

ISSN:0976-8165

# THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 7, Issue-I February 2016

7 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Impact of Insurgency: Violence against Women in Manipur as Represented in Short Stories by Ningombam Sunita and Nepram Maya**

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### **Abstract:**

After imposing the inhuman act – Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958 in Manipur and Assam, women have become its main target of violation and exploitation. Women are often tortured and threatened by the armed forces. They are even identified with insurgents when complained against them. The paper attempts to assess how the two contemporary Manipuri women writers: Ningombam Sunita and Nepram Maya represents the impact of insurgency in exploiting women both mentally and physically in their widely read short stories. It adopts an analytical approach by taking into consideration the reality of women's experience as being the 'unfortunate creature' in the hands of the insurgents.

**Keywords: AFSPA, armed forces, insurgency, women of Manipur and exploitation.**

After the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958 was imposed in Manipur and Assam, lives of women became more complicated as women became its main target. Often, women are tortured by raping and threatened by the armed forces. Women of Manipur "were victimized many times in many excessive military incidents before the administration of this land is entrusted to the army". (2010: 43) It became so worse after imposing this inhuman act that when women complained against the forces regarding rape case or any other unwanted cases, they were arrested and identified with the insurgents in the 1980s forcing many Manipuri youths to follow the path of insurgency.

The paper attempts to assess how the two contemporary Manipuri women writers: Ningombam Sunita and Nepram Maya represents the impact of insurgents in violating women both mentally and physically in their widely read short stories. It adopts an analytical approach by taking into consideration the reality of women's experience as being the 'unfortunate creature' in the hands of the armed forces and insurgents.

Sunita, in her short stories, strongly opposes those people who are more concerned in spreading false and made up stories about particular girls getting raped or molested. According to her, people never actually come forward to punish the culprits because in the context of Manipuri culture, women are seen as the bearer as well as the signifier of her community and society. For instance, in her story "Cheirak" ["Punishment"] (2007), Sunita portrays a complex woman character Memcha who appears to be bold and strong yet timid at the same time. After she fell in a trap of middle aged women Tombi and a cunning man Mahendra who wants to marry her, the writer attempts to show how powerful a Manipuri woman can be by making her main protagonist and rape victim Memcha seeking help from insurgents to punish the culprit Mahendra. Being a man and as told by Tombi, Mahendra

believes that Memcha would definitely agree to marry him once he rapes her. But he is unaware of the fact that there are some women like Memcha who is tough, strong and not afraid to punish the wrong doers. Here, Sunita reveals how women's life can be defiled by outsider's interference. It is sad to note that there are few people like Tombi, who is also a woman and Mahendra, who believes that once a woman is raped or defiled in any form, she will stick to it.

It is, in fact, the society that makes women's life worst as claimed by Sunita in a personal interview. Without knowing the truth, people love to exploit innocent and 'unfortunate' women. They tend to exploit women by forcing the latter in the hands of wrong doers eventually leading to live a life of hell. Such 'unfortunate' women would have to bear "the tantrums or thrashing from her husband or in-laws if anything goes wrong in her management. Often the wife is blamed if her husband is a drunkard or a drug addict for no fault of hers. Women do not have their own identity but are often identified by their husband and sons." (2012: 29)

Maya, on the other hand, deals deeply with how common people of Manipur try to take laws in hand which are supposed to be taken by police and courts. Taking important matters in their hands has become the unhealthiest habit of the people of Manipur. In this case, it would not be wrong to assume that people in Manipur are easily influenced by the act of armed forces and insurgents and always tend to act it out in the societal issue which is not convincing.

In Manipur, armed forces play a vital role in exploiting women. One heartbreaking incident can be recalled when

the former chief minister [of Manipur], Rishang Keising in 1987 submitted a memorandum to the union home minister protesting against the atrocities carried out by the Assam Rifles in Oinam village in the Senapati district of his state, he was promptly removed from chief minister-ship. The army persuaded the home minister to take this action by suggesting that Keising had secret links with [one of] the secessionist underground. (2010: 54)

In Manipur, women's lives are entrusted to the armed forces to rule over consequently leading to the victimization of women through "unending sexual harassment by foreign army." (2010: 43) It is important to remember that the violation of women has been in practice even before Manipur was announced as 'disturbed area'.

Insurgency too plays an important role in exploitation against women in Manipur to some extent. Yet, it is believed that they sometimes could earn supports from people by reportedly running "clinics and schools in the remote hill areas neglected by the government" (2012: 224) and by helping out innocent women in giving back their justice as represented in Sunita's short story "Cheirak" ["Punishment"] (2007) where insurgents agreed to kill the rapist as requested by the rape victim Memcha. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, insurgents have started taking up odd jobs in the name of fighting for freedom: demanding substantial sum of money leading to abuse, violation of women and frequent murdering and raping. As a result, many women in Manipur and other parts of Northeast are ripped apart in their evil hands. These unwise acts force people of Manipur to think that the 'so called freedom fighters' are not there to fight for its freedom. Their good images are likely to be disappeared from the mind and thought of people especially women.

It is rightly mentioned by Parratt that “Manipur has three competing governments”, one being the insurgency groups who control remote and urban areas and another important government being the security forces who “exceed their mandate and interfere in the general running of the state.” (2012: 228) The main victim of these two forces is women. Yet, it is also true that not every insurgency groups are abusive and violent towards public. However, it is also not wrong to say that there are some such insurgency groups. They started taking law and order in their hands which sometimes leads to an exploitation of other innocent along with the culprit. Manipuri women writers have started to laments for those women who have been punished for being a relative of insurgents. They claim that women are the real victim of insurgents in a state torn by militants’ violence. Manipuri people’s perception of security forces as well as the official perception of insurgents are “violent and anarchists”. (2012: 235). Many instances of violation of women have occurred during military operations.

The realist women writer Nepram Maya is one such writer who not only raises her voice against insurgents violating women but she also claims that if insurgents attempt to work for the welfare of the people, she is ready to sacrifice her life for them. Unlike any other men or women writer, she compares the concept of patriarchal system with that of ‘fake’ insurgents who are always ready to extort money unreasonably from both rich and poor. It is interesting to note that she supports the concept of insurgents fighting for freedom. Her idea of ‘real’ freedom fighter understands people’s problem and never tries to take advantage of the ones who stood for them in their time of needs and they have high respect for women. In fact, she provides full support for such insurgency groups.

Maya seems to assert that the ‘real’ freedom fighter would never violate women and make poor and innocents suffer with their unreasonable demand. She also believes that they would not be able to achieve their goal if ‘fake’ ones increases day by day. So, she does not approve of such groups who make people suffer and who treat women as a sex object. Unlike some, Maya is ready to provide full support to the one who are actually fighting for the freedom of Manipur which is reflected in her short story “Wakhalgi Wangmada” [“Beyond One’s Own Belief”] (2010). In this story, the protagonist Dr. Thoinu, a single, strong and educated woman, saved a wanted man from death without fear. She is well aware that the person she is saving is a ‘real’ freedom fighter, one who actually works for the welfare of his people. Being a woman she is not afraid of anything that could harm her life in the future for saving and helping a wanted person escape from armed forces. In fact, she herself wishes to contribute something to her people like the freedom fighter without the help of weapon or without taking the path of insurgency. Maya’s concept of sacrificing her life without getting married for the sake of her people is very strong. In a state like Manipur, it could be hard fighting for freedom and ones’ right without any weapon or support. But strong and confident woman like Maya believes that if one believes in oneself then no one can stop them from sacrificing their lives for the of their motherland which we seldom find in any other writers.

To conclude, both writers assert in their respective stories that the mind of most of the people in Manipur are influenced negatively by the unlikely roles of armed forces and insurgency that violate certain rights of women. Both writers gather creative forces through their writings that challenge the violation and exploitation of the rights of women. They record, in their writings, the yearning of women’s struggle to earn their lost dignity, image and chastity back. The short stories discussed in this paper contain within them strong arguments against the violators: the predators in the garb of protectors in a patriarchal society and the unidentifiable difference between the real and the fake freedom fighters.

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