CHAPTER-IV

COINCIDENTAL PREDICAMENT OF NAGA AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Naga women’s experience of repression and exploitation set in the backdrop of patriarchy, customs and exploitation is the root of both their historiography and feminist discourse and can be seen as rejuvenated and reinterpreted in the perspective of feminist criticism. The theoretical structure of creative literature of Naga women writers stems from this erased and hidden historical experience of their existence. The earliest voice of women’s poetry in Tenyidie are poems of Tuonuo and Duosieü in 1945 where they composed a folk poem ‘Japan Rühuo” (Japan War) on the Japanese war and the horrors and sufferings of war, bringing into focus the battlefield of Kohima in the second world war and the defeat of the Japanese at the hands of the Borchaha (Big Boss). Colonial references to the white man, the Big Boss who protects and saves them from the Japanese. Their voices represent thousands of Naga women who were witnesses to the war and the Japanese, who according to them came with nothing but destruction and left defeated. The poem “A Kesuoü” (by Tuonuo and Duosieü) is poignant with longing for their life before marriage and the company of her age group of friends. The lonely life of a married woman, in the midst of endless warfare, all alone in the fields, suddenly
hears the sounds of songs sung by her friends carried by the wind. The poem conveys the hard work and loneliness of women who are married and sent off often to other neighbouring villages. Arranged marriages are the custom and everything is at the consent of the parents and not the girl.

Dinuo, in the nineteen fifties, finds a mixture of themes on society, life and nature. In Tenyimia, it is a strong critique on the Tenyimia people and the times and she expounds on Tenyimia society to learn to be unselfish and be good leaders, while her other poems *U Kelhou* (Our Life), *NhicuZha* (Childhood days), *Themvu* (Star), *Kesia* (Death) and *Niaki* (Sun) bring echoes of the Romantics and modern poets. *U Kelhou*, a poem about the various aspects and meaning of Life is poignantly philosophical and is a strong voice from a woman writer who believes in positive changes and that one change makes one’s own destiny. Our life can be made into dawn, our life can be made into night, our life, and we ourselves can make it. Our life, we ourselves can dismantle it. Her poem “Nhicu Zha” (Childhood Days) speaks of the innocence and happiness of childhood and compares it to the forest flower blooming alone in the dark thick forest, making a difference in other’s lives, a short life like that of songs of happiness, passing us by, in the blink of an eye. She analyses the magnitude of the power of death in ‘Kesia’ in a dark sombre mood, while in Niaki (Sun) there is a celebration of
the journey of the sun, its beauty and brightness that lightens everything in its wake. There is a comparative note she brings in hoping that we will also live our life like the sun, circling around its brightness if we could only fly. In the poetry of Dinuo, there is depth of feelings masked in simple truths of Nature. Questions on society and life resound in all her poems, at a time when Naga women were supposed to be silent followers and home makers, unquestioning of patriarchy that resisted outside conquests and yet brought untold grief and suffering to its women and children as victims of the longest decades of violence. Perhaps Dinuo’s voice is one of isolation because there were very few women who were educated or had the courage or time to write and dream.

Naga women writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalung or the most prolific Tenyidie poet and novelist Kekhrievoü Yhome are trying to locate a space for expression to the repressed speech and through their literary work they have defined a new mode of expressivity of Naga women, while emphasizing a speakerly voice within the text. These writers have attempted to reconstruct Naga feminist ideology in terms of their creative work whether through fiction or poetry. The literature of Naga women writers is both self definition and redefinition.
Easterine Iralu’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* is rooted in the history of stern Naga matriarchal attitudes and discrimination of the girl child, not by the men of the family but by women themselves. *A Terrible Matriarchy* is a challenge to the feminist ideology. It is not only the patriarchal dominance which oppresses the womankind, but the matriarchy in the matriarchal society or even in the patriarchal society makes women suffer. In her novel she presented cases from Nagaland where women suffer for terrible matriarchy. The story narrates the case of a five year old girl named Dielieno, the only girl child and youngest of the five children. The child underwent severe mental agony feeling the discrimination of her grandmother in the family where boys were given enough importance. Dielieno, briefly called Lieno felt unwanted in the family as her parents often made her wear the leftover dresses of her brothers. At such tender age she knew that her grandmother did not love her, when she refused to give her a much desired chicken leg. The granny said, “That portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions” (1). Lieno also observed how her mother lived a very unhappy life, in the dread of the granny who never appreciated her mother. The brothers were not allowed to do any work and the child Lieno was sent to do works like fetching water, etc. The granny advised her mother, “Don’t let her run about with her brothers any
more. That is not the way to bring up girl-children” (4). Lieno had no identity. The granny never called her by her name. She called her ‘girl’ all the time. The granny did not like the schooling of Lieno. She told Lieno’s mother, “I really don’t know what it is your generation sees in school. Your children are not being taught the skills of life because they are too busy studying….She will completely forget all I have taught her now” (37). Lieno suffered all through her life, but she finally forgave her granny in her death-bed. One’s suffering at the stages of growth handicaps and keeps one aggrieved throughout life. Lieno suffered like that.

Kekheievoõ Yhome’s two novels *Kijü nu Kelhou* (*Life on Earth*) and *Rüleitatuo* (*Will be at Rest*) create women protagonists and re-examine the role of women in society through the exploration of the role and status of women and the creation of families of choice and the speaking voice who knows where she comes from. Yhome’s writing is rebellious, defining an alternative reality, deeply rooted in Naga societal tribal traditions and the strength of women, both as destroyer and builder of family bonding. There is a political consciousness behind Yhome’s texts, whereby she challenged the dominant hegemony of patriarchal culture, while exposing the hidden treasure of the cultural acumen of the Naga women and their worlds. In her fictive discourse Yhome presents the chains of continuity of Naga women’s
experience and tries to link experiences of different women—sisters and best women friends in a dramatically changing world of fame and fortune.

In her writings, Yhome represents the community and the tribe to which she belongs, which is the Angami tribe and reflects the age-old beliefs and conditioned mindset of Angami women representative in Naga women themselves through the stories of gender discrimination, abuse, violence and silent suffering endured by them, both from within their homes and outside. Her narrative is framed on the dominant Naga patriarchal structure and the sufferings and denigrations of the Naga female. It is also an alternative feminist historical discourse of Naga women.

Her powerful novel *Kiju Nu Kelhou (Life in this world)* is a significant remodelling and rethinking of the issues of tradition and gender and thus becomes an alternative feminist/historical discourse of Naga women. There is an emphasis on a specific feminist ideology, where the reader reconsiders Naga women’s position as oppressed as a significant cultural history and politics of oppression. The narration is powerful and brings into focus the sacrifices of the eldest daughter of the family, Khrienuo, who is forced to give up her studies, gets into the Government service and supports all her younger siblings, which is an echo of many stories and experiences of Nag women. The sharp staccato statements of her aunt
Khoû, “No need to bother about girls” encourages violence against girls within the homes and tradition of not bothering about the future or education of girls, sending brothers to better schools and the girls ill-treated and even differences in food served, reveal the hidden pains of young girls and women in many Naga homes. The narrative also focuses on the tragedy of the single woman in Naga society, hardworking yet abused which is reflected in the protagonist. Her decision to leave for a faraway place and even hide her identity and change her name to Bunou encourages the redefinition of womenhood and her strength in the midst of adversity, as she is highly regarded and respected in the new place.

Yhome’s *Rûleitatuo* focuses on the familial bond between the two sisters Siedzeleû and Dziesenuo whose lives take different turns with marriage. Yhome’s sceptic depiction of unhappy arranged marriages in Naga society is in the portrayal of the forced arranged marriage of Seedzeleû to Neichüo and the choice of wealth by many families over love and character. The novel also represents another vital theme within the family, the relationships that women build within themselves to share their pains and experiences and form their own community in resistance to the sexism of men. Siedzeleû’s husband Neichü-o keeps a mistress, but she is unable to escape from the marriage because of her children and bears the
abuse and violence in silence. The bonding between the two women, from different villages and backgrounds, is held together by each other's experiences and strength.

The common struggle of Naga women not only within their families but also in the societal circle of expectations and structures is sharply reflected in Yhome’s narration. The responsibility and drudgery of the lives of women, the lack of appreciation from children for whom one sacrifices one’s happiness and the living reality of many Naga women is exemplified in the life of Seidzeleü. The strong matrilineal bonding in Naga women is different experience and different history. The special task of a Naga woman writer to seek her motherhood originates from her lost history. Yhome in her two novels re-creates the idealism of matrilineal and the strength of women to counteract the psychological abuse and anger. There is a resurrected consciousness of Naga women in Yhome’s depiction of the women protagonists and a specific feminist expressivity. The two different representations, Khrienuo’s private world of growing consciousness, the characters of Siedzeleü and Avulü and the feminist critique of the Naga societal structure constitute the feminist structure of the novels and that also emphasizes on the global oppression of women.
Just as Alice Walker recounts about the Groits- poet priests, in her work and making Lissie a female Groit, there are similar echoes faced by Naga women where the Phichū u- the high priest, is male and never are the women recognized for these priestly rituals. The patriarchal context of both African and Naga society resonates in the writings of its women, as poems, fiction, essays or other literary outpourings. The theoretical structure of creative literature of Naga women writers stems from this erased and hidden historical experience of their existence. KekheievouYhome's novel *Kijū Nu Kelhou* (Life in this world) is a significant an alternative feminist/historical discourse. Yhome's sceptic depiction of unhappy arranged marriages in Naga society is in the portrayal of the forced arranged marriage of Siedzeleu to Neichūo and the choice of wealth by many families over love and character. The novel also represents another vital theme within the family, the relationships that women build within themselves to share their pains and experiences and form their own community in resistance to the sexism of men.

Temsula in her *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 impressions of various times, 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.

The occasion of the songs and the influences for them has 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 voice and her responses to them. In her poem, she again says in her ‘Songs Dedicatory’:

... 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 memories of the poet. The ‘coming-of-age’ troubles the poet's vision and she has been disturbed by the thought of ageing and the decadence of self:

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 some one

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 time immemorial by society 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 and solemn devotion of Mother Teresa has
enticed and elated the poet and as such she glorifies 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. She portrays the destruction of nature which has become a menace to mankind and reacts in the following words:

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 the ‘self’ are also significant concerns of this Naga poet. That 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, where she spent the better part of her life away from her homeland:

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 mellifluy. Her inquiring voice in the poem “why do songs live” is very evocative and 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 are 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 is found 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, barters, etc.:

The art of living

According to some

Is but a system

of bargains and barters.
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 sNagas 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 Lungterock. There were three men and three women. 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 and this is revealed in much of her writings. 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. 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 has been called ‘the Nightingale of North Eastern India.’ (Das 1998:26)

An autochthonous poetess, Nini Vinguriaü Lungalang (born 1948) who teaches at Northfield School, Kohima, exposes her tragic views on life, 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 and observations 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 cool

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. She writes about the street sweeper, the tragedy of youth senselessly killed and maimed, old tribal woman suffering in a city hospital and so on:

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 young boys were killed and eighty others maimed in a senseless firing incident by the Nagaland Police on young students during a protest rally which the poet witnessed. Remembering this fatal tragedy and the death of young Naga students she writes a dirge grieving 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 can 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.


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 memorize 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)

Easterine also writes on romantic and religious themes. She is a patriot in her writings and is passionate about the glorious heritage of her motherland and very critical about the patriarchal dominance in Naga society and the age old suffering of women.
Ecological inequilibrium in our times is one of the important concerns of Monalisa Changkija (1960–), a stern feminist and ecofeminist. She is the editor of a newspaper *Nagaland Page* which is published from Dimapur. An eco-chronicler and sentinel of time, in one of her poems, Monalisa says:

Yes, I’ve seen our rice fields

turn into factories and hills

reduced to barren brown

our rivers have dried

and our once sparkling fish

lie dead on sandy banks.

But I wonder why you remain silent

When I say we are hungry.

(Nongkynrih&Ngangom 2003: 216)

In the preface to the first book of her poems, Monalisa speaks about her feminist concerns:

The first part of this collection, *weapons of words on pages of pain* and to whom it may concern reflects some of my thoughts on
battered and abused women, on domestic violence and on women’s ability to rise above the “second class citizenry.’ Yes, I am empathising with and also crying out at the same time along with women who have suffered and continue to suffer in a discriminate society. (n.p.)

In several of her poems Monalisa raises the basic question about inequality and sexual discrimination in the society and against the atrocity and patriarchy which exploits the weakness and innocence of the fairsex and shatters their “liberty, peace, prosperity and right to live independently at par” (Das 2008:125) with their male counterpart. As such she seeks justice for the eternally oppressed, exploited and dominated women class:

    If god made man

    In His own image,

    Where shall the

    Battered seek justice? (1993:1)

    Being ambitious of the victory the women subaltern, their age-old predicament, insecurities and sufferings, she feels that these do not speak of their inadequacies, but Man’s violence, dominance and atrocities and his
inadequacies. About the pages of pain and the destiny of eternally suffering women she is sympathetic and feels acutely troubled:

Violence-induced miscarriages,

Black-eyes and bloodied –lips

Blue bruises and broken ribs

Within the sanctity of marriages

And security of homes,

Are unrecorded indexes

Of man’s “progress and growth”

On this planet’s unwritten

Pages of pain. (ibidem 7)

Rapid changes in the bio-diversity of Nagaland and places around Northeast India, the suffering of tribes amidst the environmental degradation, degeneration and extinction of rare flora and fauna and the impact of the ecological inequilibrium on the human habitat and living conditions create recurrent provocations in her to protest:
Yes, I’ve seen our rice fields
Turn into factories and mills
Our green hills
Reduced to barren brown
Our rivers have dried
and our once sparkling fish
lie dead on sandy banks.
It’s no more the Pines I can smell
Nor hear the Tragopan and the Hornbill (2007:29)
Besides the rare flora and fauna, birds like Tragopan and Hornbill which are the symbols of Naga heritage are extinct now and this gives pain to the poet to ponder over the culture and ecology of her motherland.
KekhrievoũYhome says that real life experiences which she had seen or heard have formed the basis of her novel Kijū nu Kelhou. Spinster stories and mistreatment by relatives has been fictionalized by her, where the girls are treated as nothing according to the common saying “girls are nothing”. The characterization of Khrienuo, the protagonist is from an older
generation story very common in Naga society, where the eldest girl has to sacrifice her education, love and happiness for the responsibility of her younger siblings and brothers. Situations for spinster sisters and single women in the family become worse when brothers don’t marry good women and they continue and encourage discrimination of the sister. In the Naga context of feminism, both in Yhome’s and Easterine Iralu’s work like *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the violence against the girl is carried out not only because of men but by also of the elders, in laws or even the mother, mother-in-law or grandmother. Khrienuo’s aunt in the end of the story realizes the value of daughters and importance of girls, as well as the destruction of the family by daughter in laws who are not good women. (Interview with Yhomeon 14.6.2013)

Her latest novel *Rüleitatu* (2011) focuses on alcoholics and womanizers and the tragedy it brings into many Naga families. Violence, alcoholism and the cycle of patriarchy, protected and preserved by the society, including the family and mothers themselves is revealed through the heart rending story. Yhome’s own personal experience of alcoholism within the family and the tragic marriage breakdown of friends because of the relentless womanizing of the husband expose the façade of marriage and relationships. The situation of women who dare not break away from
abusive husbands and failed marriages because of the fear of losing their children brings to the fore the Naga custom of custody of children to the father and not the mother. *Rüleitatu*o shows that men realize too late their folly and this is when their own children grow up like them, squandering family wealth and name and follow in their father’s footsteps. Often, according to Yhome children get out of control due to anger and bitterness, watching their own father’s irresponsible ways. It is obvious she refers to the Naga concept of many families spoiling and pampering the son, thus making them more irresponsible as they grow up. Naga women on the other hand are forced to be responsible for their siblings and homes, and this prepares them to be stronger, resilient and cope with bad situations in life, come what may. The tenacity and devotion of the wife in *Rüleitatu*o and the belief that rest and peace will only come to women after death is a strong message of the futility of marriage and relationships in the face of alcoholism or philandering by men. The resignation of women to such situations in marriages, bound by tradition and family commitment to marriage and the honour of the family is stressed by Yhome throughout her novel.

The recurring themes of women and violence and battered lives, domestic violence, incest, threats, victims of prolonged political conflict are
found in both fictional and poetic worlds of Naga women writers and their art. Within these artistic expressions, Naga women writers recount historical stories of discrimination and political consciousness of rights are slowly realized. With more than a hundred poems and ten novels to her credit, Yhome is regarded as the foremost women writer in Tenyidie literature as well as the one amongst the Naga women writers. In her novel *KephoumaZakhra, (The Price of Sin)*, she brings out the effects of abortion on the lives of those responsible – the rich young man Neitho-o who studies theology, womanizes, but becomes a leader of the church and who demands for abortion of the baby from his girlfriend. He is never blessed with a child after his marriage later on and is often ‘woken up by the cry of an infant’, alluding to his guilt and sin. The young woman traumatized by guilt for the rest of her life with memories of the abortion and the lost baby, even after she has children of her own after her marriage. Yhome shows the reality of Naga families who send pampered sons for theology, no matter even if it is not his calling and the after effect of abortion on young couples, especially girls who are given no choice.”I have witnessed and heard of so many cases of abortion and the story was born out of my deep concern for the lives of young girls” (Interview with KekhrievoûYhome, 14.6.2013.)
Simone Beauvoir says, “One is not born a woman, but becomes one” (1997: 295). This principle makes women aware of their role in the society. As mothers, sisters or daughters, they should be the real crusaders to bring upheaval in the society and makes changes possible by making people aware of their responsibilities. In her collection of poems, *Weapons of words on pages of pain*, Monalisa brings out the truth of domestic violence and violence against women in Naga society, Naga homes and Naga marriages in her poetry, resounding and heartrending. Pointing to the patriarchy of Naga society which has allowed such violations on women, she refers to a tragedy of unending physical abuse that goes unabated behind many homes:

Masculine hands

Raining blows on bodies

Soft and feminine (WWPP 12)

Monalisa in her terse language is explicit in her opinion about the brute force of men and speaks of the strength of women whose stories will become the weapons of words. There is a constant deep concern for the Nagas and the land and its women in most of her creative outpourings, including those in her second volume *Monsoon Mourning* (2007). The
poignancy of the continuing horrors and suffering of women in warlike Nagaland where

Our brothers are at war

Our land is awash with blood

Our rice fields need tending

Our children caring. (7)

And yet the dream for peace and longing in her ‘Field of Baby’s Breaths’ is reflective of the situations and longing of women:

I wish I could wear

A pretty Pale Pink

Ankle length Calico dress

With frills, flounces and lace……

….romping on a field of Baby’s Breath.’ (MM 16).

As a woman journalist facing the threats on life and extortions from different militant groups in the state as well as for the tragedy of the killing of the Editor of *Ura Mail*, Chalie Kevichusa, she pours out her grief in ‘Not be Dead’: 
If tomorrow

My body

Is riddled

With bullets

I shall not be dead

Nor will I

Be defeated and silenced.’ (MM 18)

Her strong protest against diktats by armed men finds expression in the trilogy “Of A People Unanswered- III”:

Don’t waste your time

Laying down diktats

And guidelines

On how to conduct my life

On matters personal and political’

And

‘Stop this nightmare, I beg of you
Wherein I have to write of another child orphaned,

Another girl abused, another woman widowed’ (MM 20)

Monalisa brings out the stark reality of a land and its people threatened by guns and diktats and voices against so much of violence at the hands of gunmen who move in the name of the nation and where individual opinions are silenced. In her poem “Shoot” she says:

Go ahead, shoot and blast us to eternity

I give you my word, we will not move

Neither from our stand nor to distract your aim

Shoot, what’s stopping you?’ (MM 22)

Naga feminism has not become a force as the Black feminists’, either in literary works or in movements till recently. The demand for protections of women’s constitutional rights pitted against claims of men that Naga customary law does not allow women in decision making bodies has driven Naga tribe women organizations to demand for their rights in the mid nineties and to move the court to seek legal justice. Naga women, especially the enlightened and educated, which include writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu and Monalisa, Kekhrievou Yhome are more
aware of their rights and express their feminist concerns on Naga women through their literary works, either in fiction or poetry. Emerging from the stronghold of Naga patriarchy has been a difficult move because the difference with Naga feminism, as explicitly defined in Easterine’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), is that the protest is also against the constrictions of the Naga matriarch- the mother or grandmother who discriminates Dielienuo, representative of the Naga girl, till the very end. Not only is discrimination and violence committed by men, but also in the Naga context it is perpetrated by women themselves in the form of the mothers and grandmothers. Gender sensitization and equity is linked with education and the fact is that most Naga mothers and grandmothers of the older generation were uneducated and unaware of women’s rights. So movements of feminism articulating women’s rights has gained momentum only from the late fifties, born out of violent conflicts and the aftermath of the relentless killings of men and innocent women and children by the Indian army. Today, Naga feminism is strongly being articulated in poems of younger women and essays that draw the attention of the Naga public and the outside world on the serious questions of gender based violence and domestic violence behind the fragility of the veil of Christianity and marriages.
This movement for women’s rights, though late, is similar to the African American women’s movement for civil and political rights that brought women like Zora Hurst to the fore and deeply inspired Alice Walker and younger writers. The difference one needs to understand is while Black American women were fighting for their rights and against discrimination, in a supposedly peaceful country, Naga women’s movements have sprung up in the midst of more than half a century of armed political violence and movement for self determination, which has compounded the violence faced by Naga women. Protesting voices emerging from rape and the violence of Indian army atrocities is replete in many creative writings of women in Nagaland. There is a very strong political consciousness inbuilt in most Naga women, which makes it very natural for these poets and writers to speak out on behalf of the silent suffering half of the Naga population.

Alice Walker blends the sexual and spiritual in an exploration of women’s identity. Written in the voice of the Father who witnesses the growth of his daughter is reflected through Walker’s powerful portrayal of sexuality and incestuous recollections of a father daughter relationship, lesbian love, the angelic quality of a young innocent girl and the explorations of sexuality. The contemporary Naga women writers as
discussed in chapter differ from Alice Walker in many respects. They are not vocal and strong like Alice except a few privileged women but the ray feminism that lurks in their heart and mind. They are influenced by many forces including the church, patriarchy and traditional matriarchy. In spite of all these forces, change is visible and time will positively bring a revolutionary turn in them which is predictable from the symptoms exposed in the writings.
REFERENCES


