

Understanding the Lullabies as a Source of Women Voice in Sumi Naga Tribe of Nagaland

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Abstract

Lullaby holds a significant medium through which we can comprehend the status of women particularly in a patriarchal society where they are mostly not provided with any platform or medium through which they can express their desires, problems, pains, expectations to the members of the family and the society. Hence, we can observe in most of the patriarchal societies, public speaking platforms are traditionally male controlled and where women can only be spectators not performers and even in some societies, they are allowed they have to perform strictly scripted roles there, maintaining the patriarchal values. The present study is also focused on understanding the status of women among the traditional Sumi tribe of Nagaland. Nagaland which is strictly a patriarchal society the diverse norms, rituals and values and practices are designed to keep balance with the broad patriarchal value. Hence a detail study of the few traditional lullaby which are now in the verge of extinction can through light on the overall status of a typical Sumi women and the Sumi society as a whole. The study establishes how women in a typical traditional Sumi society face divers gender based social inequalities which are legitimized by the rigid social norms, rituals and practices in a typical patriarchal society.

Keywords: *Lullaby; Gender; Folklore; Sumi tribe; Patriarchy.*

In the literature of folklore, lullaby is often referred as cradle song, in this line folklorist Theresa Brakeley (1950:653) defined lullaby “as a type of song sung by mothers and nurses the world over to coax their babies to sleep”. The interpretation of these songs is frequently connected with charms, as the power and enchanted integrated in the blend of musical drive and pulsing modeling stimulus to the behavior of the song addressee. Similarly, Ikegami (1986:103) expresses the connotation of magic to lullaby singing in Japan and endorses that the performer of the text perceives that they have control over the doings of the song receiver in much the identical way as a magician chants an allure and commands an alteration in behaviour. Likewise, in the literature on lullaby performance, Farber’s (1990) investigation of Babylonian and Assyrian lullabies draws strong parallels between an allure used to soften a crying baby and the religious ancestries of Babylonian magic but counters the impression that lullabies in this context are controlling. Giudice’s (1988:270)

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research of Italian lullaby and Ebeogu's study on Igbo recital of Nigeria (1991:99) contemplate the function of lullaby performance. They hold that while the prime role of the lullaby is to put children to sleep, in several cultures the performance of lullabies aids other secondary functions such as the socialization of the infant in musical and conceptual standings.

In the context of lullaby performance children are the receivers rather than the recitalists and hence lullaby songs are not proposed to be sung by children but rather to be sung to and for the infant or child by a grownup. Further, the performance of lullabies is usually considered to be the sphere of women and performance of lullabies may offer the child with one of the first points of contact with important female kin. Thus, performance of lullabies can serve as a vent for sensitive countenance by the performer. Macfie (1990:196) suggests that Turkish lullabies often prompt the feelings of the mother and Manasseh (1991:4) highlighted through his study that performance of lullabies amongst women of the Iraqi Jewish tradition serves the twin purpose of comforting a child and the singer's own injured soul by providing her with a ventilator to air her emotion. Masuyama (1989:144-5) observes that in Japan lullabies might ideally be defined as an occasion for caregivers to "say the socially unsayable" in order for them to release their feelings of craving, yearning and displeasure. Thus, lullaby texts may through light on the social and musical themes of curiosity and interest to not only mothers but also other adult listeners. Amil Çelebioğlu, in an interview about lullaby as a literary genre suggests that between the ages three-four, the feelings of anger, promise, displeasure becomes more active. Although lullabies are addressed to babies, mothers tend to express their daily difficulties and obstacles and problems through this medium, the mood that they are experiencing and their hope for the future and many more personal feelings and expectations through lullabies.

Thus, lullaby holds a significant medium through which we can comprehend the status of women particularly in a patriarchal society where they are mostly not provided with any platform or medium through which they can express their desires, problems, pains, expectations to the members of the family and the society. Hence, we can observe in most of the patriarchal societies, public speaking platforms are traditionally male controlled and where women can only be spectators not performers and even in some societies, they are allowed they have to perform strictly scripted roles there, maintaining the patriarchal values. The present study is also focused on understanding the status of women among the traditional Sumi tribe of Nagaland. Nagaland which is strictly a patriarchal society the diverse norms, rituals and values and practices are designed to keep balance with the broad patriarchal value. Hence a detail study of the few traditional lullaby which are now in the verge of extinction can through light on the overall status of a typical Sumi women and the Sumi society as a whole.

The Sumi tribe are mostly concentrated in the Zunheboto district of Nagaland situated in the heart of Nagaland and is bounded by Mokokchung on the North, Tuensang district on the East, Phek district on the South and Wokha on the West. The name, 'Zunheboto' is derived from two sets of words "Zunhebo" and "To" in Sumi dialect. "Zunhebo" is the name of a flower shrub with white leaves which bear sponge like ears containing sweet juice and "To" means the top of a hill. Hence, Zunheboto was named after the flower found on the top of the hill. It is interesting to note that Zunheboto district was never known by a single nomenclature.

Sumi Nagas, are a warrior tribe of Nagaland. Head hunting was practiced extensively until the advent of the Christian missionaries who converted the warriors to Christianity. Today the people are peaceful and hardworking, practicing agriculture as their main occupation. Like all other Nagas, Sumis have Mongoloid features. The people are generally healthy and well-built. Sumis are adept artisans and skilled craftsmen. They weave beautiful designs on their hand-woven mekheles and

shawls. The Sumi people are on an average shorter in height but their lives are very active, manifested in their folk dances which are fast and rhythmic. They have a system of hereditary chiefdom and the words of the chief were the laws in the past. He was the man who was responsible for the maintenance of harmony in the village, protection of their customary laws and customs and defence of the village from the invaders. The role of the village elders in the day-to-day affairs of the village was very important. In modern times however, this hereditary system has been gradually replaced by a system of elected/nominated representatives forming a village council headed by a chairman.

The present study is focused on a detail study of three selected lullaby of the Sumi tribe to get more light into the social life of Sumi women as it has got inputs of many minute details of their pains, problems, expectations that the society and the family has imposed on them and in the process get impression of the actual traditional social practices among the tribe.

Lullaby 1

Angamuzu puzu kue le (Song putting a baby to Sleep)

Hi ye lo zuhu velo
Off to Sleep
Hi ye lo xu shivelo
Off to Slumber
Ninu ye akivi ke
Our son is obedient
Ni nga mulo shi pusa mo zuhu velo
Our daughter won't be stirred so slumber
Hi ye lo zuhu velo
Off to sleep
Hi ye lo xu shivelo
Off to Slumber
Alomi adu shipeni ke
May my beloved be a gentleman
Alokeu apumi ye adu kuchou shipiyeni
May my beloved son become a real gentleman
Alokeu ilimi ye totimi kuchou shipiyeni
May my beloved daughter be virtuous
Iqhu ighai alo ino aza lokumugha ke puno zuhu velo.
In sweet calm, burden not your mother and sleep

Analysis.

This particular lullaby is generally sung by the mother for their baby off to slumber. The mothers articulate her gratefulness for their children and phrasing a blessing line for their children. In the earlier times it was a believed that whatever phrase pronounce by the parents for their children normally turns into reality when they grow up, therefore parents are always cautious and think wisely before they speak. Hence when they are still a toddler the mother moulds their children by singing a melodious lullaby in a calm voice and allowed baby to sleep peacefully and also ask a good fortune for their children. The lullaby highlights the gender constructs of the tribe where the

boy child is expected to be gentle man and obedient, but the girl child is expected to be virtuous. The importance given to the chastity of the women throws light on the gender perspective of the tribe. It also pointed out the how by the medium of lullaby singing the mother is requesting her children to not add to her burden of household chores which she may not do to other members of the family.

Lullaby 2

Inali lakhino Aza anga-kupu kuha no qa-ghi anga muzu keu shikipili le.

(Lullaby of a daughter-in-law sung in tears)

Wolo wolo

Gone gone

He-o wolo zulo-ii-ye yea-ey-oh-oh-i-e lo-e

Yodeling...

He-oi ning-u ninga-oi qakeloilomi-I i-ye lo-oyi iye-o-oh-he-yi

O My Baby don't you cry o

He-o azano mulani qatsuke vi-lo-I he-o-I ye-oyi lo-yi

O mother shall work so don't you shed a tear

He-o azano ashi lhotsuni ke qakelo-I hi-ye-ye-o-oh he-oyi

O don't cry as your mother shall prepare you meat

He-oi timi khiu nono aza zuqho shitsu kemi kuha ye-o iye-lo-o-yi lo-o-yi

Alas! There's no **nanny** to lighten my burden

He-o ilomi azano xapsu qaniye ninga oyi iye lo-oyi lo-oyi

O my dear the mother is shedding a tear

He-o niqhemu hamiye ninga puqa che ye-I hi-ye-lo-oohe lo-oyi

O how some of my companions let their children cry

He-o azaye inapu, inali-mike qatsu kevalo-oh he-oyi lo-oyi

O I am a stranger here, so don't you cry

He-o xulo-oi zulo-oi

Ahoy! Life goes on

I-ye o he-o-yi lo-oyi

Analysis.

Every community has diverse lullaby, and this lullaby is not only for smoothening the babies but also a platform for the mothers where she can express her feelings. Even in Sumi community the lullabies are usually sang by the mothers for their babies at the same time narrating her hardship living. This particular line signifies how one face barrier when married to a far place, she also narrated that nobody to give her a helping hand she was completely alien and feeling isolated and secluded, where no one in the family is sensitive to her pain, problems and dreams. Therefore, mothers are pleasing their baby to sleep at the same time narrating her unfortunate life simultaneously. Hence lullaby is sometimes considered the only voices for the mother to showcase her emotion. The use of meat here is not just food but a reflection of happiness, celebration and good days.

Lullaby 3

Khaghi kichimi ye aqha kumtsu no ale lakhi ye kumo, ikemu anga muzu puzu kiu le acheni ipikiu kiqui ye inapu inalimi no khuno phu lo kulau kela paghi mighimi shi kulaighi. Ikemua kimi no anipu atianuli ghili muthano paye ashou thono akibo ghili muthano anipu no imea kiu mutha. Anipu ye anga anike kea nga ghi ghoshi masa akumla ghi shimasa tilehino anga no qauve ani. Anga pinimula kelauno anga ghi heghi aza no ishi anga muzupu zu cheni

*Ningau aza ye Inalimi ipukuhai zakuha,
Opu kughapesu ipushini izashiniye
Ikemu opunono akivishi ikujo tuchamoke
Ike aza no kugho no ani shinikeno ash iotsunani, akha otsunani,
aza no alokiu otsunan ike tighenguno azakimiye no qhatsukelo,
Ipi aza ghi anhezu iqhighi tishi ang amuzu ghi tishino akumla shiche.*

Tishi aye anga ghi ithiakeshi aza no tishi kimiye kiutsa pikiu,
Anga ghi aza tsa inipesu no zuhuveche.

Tishi no aza ye amlolikihi shi inapu inali shipu paye mla ithano kinimi shighi, tishino ajuaje kivishi quniye pukaputsa ghi anga muzu ghi ale pheachene.

Translation

During early days, the lullabies that were sung were of different genres which were performed according to the context. One certain type was of the woman who married off to a man from a faraway place and hence she had to abandoned all her relatives and had to settle off in her in-law's place as the society is a patrilocal one. Often the husband was unaware of the plight of the family at home for he was mainly concerned with the work and life outside the home. The wife had to deal with all the household chores and at the same time nurse the little child and so many times. The mother would be overwhelmed. In such situations the mother would well up and in tears would break into a lullaby

**O my little one. Mum is an alien and a hapless orphan
I expected your father to be even my mother and father
But your father is none of that.
When its *tuluni*, mother will feed you fish and meat aplenty
Mother will feed you the best so do not cry my little one.**

And as if the child understood the lyrics to the lullaby, at length would stop crying and would slumber off to sleep. And the mother would be relieved and would continue her chores.

Analysis

The song reveals many imperative details about the life and the status of women in the traditional Sumi society. The routine of a typical housewife is very hectic and when she is also a mother her plights is heightened by the demand for additional nursing to her children. Here the importance of family is also highlighted and marriage village exogamy is also portrayed. When a woman is married within or nearby her parents' house, her family members plays a significant helping hand to her both emotionally, psychological and also in the household chores physically.

But when she is married faraway outside her village she is all alone, and only expects her husband to fill the loneliness in her life, by also taking the role of her parents too. As the man of the family spends most of his time outside the house in search of bread for the family, she remains secluded and lonely with all her problems. The mention of Tuluni festival here represents the present status of poverty in the family where they may not always afford to have fish and meat, the festival also signifies happiness which is an occasional reality for her. Hence this lullaby reveals the story of a typical Sumi woman who is lonely, unhappy, tired, sad, despondent and her only ray of solace is her child and a hope for a better life for her child.

Conclusion

Performing lullabies within the concealment of the household permits women to express their private feelings, which are mostly silent and the forbidden. As they enjoy their privacy only when they are with the child, here only they can release their grievances and anguishes only to their baby. We can see here that the Sumi lullabies let women to ventilate their angst and longings over the lost people, homeland and happy family. In this context, lullabies might be observed as the most intimate revelation ventilated by repressed women in a typically patriarchal society.

Monologue of mother with her child is one of the most imperative refrains accessible by the mother in the form of lullabies. The analysis of this verbal art forms comprises numerous vital aspects. Regardless of the optimistic purposes of discourse which aids the mother to get respite from mental tension and stress, the melodies of lullabies in monologues also portrays the stifled feeling of the mother. These lullabies are the unwritten and oral expression of mother's suppressed feeling which she has chosen to convey to her children only. These suppressed feelings are related to mother's loneliness, pain, anxiety, disparity and also her dreams. Conceivably, the core purpose of opening such repressed feeling in front of children can be accredited to the fact that in a typical Sumi family, the woman has no choice or opportunity for free discussion and communication with members in the family. Hence, the gender inequality in the family leads to a situation where the woman is forced to unilaterally express her suppressed feelings to her children.

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- Music for dreaming: Aboriginal lullabies in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola, Northern Territory Elizabeth Mackinlay 31 May 2008 To cite this article: Elizabeth Mackinlay 1999: *Music for dreaming: Aboriginal lullabies in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola, Northern Territory*, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 8:1, 97-111, DOI: 10.1080/09681229908567282).