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Emergence of New Women with Reference to Temsula Ao's Aosenla's Story

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Abstract

Temsula Ao is one of the pioneer women writers of Northeast India who is a fictionist, poet, ethnographer and retired Professor of North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong. Her novel entitled Aosenla's Story (2017) delineates the story of a vibrant protagonist called Aosenla. The novel deals with the emergence of "New Woman" which comprises autonomy and individuality. Aosenla is one such character who tries to be assertive against the limitations which society imposes on women in her native place. This story is taken up for discussion to highlight the condition of women in Northeast region through the character of Aosenla. Aosenla tries to prove her mettle to overcome the lower financial background of her family. The investigation explores how Aosenla struggles hard to break the familial shackles physically, mentally and emerges from the patriarchal world that subjugates women inside home by restricting their moves through the invisible rules.

Keywords: Emergence of New Woman, Autonomy and Individuality, Dilemma, Marriage, A Bond, Physical and Mental Struggle.

Introduction

The emergence of new women in literature has been a significant subject of study in recent years. One of the notable literary works that have brought to light the emergence of new women is Temsula Ao's Aosenla's story. Ao, a distinguished writer from Nagaland, India, captures the changing roles and status of women in her society.

The concept of "New Woman" was not recognized or accepted by historians and critics until 1960s. It may be because of the patriarchal predominance at that time, because the term was initially endorsed primarily by female writers who tried to promulgate freedom and individuality to women by providing them opportunities to equip them and up skill them to carve identities on their own independently. However, each women writer frame their own ideology form the definition called new women.

The concept of new women introduced from fictional world to real world through literary writers in their literary pieces. For instance, Sarah Grand's New Woman was educated and wanted an equal marriage, Olive Schreiner's New Woman wanted equality and sexual freedom, and George Egerton's New Woman also wanted

sexual freedom. Though the ideology varies from writer to writer, they had many traits in common. Grand's New Woman was trapped in a loveless marriage to a sick husband, and Schreiner's New Woman dies in childbirth. Only Egerton's New Woman appears to live a happy life. Similar to Grand's New Woman, Aosenla accepts loveless marriage and she undergoes certain changes which transfer her and becomes an icon of Egerton's New Woman.

The Emergence of New Women in Aosenla's Story Aosenla's story takes place in a Naga village where women were traditionally relegated to domestic chores and child-rearing. However, Aosenla, the protagonist of the story, challenges this norm by pursuing her education and working outside the home. Aosenla's determination to break away from the traditional role of women is evident when she tells her father, "I do not want to get married. I want to study." This declaration is significant because it shows that Aosenla is not content with the traditional role assigned to women in her society.

Moreover, Aosenla's decision to work outside the home is also a departure from the traditional roles of women. She takes up a job as a teacher, which was considered a male-dominated profession. Aosenla's success in her job and her desire to continue working are further evidence of the emergence of new women. Aosenla's story also shows that the emergence of new women is not a solitary phenomenon but a collective one. Aosenla's friends, who are also pursuing education, represent a growing number of women who are breaking away from traditional roles.

The novel, Aosenla's Story, delineates the story of a vibrant girl called Aosenla who is brought up in a humble locale. The girl's basic wish of pursuing her studies is shattered by her father and her family members. Suffrage of women and women who are driven under the pressure of economy downfall in a family is not the background of the novel. The protagonist has all sophistication in her life. She does not have any financial stress. Even then she does not have peace of mind. More than money what a woman needs is her identity and recognition that is what the author tries to nail through this novel. The condition of Aosenla is stated by Kalpana Bora Barman in her article as:

The novel opens significantly with a wedding invitation, thereby immediately enabling the writer to create a space to examine the protagonist's own marriage and thus propelling the narrative. The story centres on an extraordinarily strong willed woman called Aosenla, the young wife of a socially prominent person, who continuously struggles to come to terms with the realities of her married life. (Bora. K, 2019, p156)

Research Questions

- Do women complement the role of emerging women in their life?
- How do males play a pre-dominant role to chisel the identity of women?
- Do male and female Adjunct in their marital status?

New Woman: An Overview

The portrayal of women in literature has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades. The new women in literature are complex, multi-dimensional characters who are not defined solely by their gender roles. These women are portrayed as independent, ambitious, and confident individuals who are unafraid to challenge societal norms and expectations.

The concept New Woman is influential ever since the nineteenth century. Sarah Grand and Ouida used the term in their articles in that century. The term has a broad connotation to widen the limitations set by men against women and it makes them independent mentally and physically. Henry James popularized the term to highlight the growth of career women in Europe and the United States. The term does not refer to the independence of women on paper alone. Later the term associates its ideals with feminism.

Bordin, Ruth Birgitta Anderson said that the term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives, be it personal, social, or economic. New woman emerges as an active participant either in her career or in household responsibilities. She stays assertive in exercising her autonomy and remains the representative of fellow women. Industrialization paved way for the emergence of new women especially as career women to prove their mastery in their assigned task. Men also have noticed the value of women excelling in career. They welcome pink-collar workforce by 1910. Women could not be discarded even the patriarchal society marginalize them. Their stamina in all fields is mind blowing. They cannot be underestimated. Chances are not provided to many to highlight the achievements they have accrued. The ratio of women in non-agricultural workforce skyrocketed in the early 20th century. Empowerment and emergence of women was possible because of women education. The gross ratio of women in professional studies too ascended so rapidly enhance our economy background also.

The emergence of new women is often viewed as a challenge to traditional societal and familial structures. In many cultures, women are expected to fulfill specific roles within the family and community, and deviating from these roles can be met with resistance and criticism. However, as more women are pursuing education, careers, and personal fulfillment, the tension between society and family is becoming more apparent.

On one hand, society has been slow to adapt to the changing role of women. Many cultural and religious traditions place a premium on women's domestic roles and restrict their mobility and autonomy. This has created a societal pressure for women to conform to these traditional roles and expectations, which can limit their opportunities and life choices. Society's expectations for women are often in conflict with their own aspirations, which can create tension and conflict.

On the other hand, families are also grappling with the changes brought about by the emergence of new women. Parents and grandparents who grew up in a different era may struggle to understand why their daughters or granddaughters want to pursue a different path in life. They may worry that their daughters are neglecting their familial duties or placing themselves at risk by pursuing careers or education. Family members who are invested in maintaining traditional gender roles may view the new women's choices as a threat to the family structure.

The emergence of new women requires a shift in both societal and familial attitudes towards women's roles and capabilities. Society needs to recognize the value of women's contributions to the workforce and society as a whole, while families need to support and encourage their daughters and granddaughters to pursue their dreams. It is essential for women to have the freedom and support to choose their own paths in life without being restricted by societal or familial expectations. As we continue to navigate the tension between society and family, it is important to remember that supporting and empowering women benefits not just individuals, but entire communities and societies.

The New Woman prioritises her sexual autonomy, but that was difficult to put into practice as society still voiced loud disapproval of any sign of female licentiousness. For women in the Victorian era, any sexual activity outside of marriage was judged to be immoral. Divorce law changes during the late 19th century gave rise to a New Woman who could survive a divorce with her economic independence intact, and an increasing number of divorced women remarried. Maintaining social respectability while exercising legal rights still judged to be immoral by many was a challenge for the New Woman. The protagonist Aosenla in *Aosenla's Story* is one such woman who sticks to legal and conventional relationship in her marital life. Though she is not happy she never tries to betray her husband. She endures the trouble and tries to find a solution to be a perfect wife. Being a man of loose morals Bendang tries to hush his wife from expressing herself.

Literature Review

George Mary & T. Jayakumar (2021) states in their article *Manifold Multitudes of Women in the Writings of Shobhaa De* that “The standing of women has never been the same... However, the truth remains that women worldwide have always had a lower social status, often even that of an enslaved person”. (p.768)

Aten, Susan in “Weaving a Literary Fabric” discusses the position of Naga women in their family and community and the patriarchal mindset and ideology that surrounds the men’s behaviour. (Waten, 2009)

Priyanka Mahajan and Jaideep Randhawa states (2016) “The depiction of “New Woman” has become a reality in modern and postmodern literature. Socio-cultural forces, new science, new technology, new education and trends towards liberalization brought about the emergence of the new woman in fiction.” (2016, p.2)

Barman (2019) in her review says that Aosenla’s aspiration to accustom herself with the literature and music enables her to be an assertive character. The readers can feel her growth and empathise her loneliness, her self-doubt and her struggle to overcome her identity crisis and make her “self” known. When it is her turn to take care of her daughter Aosenla takes the reins in her hands and provides the facilities and exposure that she lacked to her daughter to make her an independent girl, Aosenla’s expedition metamorphoses her beyond the realm of the marital bond and the routine.

Jasbir (2018) in his article opines how Aosenla is caught in family ties and struggles hard to come out of the web which is woven under the name of convention and custom. Aosenla is admirable because she is not vulnerable to the obstacles. She proves herself to be strong and Chowdhury (2019), analyses the factors that affect and curb the women in Ao community. Aosenla’s grandmother strongly denied the facts of sending girls to schools and colleges. It is generally perceived by elders belonged to the postcolonial period that sending out girls will incur problems to the family. So they decide to curb her studies and self - development. They want their girls to be eligible for marriage to look after their husbands and children.

Arora (2019) in her article locates Ao’s text as a voicing source of socio-political issues that have affected Nagamese people. Not only her novels but also her short stories reflect” the patriarchal biases inherent in the conception and construction of the official reports, political processes, and commentaries which aggravate the gendered contexts of women’s lives in myriad ways”.

As an eco-feminist writer, Temsula Ao stands for her fellowship with nature and women, opines Saranya (2020). The writer has concern toward not only with women but also with nature. Her writing stands as the testimony of her views.

Discussion

Temsula Ao’s character Aosenla embodies many of the qualities of the new women in literature. Aosenla is a strong, independent woman who is unafraid to speak her mind and pursue her dreams. She defies societal expectations by rejecting the traditional roles assigned to women in her community and pursuing a career as a teacher.

One of the defining qualities of the new women in literature is their agency. These women are not passive characters, but rather, they actively shape their own destinies. Aosenla embodies this quality, as she takes control of her life and refuses to be defined by the expectations of others. She is determined to pursue her career as a teacher and make a difference in the lives of her students, even in the face of opposition from her family and community.

Another quality of the new women in literature is their willingness to challenge societal norms and expectations. Aosenla embodies this quality as well, as she refuses to conform to the traditional roles assigned to women in her community.

She challenges the patriarchal norms that limit women's opportunities and asserts her right to pursue her own dreams and ambitions.

Temsula Ao's *Aosenla's Story* clearly gives a picture about the male dominated Naga society especially among the Ao tribe, marked by ancient tradition and superstitions. The ambience and the society in which Aosenla lives prioritizes male children in getting due care and respect from their parents "why does he treat me like a guest in this house? Why is he so formal?" (p.11). complains Aosenla to her mother. The patriarchal set up that pervades in the village made Aosenla subside her wishes. Her independence is curbed by her own father and her grandmother who have such a grand narrative imbibed in his mind like people from ages hence that girls' duty is to stay inside home as a dutiful daughter, wife and then mother.

In *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) Easterine Kire reminds us, girl children are never considered real members of the family. Their mission in life is to marry and have children and be able to cook and weave cloth and look after the household. If they got married, they would always be known as somebody's wife or somebody's mother, but never somebody's daughter. (pp. 24- 25)

Aoesenla is unable to get support even from her mother who is an obliging wife and cannot go against her dominant husband. The sad plight is that Aosenla cannot get support even from females at home. The worst irony is that her maternal grandmother weaves a plot for Aosenla to accept for the marriage arranged by her son-in-law. It is explicable that women too are submissive and ready to obey to the words dictated without minding their desire and dream. They are always ready to adjust their life to the desire of men at the cost of their dreams.

During Aosenla's marriage talk her maternal uncle too informed the grandmother not to "come to a hasty conclusion" and said "Maybe we should ask the girl what actually happened tonight." This heightens the fury of grandmother, she fears that if Aosenla refuses to give her consent towards marriage their family will be looked as a "laughing stock of the village" (p.24).The grandmother thus succeeds in her ploy by interpreting Aosenla's meeting with Bendang according to her whims and fancies which results in the forceful and undeniable marriage of Aoesenla with the kingpin called Bendang.

Bendang is very much older than Aosenla, but for his richness and influence in the society Aoesenla's father approves the request of Bendang's father's proposal to give his daughter in marriage with Bendang. The initial days of Aosenla and Bendang's marriage are not smooth. Bendang expresses his grudges towards his wife when she weaves a cocoon around herself during any social gathering. He continued, "Do you know what he said? He said that my wife is snooty, thinks no end of herself and does not know how to behave in polite society. Mind you, if I do not get the army contact this year, it will be your fault." (p.31)

Aosenla feels disheartened initially later she proves herself to be a worthy woman to adapt herself to new environment and people. This changeover of Aosenla too shocks Bendang.

The submissive and ignorant Aosenla has taken a new form after the birth of her two girl children. The intimidation of her husband and mother-in-law considering her to be a feeble girl who comes from a middle class background finds an end when Aosenla is charged for her social acquaintance with one of her brother-in-law's friend by name Toshi. Aosenla enjoys the company with her peer group but that has ignited the entire family to accuse her of flirtation. The pent up feelings and emotions of Aosenla erupted from her fiercely in such a way that has clipped and pruned the mouth which talks ill of her. She measures her worlds while defending her stance.

This is a grave accusation and I am not prepared to let this unfolded attack on my integrity go unchallenged. After all I too have a family and clan members; I have not sprung out of sticks or stones. I shall send word to my father, uncles and other clan members and only in their presence can we have a proper hearing to determine if there is any truth in your accusation; it is not going to

be settled like this with all of you ganging up on me. And not only that, you will have to deal with Toshi's family too because you are naming him as my "boyfriend". Be prepared for that too. (p.39)

Aosenla's defensive statement jolts everyone in the family. Her assertive statement "had stumped them not only with a moral challenge, but had also reminded them that she had the advantage of belonging to a powerful clan in the village." (p.40) The statement further proves that a girl's determination and courage emerge only when she is supported by her family. Bendang's father realises the ferocity of Aosenla's utterance. He realises the fathom of his daughter-in-law's retort. He calls his son for a private conversation. He changes his attitude and has brought a surprise to Aosenla by staying with her and spends a lot of time with her. Bendang's concern impresses Aosenla. She forgives his past misdeeds (gambling debauchery) she leads a life of fantasy then on, until she finds out that she is pregnant. After this, Bendang retreats to his past deeds.

Aosenla realises that her vulnerability towards sex has led her to this scenario. To "reaffirm his superiority over her body" (p.45). Bendang uses sex as means. Aosenla recollects his past at this juncture. She was sexually abused as a child. She travels through the school days during which she came across an old man in a camp where labourers used to reside. The young girl was attracted to an earring. The stiffness of her father towards the girl child and the submissiveness of her mother to approach her father made her feel enjoyed to the request of the old man. The girl who is tinged with ignorance and innocence without having an iota of suspicion has fallen into the trap of the old man who wants to appease his sexual desire through Aosenla, without realising the intensity of the old man's plot Aosenla listened to his words then realises pain and escapes from the clutches of the sex monger. The incident mars Aosenla's peace of mind. She tries to pull the dirty moment that gnaws his memory. She determines to relegate it to the beach of the mind. This misery in the third conception also hits her like that past event.

Aosenla Stand as a Real Testimony for "New Women"

Aosenla is a true inspiration and testimony for new women around the world. She is a woman who has not let societal norms or traditional roles define her place in society. Aosenla is a trailblazer, a fighter, and a survivor. She has overcome numerous challenges to achieve her goals and has emerged as a role model for women everywhere.

One of the most remarkable things about Aosenla is her determination to pursue her dreams despite facing obstacles. As a young girl, she had to fight for the right to an education in a society that did not believe in educating girls. She faced opposition from her family, her community, and even the government. But, Aosenla persisted, and with the help of supportive mentors and allies, she was able to earn a degree in engineering. Her success has shattered stereotypes and shown that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Aosenla is also a strong advocate for women's rights and empowerment. She has used her platform to speak out against gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality. Her work has inspired countless women to speak up and demand their rights. She is a champion for women's voices to be heard and recognized, and her leadership has helped to pave the way for a more equitable and just society.

Thus, Aosenla is a real testimony for new women who are seeking to break free from societal constraints and carve out their own path in life. She is a symbol of hope, strength, and resilience, and her story serves as a powerful reminder that anything is possible with hard work and determination. By embodying the values of courage, passion, and perseverance, Aosenla has inspired a generation of women to follow their dreams and make their mark on the world.

Three Phases of Aosenla's Life

Aosenla's life begins in an unassuming way. Her life can be divided into three phases-premarital post marital and post marital blues. During all the three phases there is a transformation and change over in the character of Aosenla.

Life of Aosenla before marriage is so simple and humble. She leads a contented life except her father's indifferent attitude towards her because she is a girl. Aosenla is enforced to take up the role of a wife. Through her father-in-law and her entire clan know that Bendang, her husband is amoral, for the sake of society and to keep the family name in tact Aosenla is chosen by Bendang's father.

Aosenla faces humiliation because of her husband and mother-in-law. Even after the birth of her two daughters she does not gather courage to express her desires to her husband. But the way she remained stubborn and patient in facing challenges bring her success in her life. Everything has fallen into her plate because of destiny.

Aosenla's charisma and dynamism allures the attention of the doctor kilang, who treats Aosenla during her third delivery and her husband Bendang after the fatel accident. The doctor has dilemma and does not want to tarnish the good name that he has earned in the town after his sincere and devotional effort in setting up a home for the abandoned. Aosenla does not lose hope after Bendang's accident. She asserts her decision to Kilang. She senses his feelings for her. So she terminates the bond by stating that "let us always remain friends". (p.187) The girl who divests her individuality after marriage starts processing her independence and identity.

Aosenla's Emergence as a New Woman

Aosenla's emergence as a new woman begins only when she realises herself. She "began to realize that dwelling on the past serves no purpose; such thoughts only aggravated her inner turmoil" (p 90) past events threaten to blur our present. So she determines to create a new world of her own with her daughters, Chubala and Narela. She dislikes intruders in her life. But she does not have a smooth sail for a long time. She receives a bolt from the blue which discloses the dark past of Bendang and his illegitimate and irresponsible affair with a young girl during his business trip. The innocent girl loses her chastity and begets a child. Since Bendang's father refuses to accept the girl she finds a new way on her own and stays away from her family after begetting a girl child.

The child grows amidst much turmoil and turns out to be a notorious figure in the entire village. Like her mother she begets a child but cannot tell exactly who the father is. The girl also passes away. The grandfather brings the child to Aosenla's place but because of Kilang the child is left at home and later through adoption the child reaches its destination (safe in the arms of her own grandmother)

Aosenla who has a mental turmoil hides the heart-throbbing secret from everyone until the end. Even the tormentor, Bendang is also unaware of that Aosenla keeps all fights and conflicts within herself.

Aosenla retreats from Bendang after she comes to know of his past affair and its dreadful impact now. She realises the value of her role as a mother and so restrains herself from Bendang who never acknowledges his wife's concern. This mutation compels Bendang to opt for patch up after much mull over. Fate has its own plot. Bendang meets with an accident which has crippled his desire of Bendang.

Bendang remains in the custody of his father even after fifteen years of his married life. When he is in bed, his father takes the responsibility of deciding the hospital and the companion to accompany his son to Vellore. His unexpected death forces Bendang to take up the role of his father. He is very decisive to recover soon. On the other hand "Aosenla, the timid a girl and submissive wife was gradually becoming Aosenla, the bold and decisive woman" (p.142) she becomes a dutiful

daughter-in-law to look after her mother-in law. Though the woman disgraces her during her early days of marriage, Aosenla forgets and pushes aside those intimidating moments. This attitude and good gesture of Aosenla prove her maturity to get into real life situations.

Her mother-in-law, basking in the aura of her husband and her position as the matriarch of a formidable family, had seemed absolutely invincible; but she had witnessed how helpless and vulnerable she had become once the protective power of her husband was snatched away from her. (p. 193)

This thought reflected by Aosenla implies that man and woman complement each other to build a fine place called home in the society. The worried mother-in-law gets perturbed and has gone insane. She is unable to with stand her husband's loss thus she succumbs to ailment and breathes her last.

The big house that frightens Aosenla in the beginning now has become lifeless and she has got entire control over that. The author has concluded the story like other "happily after" tale.

The emergence of Aosenla as an independent woman who no longer awaits her husband's approval stands on her own. "She becomes Aosenla, the mistress of her own little world where her authority is absolute" (p. 195)

Conclusion

The author concludes the novel with a striking note, "There is a new understanding not only of herself but also her husband's love and concern for their daughter, a fine balance emerges within the relationship between them. She is free from her earlier insecurities and doubts" (p. 203)

This elucidates that even woman are independent they want their life partner to play a part in their life to add feather to their cap. Independence and individuality takes a complete shape only when a woman is attributed by her spouse. Aosenla does not fight for right she just travels in her own way without creating any tremor and thus is understood and realised by her husband who tries to adapt to her nature with all heart. A woman's role/success of a woman is destined or designed with a perfect outlook when she is complemented by a man. Though Aosenla's husband has some friction with her his metamorphosis in understanding his wife has brought some changes in Aosenla.

The emergence of new women is a phenomenon that is transforming societies around the world. Women today are breaking free from traditional roles and expectations to create their own identities and lead independent lives. The story of Aosenla in Temsula Ao's Aosenla's Story is a powerful portrayal of the struggles and challenges faced by women who seek to break free from traditional roles. It is a testament to the strength and resilience of women who refuse to be held back by societal expectations, and who are determined to make their mark on the world.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

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