ad-free Music'. At the bottom center, a yellow button with a black border says 'Join now'. In the bottom right corner, the text '*T&C Apply' is written in a small, dark font.

Get Your Book Reviewed

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here.](#)

Authors & Books

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.