



'Zorami: The Redemption Song' As A Resistance Text

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Abstract

When a person lives in a democratic land it is very difficult to please everyone or to say yes for the request of all. There will always be some people accepting a 'no' in return. India is also a nation which undergoes such practicality every day. However, if any such denial is seen made to a group of people violating their tribal or ethnic identity, language, threat of losing their homeland and culture can transform the group into an opposition one. The present paper looks forward to bringing in such opposition not only against the government authorities but also for the ills within the community too. The primary text being, *Zorami: The Redemption Song* the first English Mizo novel by a Mizo writer, Malsawmi Jacob examines the inner and external chaos present and brings in the much-required resistance against both insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Zorami is not just a resistance which questions the authoritative tone from the mainstream but also a rebellious text which focuses on the minute internal discrimination faced by the common Mizo specially in terms of gender inequality and in search of peace. To a greater extent we also see resistance for Nature by the words of Malsawmi Jacob. The author is outrightly cries at the atrocities received by Mizo society by both Mizos and Non-Mizos. Thus, the text posits as a resistance text and calls for the much-required peace.

Key words: Resistance, Mizo Society, Peace, Insurgency and Counterinsurgency.

Introduction

For any community, recognition becomes very significant. Whereas in a democratic rule this recognition and spacing for one's identity is pushed to the periphery. As we observe in India itself, the northeast is a melting pot of diversities, yet the government is unable to

accept and provide complete support to them. To ponder on this, note the present research article focuses on the text, *Zorami: The Redemption Song*, penned by Malsawmi Jacob. The text denies the continuous reception of no validation from the central forces; and brings forth the step motherly treatment inherited at the mercy of the then Assam province. The

fragmented narrative structure through the lens of the female protagonist, Zorampari makes the screams and shrieks back to life for the readers. Zorampari, shortly referred to as Zorami is not just going through the process of redemption but also is seen to describe all those scars felt by the common Mizos during the bloody two decades of insurgency. Zorami herself tormented by molestation speaks of the frightening and coerced conditions that the fellow Mizo women have endured. A series of violations to this ethnicity are covered by the author explicitly in the text. The droppings of hundreds of bombs on Aizawl and its outskirts by the centre is another poignant wound for the Mizos being recorded in the narrative. The novel parallelly creates a history to the Mizo community specifically in formation of its state. The much-feared Famine or *Mautam* and the inevitable MNF proceedings are also documented in this novel. Amidst of all these Zorami posits the patriarchal dominance in Mizo society along with the mutual support gained by the new religion on the soil of Mizoram, Christianity. Surrounding these topics from the text, the reader gets to distinguish the disappearance of Mizo identity through the various cultural, political and geographical exploitation on the common Mizo folks. This attempt to erase the Mizo identity makes the community become resistant to their oppressors. One such attempt is made by writing *Zorami: The Redemption Song* by Malsawmi Jacob.

Major elements

The constant threat to one identity gives rise to a more dangerous resistance and the same was followed by the Mizo people after the independence of India. The resistance of Mizos is broadly divided into four categories. The first resistance started with the opposition to the dominance of Assamese culture on the Mizo speaking ones. The language of Assamese is completely an alien language to the Mizos. Neither could they understand the script or could they communicate the same orally. Before

the formation of Mizoram on February 20th, 1987, they were under the jurisdiction of the then Assam province. Hence Assamese became a burden to the Mizos

when it was declared as the official language in the entire region. The lines in the chapter 4, *A Plague of Rat*, "Assamese *tawng*", "Because the state rulers are trying to force us to use it for all important matters. But we don't know the language and most of us will not be able to learn it even if we try. That means we Mizo people would become like fools in our own homeland." (35) clearly states the fear of Mizos, how they will be denied and kept out of all the vital affairs of the land and how there would be a threat of not having even a Mizo representative for their problems either.

This problem only was noticed when the second issue of the ecology surfaced. Mizoram is widely known for the growth of bamboo shoots along with Manipur and Tripura and has become a victim by nature once in every fifty years. The blossoming of the bamboo shoots once in five decades increases population of the rodents in a rapid manner and finally these rodents attack on the yield. Since Mizoram has rice as its staple food, in the agrarian sector rice is the major grown crop. Hence, each morsel of rice is finished by the rats, and the Mizo people must live at the mercy of the Assam government. The very first negligence paved the way for Mizos to understand their position, and they went in resistance against the Assamese language and culture also equally; and these resistant feeling is very clear in the same chapter 4, when Zorami's mother exasperates "The famine is only beginning, and you are already starving." (33) This concept of losing the Mizo culture and ethnicity by the Mizos made them realise and finally act in a resistant manner, eventually forming Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1950s by Pu Laldenga from the former Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF). Both the violent situation of *Mautam* and the dominance of Assam culture led to a series of insurgency against the central forces. As a result, the

innocent Mizos had to bear the brunt of getting bombed in their own homeland. The bombing was not just once but a repetition to destroy the strength of the Mizo rebels and hence was numerously dropped. In chapter 12, *Alarm Bells*, Zari's Father's saying makes it coherent, "They're likely to return. Get ready, we have to flee. Let's go to the forest", "Take the food along, we'll eat when we reach a safer place" (Jacob 89) evokes terror in the minds of the readers. These bombs were of combustible types and hence everything of the Mizos in their house was transformed to ashes; thus, making their condition more pitiable refugees in their own land. Henceforth besides insurgencies even the counter insurgencies have created havoc among the Mizo community. The novel remarks about the misbehaviour and maltreatment meant for the Mizos alone by the army chiefs.

The resistance in the work is not just for the external forces but also to the inner society of the Mizo system. The chapter 7 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, states the incident of Zorami finding her suitable suitor, Sanga who later becomes her husband. Amidst all these matchmaking we see a firm and rigid patriarchal coercion on the women folk even in Mizo society. The command of Zorami's father to agree for the suitor is resisted by Zorami with a resistance call, "You didn't have to say that! As if I didn't know I'm damaged! As if I didn't know I'm good for nothing!" (55). This is a staunch and direct resistance of women against the male pressures unlike the other helpless resistance and rejections. The narrative points out resistance to both the viscous patriarchal norms and to the shady characters in the army and the Mizo Front. The character Ralkapa is one such character who transforms from the position of a victim to a victimize and life. The chapter 8 *What Man has Made of Man* and chapter 14, *Downward Slide* chalks out this Survival of fittest policy of Ralkapa. Between the direct calls of resistance and screams we do come across such references as to say no and resist to such presence of soldiers either. Similar shady

characters are even present among the army too. In the chapter 18, *Survival and Nightmares* Malsawmi Jacob lists the heinous offences committed by Majors and officers from the army against the villagers, and rebellion family members. There is a tear-jerking instance where a rebellion's wife and sister are taken captive, leaving behind the two-month-old baby boy alone at home the entire night. A destined death of the infant and the women eventually losing their sanity is the impact of the barbarous officers. Further in the same chapter the lines, "Our village had a harrowing time last night. He had forced another young girl. She cried aloud all night, and none of us who heard her cries could sleep. It is high time this misualpa, the wicked man, is punished." (118) clearly triggers trepidation and uneasiness even to read. These are some significant resistance presents in the text, *Zorami*.

Secondary Texts

Zorami is not the only text to bring in such resistance. We also have other narratives from the northeast particularly. *Zorami* in several parts of the texts consciously speak of the peace and intellectual resistance which would provide them "Zeenna! Freedom!" (61) Chapter 8 again, guides the Mizo folks and directs the readers as to how violence has no space of hope anymore by the quotes, "If we start violence, our people will suffer terribly. Mind you, we will not be treated like the youngest child. We will be punished like stepsons. Just mark my words. Do you think the Indian government will hold their peace if we capture its offices? They will send battalions of army men to subdue us. Blood will flow in our land." (64) In resemblance to such narratives we also have other writers contributing through peaceful negotiations and intellectual activism. Several types of resistance are available and the same is exercised by various other writers too. The stalwart, Kaka D. Iralu, a prominent Naga activist and writer has contributed a lot to Naga Nationalism. The work *The Naga Saga: A Historical Account of the Fifty-Two-year Indo Naga War and the Story of Those who*

were never allowed to tell it was never accepted to be published by anybody hence he is seen to manage the publication of truth by himself. This is also a kind of resistance text in the backdrop of insurgency.

Tesmula Ao too falls parallel to such resistance writings in her works; specially as an ethnographer she aims for a redemption of the naga community too. *These Hills Called Homes: stories from a War Zone* adds to the resistance spirit of the northeast insurgency movement. With several other works by the remaining states under insurgency from the north wing emphasises the power of intellectual resistance with writers like Easterine Kire (*Mari*) from Nagaland, Indira Goswami in regional language and Aruni Kashyap's texts from Assam on the context of insurgency; even the writings of Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh underscore the art of writing as resistance and gaining a larger audience across the globe.

Conclusion

Finally, we see *Zorami* as not just a resistance which questions the authoritative tone from the mainstream but also a rebellious text which focuses on the minute internal discrimination faced by the common Mizos specially in terms of gender inequality and in search of peace. The author outrightly voices against the atrocities encountered by the Mizo society, both Mizos and Non Mizos. Thus, the text posits as a resistance text and calls for the much-required peace.

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