Colonial Representation in Sümi Folksong

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Abstract
The Sümi folksongs are important cultural texts that document not only their way of life but also their history. The representation of colonialism is prevalent in Sümi folksongs and they act as authentic historical documentation of colonization. Through their folksongs, the Sümis have sung about their experiences under their colonial masters, how they took part in a war that was unlike any other wars they had ever fought. This research is an attempt to critically analyse one of the folksongs of the Sümi Nagas and explore the colonial representation through it. The self-representation of identity and representation of history has been explored in this research.

Keywords: Colonialism, Cultural Identity, History, Self-Representation

Introduction
Colonialism is a term that plays a significant role in defining the various forms of cultural exploitation which developed with the expansion of Europe in the last 400 years. The settlement of the colonizers caused by the expansion of European society after the Renaissance portrays why the term has been seen as a distinctive form of the more general ideology of imperialism. (Ashcroft 45-46). In his book Orientalism, Edward Said writes that, the theory laid down by the white men in the first decade of the twentieth century worked resplendently well. It was easy to grasp that the theory between the Westerners and the Orientals was that the former played the role of the dominator and the latter was meant to be dominated. This usually means having the land of the ‘dominated’ being occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power (36). Hegemony has played a significant tool in colonial rule and has proved effective in bringing about cultural change amongst the colonized people.

Hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class’ interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. (Ashcroft 116)

In a colonial world, the colonized man looked up to the white man in admiration and in his mind created an image of faultlessness. In this process, he felt that his own culture and identity was less significant than that of the white man. Hegemony begins from the mind and ends from the mind. Its birth took place in the white man’s mind, and it then got transferred into the minds of the colonized and that is where the power struggle comes at play. Imperialism deals with physically colonizing the native people and their lands; however, in hegemony the minds of
the native man are colonized, and this phenomenon seems to be even more complex. In a postcolonial world, hegemony is still existent and thus making is more powerful than imperialism. The native man feel that he is insignificant and inferior and thus tries to make all efforts to be like the white man. In The Wretched of the Earth Fanon writes, “the colonised man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive ‘They want to take our place’. It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place” (30). The ‘dream’ of being in the settler’s place and of living a life of imitation has distorted the identity of the colonized man. His history has been misrepresented for long.

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Before the Nagas came into contact with their colonial masters they had their own distinct cultural identity and religion. The Nagas were animists who worshiped nature and believed in spirits. Their world was their small villages, clans, and family, and they did not know a world beyond that. The Sümis were story tellers, they were creators of music, lovers of nature, and everything around him was a source of inspiration for creativity. It cannot be denied that colonialism brought in several changes that contributed towards their growth and advancement, however it is equally important to consider the fact that the damage it has done is still very prominent and the struggle for cultural identity still continues. Sümi folksongs were a means of comfort, solace and entertainment for the Sümis but most importantly their folksongs were also a way of communication, a way of self-representation and self-expression. The folksong mentioned below was composed in France by the Sümi labourers who went to participate in the First World War:

*Hiyelo ashopumino imu Shiyihe*  
*Hiyelo asholimino*  
*Hiyelo anga Losheli ilomi hiwolo*  
*Hiyelo kin shiwuniye chenike pilo*  
*Hiyelo axamunu xowuniye chenike pilo*  
*Hiyelo xamunu xowuniye chenike pilo*  
*Hiyelo Jermalimi*  
*Hiyelo xowuniye*  
*Hiyelo xoluniye chenike*  
*Wolo-wolono iliili wolo*

(Translation by, J.H. Hutton)

“O you young bloods go and search for Shiyihe, mine elder brother, and you colleens for darling Losheli his sweetheart. Tell what he went forth to do; tell (her) that he went forth to pluck a flower; tell (her) that he went forth to pluck a flower, a flower of the Germans he went to pluck, went forth to pluck and take. In going, in going fare thee well”. (Hutton 369)

This folksong is a representation and a documentation of how the Sümis played vigorous role in the First World War. The First World War, also called the Great War was fought from 1914 to 1918. Most of the European nations were involved in the Great War including Britain. During this time the Nagas were under the British Empire and thus they were compelled to participate in the war. This folksong is a legitimate account and a testimonial record of colonisation and it represents how the Sümis courageously fought alongside their colonial masters by going down the battlefield that was unlike any battlefield they have ever fought in. This expedition of
going to the war in Germany was called *German Thawu* by the Sümi Naga Labour Corps who took part in the war and later returned safely to their homeland. *Tha* is a word in Sümi dialect which means ‘to cut off’ and *wu* means ‘to go’. The very phrase *German Thawu* would mean going to German to behead the enemies. This makes sense because the Sümis followed the tradition of head hunting and war for them meant beheading the heads of their enemies. This was the first time they were exposed to a war that was entirely different from their war, however they gave a name that was authentic and relatable to them. They fought the western war in their own aboriginal way and through their folksongs, documented their experiences.

**Conclusion**

The Sümi Labour Corps in France were identified not only for their unique facial features but also for their colourful cultural attires and their art of ululating which was mystic and left the viewers in awe and amazement. They held their cultural identity close to them and thus everyone they encounter were introduced to their unique culture. Being in an alien land, they sang their folksongs as a means to comfort one another and as a gesture of bringing the memories of their home and beloved land to the alien place they were in. It was their way of reminding themselves of their roots and their belongingness. Their folksongs reminded them of their home, their wives and children and they woefully sang them whenever they missed their homes. In a postcolonial world, ‘representation’ of the third world by the Europeans is a major concern. The history of the native people that has been presented to the world is a history written by the Europeans as they were the so called ‘cultured’, and ‘civilized’ people while on the other hand, the natives were illiterate, ‘uncivilized’ and knew very little beyond his native land and people. This gave the colonizers the freedom to write history from their own perspectives and most of the representations of the native that we know today are through their perspective. What is written in the history of the colonized man is the notion of the colonizers in whose eyes the native man was always seen as an inferior being in need of a ‘saviour’ to rescue them and bring them out of their irrationality. According to Said, “the Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire” (203). A glimpse of self-representation and self-portrayal can be seen in the Sümi folksongs that reflects colonialism. The so called ‘rational’ group of colonizers failed to identify and refused to acknowledge the fact that the people whose land they had intruded into were rational beings like them and have their own identity. In a postcolonial world where the image of the history of the colonized people that is shown to the world is one sided, age old folksongs can be great source of testimonial for depicting history and this very thing is what we see in the Sümi folksongs.

**References**


