



Youth, Resistance and Identity: A literary study of politics in Nagaland.

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Abstract

The politics of identity in Nagaland is intricately linked to the experiences of its young, who navigate their position among history, memory, and present circumstances. This article analyzes how Naga youth express resistance and identity via literature, artistic expression, and political involvement. The research underscores the impact of historical trauma, namely militarism and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), on the communal memory and political awareness of young Nagas. Literature by authors like Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire provides critical perspectives on youth challenges, depicting them as engaged agents in identity formation while contending with marginalization, migration, and cultural hybridity. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the gendered aspects of adolescent narratives, illustrating how young women and men navigate identity politics distinctively, with women often asserting agency via education, storytelling, and cultural endeavors rather than through formal political engagement. Globalization and urban migration exacerbate these conflicts, as youngsters navigate prejudiced contexts while endeavoring to preserve indigenous pride. Literature serves as a locus of cultural resistance, chronicling the persistence of tradition alongside the challenges posed by modernity. The research, via meticulous analysis and theoretical context, illustrates that Naga youth are not only passive victims of political history or solely militant participants, but rather active architects of dynamic identities that reconcile tradition, resistance, and modernity.

Keywords: Naga identity, youth resistance, literature, cultural politics, gender, hybridity, collective memory, self-representation.

Introduction:

The politics surrounding Naga identity has been persistently shaped by conflicts over autonomy, sovereignty, and recognition. Young individuals are crucial to this discourse as they serve as a connection to both the past and the present. Following India's independence on August 15, 1947, the Naga National Council (NNC) proclaimed independence the same day. Youth were a significant portion of the fervent advocates for the nationalist movement (Lal, 2016). This operation initiated a protracted conflict between the Indian government and several Naga insurgent factions. Young Nagas do not only inherit their political identity; they embody it daily via their engagements with the state, educational institutions, religion, and contemporary global culture. In Nagaland, the youth are unable to dissociate their identity from their historical recollections. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) was enacted in 1958, augmenting military authority and exposing successive generations of young Nagas to brutality, surveillance, and human rights violations (McDuie-Ra, 2012). The trauma of growing up among many troops instilled a profound sense of isolation in young people, a theme well illustrated in juvenile literature and oral traditions. The collective memory of atrocities encapsulates misery while fostering political consciousness, motivating young to challenge oppressive regimes (Kikon, 2015).

A significant aspect of Naga identity politics is the influence of education and urban migration. As an increasing number of Naga youth migrate to urban centers including as Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata for educational purposes, they encounter systematic prejudice and stereotyping. Pejorative adjectives such as "chinky" or presumptions on their dietary practices exacerbate their sense of otherness (Longvah, 2017). These experiences, therefore, influence their political identity as they endeavor to reconcile pride in their origin with the challenges of exclusion. Religion significantly influences the self-perception of young individuals. Over 90% of the population in Nagaland identifies as Christian (Grossberg et al., 1996). The kids adhere to a belief system that unites several tribes within a singular cultural framework. Churches provide spiritual instruction as well as avenues for leadership, social service, and action. However, Christianity also presents challenges; youth often face a dilemma between traditional indigenous practices and Westernized Christian norms. Stuart Hall asserts that identity is "constantly in process," and this duality exemplifies that notion. Youth movements in Nagaland have been highly engaged in political activities. Historically, student organizations such as the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) have played a crucial role in orchestrating demonstrations, advocating for rights, and challenging the narratives propagated by the state (Meredith, 1998). The writing and music produced by these organizations often illustrate the desire of youth for peace, respect, and acknowledgment. Globalization offers both new challenges and opportunities. The internet, worldwide media, and popular culture significantly influence the manner in which young people dress, communicate, and see themselves. This hybrid arena complicates identity politics as youth amalgamate elements of global modernism with their indigenous Indian culture while simultaneously rejecting complete assimilation. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity suggests that these areas enable the creation of new cultural meanings. The politics surrounding youth and Naga identity is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by past trauma, present-day persecution, and expressed via cultural and literary outputs. Young people are not only passive consumers of identity; they are proactive actors continually redefining what it is to be Naga in an ever-evolving political landscape.

Youth, Literature and Self-Representation.

Literature serves as a vital medium for Naga youth to articulate their narratives, assert their agency, and forge their identities. Literature, in contrast to political treaties or revolutionary manifestos, encapsulates the lived realities of everyday battles, amplifying the voices of those disadvantaged by dominant narratives. Young Nagas articulate the intricacies of their identity and challenge preconceptions imposed by the state and mainstream culture via novels, short tales, poetry, and oral traditions.

In Nagaland, young writing often originates from conflict-ridden areas. Authors document the anxieties associated with maturation amidst warfare, militarism, and cultural marginalization. Easterine Kire's *Mari* (2010) depicts the bombardment of Kohima during World War II and its lasting impact on Naga youth (Devi, 2024). Emerging poets in India often articulate experiences of discrimination in contemporary urban settings, narrating feelings of isolation that resonate with many of their contemporaries. Literature functions as both a historical document and a personal account.

Self-representation in literature serves as a mechanism of cultural resistance. For decades, representations of Nagas in mainland India have characterized them as "exotic tribes" or "warriors," often omitting the contemporary, educated, and creative aspects of their existence. Youth literature portrays Nagas as complex individuals—urban, global, and deeply rooted in cultural pride. This exemplifies Frantz Fanon's thesis that colonial peoples must recover their narrative by developing their own cultural forms (Pachau, 2014). The use of English in Naga literature is significant. Despite not being a native language, English allows young authors to engage with global audiences and articulate experiences that surpass regional confines (Fanon, 2023). Writing in English becomes an act of hybridity, both embracing and undermining the colonizer's language to assert indigenous identity. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's advocacy for "decolonising the mind" via literature is particularly relevant in this context, as young Nagas grapple with the duality of expressing themselves in English while rejuvenating traditional oral traditions.

Literary compositions of youth demonstrate the significance of memory and narrative. Emerging authors reimagine oral traditions transmitted by predecessors, including folktales, myths, and songs, in contemporary forms to preserve cultural heritage (Wa Thiong'o, 1998). These retellings often emphasize themes of solidarity, perseverance, and the right to self-determination. Youth literature illustrates that identity is not static but is continually contested. Global effects persist in shaping individuals' self-perceptions. Music, particularly gospel rock and rap, is often used in literature for youth as a symbol of contemporary defiance (Hazarika, 2004). Musical compositions evolve into narratives of dissent, often addressing issues

like corruption, militarism, or ethical decline. Naga youth integrate music and performance into literature, situating themselves within a broader global youth culture while highlighting local uniqueness. Moreover, literature empowers young Nagas to evaluate both the government and the insurgency critically. Previous political discourse often lauded military conflict; however, contemporary youth literature increasingly emphasizes the futility of war and advocates for peacebuilding. Literature provides a "third space" that enables us to critique politics without being ensnared in the state-insurgent dichotomy (Goswami, 2007).

Gender and Youth Narratives In Naga Politics.

The link between gender and young in Nagaland's political landscape has become a more popular theme in literature and politics. This is not surprising given the current political climate. The experiences of young people are often highlighted in literature from and about Nagaland. These works illustrate how young people navigate the political, cultural, and social domains within a society that has traditionally been marked by patriarchal control (Gellner, 2022). Throughout the course of Naga society's history, young people have been at the forefront of political mobilization. They have taken part in insurgency movements and grassroots development projects, which shows a complicated negotiation of identity, agency, and group membership. The works of literature provide varied viewpoints on these experiences, highlighting the contradictory pressures that young people are confronted with: the duty to uphold traditional values while also accepting modernity and global cultures (Ao, 2006).

In these experiences, the gender dynamics bring to light the distinct roles that young women and men play in political activity, as well as the challenges that they face. In Nagaland, women are usually underrepresented in official political processes, despite the fact that they make significant contributions to the cohesiveness of the community and to informal leadership. This imbalance is represented in literature, where female characters generally maneuver agency within home and social spheres rather than clear political arenas (Kire, 2007). Although women significantly contribute to the development of social capital and local government, institutional obstacles often prevent them from directly participating in political processes (I. Jamir, 2019). These literary portrayals are in line with the findings of empirical research that indicates this. (Ngullie, n.d.) On the other hand, male young characters are shown as being more actively engaged in public and political mobilization. This demonstrates how gendered expectations impact the options for political expression and activity.

When it comes to the creation of political awareness, the intersection of youth and gender in literature highlights the impacts of education, migration, and exposure to ideas from the outside world. In the context of colonial legacies and postcolonial development attempts, it is the aim of authors like as Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire to write about young characters who struggle with questions of identity, self-determination, and resistance (Trinco, 2015), etc. Frequently underlining the moral and emotional issues that are engaged in these processes, Ao's tales investigate how young men and women manage the obstacles of cultural preservation in the midst of modernization and socio-economic transformation (Biswas & Pramanik, n.d.). Kire's works also throw light on the dreams and disappointments of Naga youth, particularly young women, who desire to make their voices, heard in both home and political contexts. Specifically, Kire's works examine the hopes and disappointments of young women.

A further point to consider is that literary narratives place an emphasis on the collective agency of young people in the context of resisting dominant development narratives that are imposed by external forces. Development programs and political interventions in Nagaland usually exemplify top-down techniques; nevertheless, youth-led initiatives—illustrated in both fictional and autobiographical literature—demonstrate grassroots opposition, inventiveness, and community driven adaptation. While adolescents are navigating their own desires, these narratives highlight the fact that they concurrently operate as carriers of communal memory and cultural continuity, therefore forming new identities that combine traditional values with the demands of contemporary life (Sanczyk, 2020).

The battle for autonomy and acknowledgment of indigenous rights in Nagaland's political history is intimately tied to the negotiation of gender and young identity, according to literary studies. They also reveal that this connection is tight. By depicting young activists, students, and community leaders in a way that is both ethical and culturally relevant, literature challenges preconceptions that picture Naga youth as either docile or primarily militant. This image of political involvement is offered via the representation of young people. Understanding the interrelationship of identity, gender, and political agency

within situations that are marked by sociopolitical turbulence and contested developmental theories (Chishi, 2010) requires these descriptions to be understood in order to be successful.

An enormous amount of political and social transitions have taken place in Nagaland, and the research suggests that young and gendered narratives are essential to comprehending these changes. Literary works provide valuable insights into the aspirations, struggles, and choices of Naga youth in the context of both resistance and progress. These insights are essential since the literary works concentrate on the lives of young men and women. It is clear from their findings that age and gender play a significant role in the manner in which individuals construct their identities, participate in political processes, and establish connections with their communities. The cultural and political environment of Nagaland is better understood as a result of this enlightenment (Trott et al., 2024).

Results

Analyzing literary works and scholarly research on Nagaland reveals a dynamic and ever-changing relationship between youth, resistance, and identity, highlighting the critical role that young people play in shaping political discourse and cultural consciousness. According to regional literature, Naga youth have always been important change agents, negotiating their identities in the face of colonial legacies and contemporary developmental obstacles (QUALITYINSPECTED, 1993). The literature highlights youth as both participants and critics of political systems, highlighting the intricate connection between identity creation and resistance, especially in the works of Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire, and other Naga writers.

The moral and psychological aspects of youth resisting political war are shown in Temsula Ao's tales, particularly in *These Hills Called Home: tales from a War Zone*. Ao portrays young people who waver between following group customs and pursuing personal freedom, reflecting a conflict that reflects real-life political participation in Nagaland (Ao, 2006). According to these works, resistance among Naga youth can take many different forms, including subtle and cultural ones like questioning social norms, redefining gender roles, and negotiating modern values against traditional customs, in addition to overt ones like participation in insurgent movements. The importance of youth in challenging and redefining identity is also emphasized in Easterine Kire's literary works. Kire writes about young men and women who challenge social and political systems in works like *Writing in the Shadow of Conflict* and *A Terrible Matriarchy*. She examines issues of resistance to structural marginalization, communal memory, and autonomy. The tensions between obedience and disobedience are often embodied by Kire's characters, showing how both literary engagement and personal experience may foster political knowledge. This implies that identity development among young Naga people is a negotiated process that is closely related to social positioning and historical knowledge (Medhi, 2023). Many academics have emphasized how resistance and youth come together to build political identity. According to Jamir (2017), the quest for self-determination and the recognition of indigenous rights, which are often supported by cultural manifestations, storytelling, and group rituals, are at the core of Naga youth movements, both historical and modern (T. Jamir, 2012). According to Longkumer (2018), literary representations of youth resistance reflect broader social shifts, showing how teenagers navigate modern schooling, migration, and the impact of global ideas while maintaining cultural identity. These studies support the notion that literature reflects and conveys political consciousness, capturing the moral, emotional, and strategic aspects of adolescent engagement.

In these stories, gendered perspectives reveal additional levels of complexity. In literature, female young protagonists negotiate social and political arenas in ways that challenge traditional patriarchal structures, highlighting the conflict between claiming autonomy and maintaining family and community responsibilities (Sarki Ubayi et al., 2024). Young women often resist using cultural and nonviolent tactics, including activism, education, and storytelling, according to Ao and Kire, among others. This demonstrates that women may participate in politics in a variety of ways that are not limited to formal or violent political activity, such as insurgency. This demonstrates how gendered expectations and generational considerations both impact resistance and identity, influencing how young people in Naga culture exert agency. Literary research also shows that memory and historical knowledge are closely linked to young resistance. The literature clarifies how young Nagas' political sensitivities are influenced by the communal memory of war, colonialism, and marginalization, which profoundly shapes their identity. The enduring influence of the past on current actions of resistance, identity construction, and political assertion is best shown by Ao's depiction of intergenerational discourse and Kire's focus on young women negotiating cultural expectations.

The findings generally demonstrate that Naga youth are both change agents and tradition-keepers. Literary evidence suggests that resistance is multifaceted, including political, ethical, and cultural manifestations, and that it is closely related to processes of identity negotiation. According to the literature, young people in Nagaland are not only passive bystanders; rather, they actively participate in redefining the idea of community membership in the face of change, negotiating gender roles, and influencing political discourse. A thorough understanding of the performance, contestation, and remaking of identity within Naga society may be gained from the interplay between resistance, gender, and historical consciousness. These revelations significantly advance research on indigenous identity, young politics, and the role of literature as a vehicle for cultural and political expression.

Discussion.

The results highlight the important role that Naga youth play in forming political and cultural identity, since literature demonstrates their active engagement in self-negotiation and resistance. Young people are shown as both change agents and tradition-keepers, juggling the pressures of contemporary living with the needs of their culture. Literary works by Tamsüla Ao and Easterine Kire demonstrate that gender often plays a part in the many forms of resistance used by young people, including political, social, and cultural ones. In particular, female adolescents negotiate spaces in patriarchal structures, using education, narrative, and community engagement to claim their agency, whereas male adolescents are more actively involved in political activism. Resistance is not just a reaction to outside forces but also a conscious engagement with inherited cultural norms, as shown by the way memory, historical knowledge, and personal experience combine to affect identity formation. In a setting marked by political unrest and socio-cultural change, our results show that gendered and generational expectations impact young engagement in Nagaland, underscoring the complex mechanics of identity creation. Literature generally provides a valuable perspective on how young Nagas see and perform their social and political duties. It illustrates the way the identity of the area is evolving while remaining constant.

Conclusion.

Naga youth narratives show that historical trauma, gender norms, and cultural resistance shape identity. Political involvement, literature, music, and storytelling help young Nagas balance tradition and modernity. Young people value memory and history, as shown by Tamsüla Ao, Easterine Kire, and other Naga authors. This keeps their common experiences of violence, migration, and outsider hood part of their developing identity. In these tales, resistance includes insurgency, cultural preservation, gendered agency, and criticism of repressive systems. Women are resilient by reclaiming their voice and visibility in locations where they can't vote. The findings reveal that Naga youth actively affect political and cultural discussions. By blending global and indigenous elements, they challenge prejudices that keep them in fixed or eroticized categories. Literature records life and creates new identities. Memory, gender, and cultural hybridity let Naga youth reimagine belonging amid war, transition, and globalization. This research highlights the importance of literature for political expression and cultural preservation, and the young as key contributors to Naga society's future of recognition, dignity, and peace.

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