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Countering The Hegemonic Narratives: A Subaltern Geopolitics View With Reference To A Village Remembered And Bitter Wormwood By Easterine Kire

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Abstract

The study of subaltern narratives that emerge out of postcolonial literature as a branch of knowledge system giving space to the voice of the marginalized living on the periphery or in a state of being ignored by the mainstream narratives, dares to challenge and debunk the stereotypes and linear perspectives long held by the hegemony and power structure of ruling class. The study traces the struggle and resistance of self-satisfied indigenous people belonging to Angami tribe in Nagaland, suffering and feeling alienated with the appropriation of their land by colonial masters or nationally elite class of post-colonial period. Tribal people, associated with the protection of land from ancient times, had suffered and gone through a series of struggle and resistance resulting in the creation of glorious history of their own, which did not find any significance and recognition in the formation of nation history for the biasness and prejudices of the hegemonic power structure. Land and land related resources, being the part and root of any tribal community represent their culture and identity. But they had to suffer from land extortion, land alienation, replacement, broader national context resulting into the disastrous loss of self-determination and cultural identity. This article aims to trace the trajectory of the critical existence of Naga people during colonial period and after decolonisation with the intricate play of hegemony and power structure over the land politics with the perspective of subaltern geopolitics. All the tribes in general and Angami tribes in particular are intrinsically and culturally connected to the land, and the acquisition and protection of land for their existence played a significant role in the exploitation and subjugation of the natives. Imperialism and its mechanism which have been spread and normalised against Tribal community throughout the ages by dominant groups, have been analysed with the lens of subaltern geopolitics. Besides, they have appropriated the cultural exploitation of Tribal community which has been reinterpreted with the lens of hegemony. It also focuses on the intricate and complex power structure in terms of political and economic exploitation inflicted upon Angami Tribe.

Keywords: hegemony, power, knowledge, hierarchy, marginalization, subalternity, surveillance, and resistance.

Introduction

Easterine Kire is the first writer of Nagaland to write in English. She was born in Kohima, Nagaland with the roots of Angami Tribe. She is the real champion of documenting the struggle and the lived experiences of Naga people for their independence and sovereignty. She, grown up with the association and nurturing of Angami Tribal culture and tradition, has documented the oral narratives into written form with inherent knowledge and skills of communication. Kire has written many novels, poetry collection, and short stories that bears the imprints of multilayered struggles and warfare of her own clans and kin. She excels in delineating the lived experience of the marginalized people. The representation of the oppressed voices in a fictional mode is unique and brilliant that the characters highly appeal to the mind of the readers who feel obliged to know the dark terrain of Indian history. She possesses the excellent capacity to collect the source of her story from oral narratives, folktales, keen observation and interaction with trustworthy people as she feels obligatory to society that bear the collective and individual identity of every human being. She debunks the concept of centre and periphery with the excellent representation of fictional character in her works. She in one of her works says, "We have always lived on the periphery. This is my experience, I have been marginalized simply because I am a Naga, twice-marginalized because I am a woman and thrice -marginalized because I am a Tribal, a member of an indigenous community... Our truths are being distorted. Our stories are being stolen. Our voices are being silenced. These prisons are man-made and invisible. But they are as real as visible prisons. (Kire 273- 274).

Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered(2003) is the first Naga novel written in English by Easterine Kire. It traces the backdrop behind the historical conflict between Naga people and the colonizer. The plot of the novel encompasses the significant events tackled by Naga Tribes, which are intertwined with the political power, mechanism and resistance. The novel covers the time from 1830 to 1879, a long-termed period divided into two phases. The beginning of this period was full of abundance of happiness and peace as the natives adhered to their own tradition, norms, culture, rituals, festivals and many social taboos. But amidst these beautiful and self-contained lives emerged the aggression of the colonizer who did not give up the hope of grounding the imperial mission despite facing the opposition and resistance from the natives. Robbing the land from the natives becomes the power point to do the politics with the natives, who are made to feel alienation to their own land. They are bound to work as bonded labourers in their own sacred and worshiping land. The novel shows the resistant movement of the Naga people against the aggressive march of British colonizer. The serious conflict occurred in a village named Khonoma village surrounded by the long range of mountains from all sides. Throughout their lives they tried to protect their land, culture, rituals, norms and history with magnitude and fortitude but failed and bowed down before the power structure and hegemony of the colonizer. So, the story chronicles the traumatic events of socio- political lives of Angami tribes whose glorious culture and traditions blurred due to cultural and political hegemony of the ruling class.

Bitter Wormwood(2011), another significant historical novel based on practical and critical events of contemporary time that have shaped the life of Angami people. The novel chronicles the atrocities and brutality inflicted on the innocent native people of Nagaland by the steep clashes between Naga people craving for independent and sovereign state and central governmental politics. The characters presented in the novel are not extra ordinary human beings. They are found to be involved with day-to-day activities. They are the replica of ordinary people from Angami community living in Nagaland. It traces the trauma and cultural shock of the native people whose idealistic hope of having a sovereign nation freed from the Power structure of grand narrative of Indian nationhood have been shattered and lost. It covers the time span from 1937 to 2003. The plot of the story begins with the period of colonization which was going to end up. With the end of British control Angami people aspired to be freed from clutch of Indian nationhood as they lived in complete isolation with peace and prosperity during colonial period. So, A Angami leader put a memorandum to the Indian Government, but it did not work. There were many agreements and compromises between Naga people and central government. Over a period of time many factions and killings created chaos and violence. The politics in terms of integrating the fragmentation from power centre created the binary resulting into the death of the civilians who are not associated with political involvement from any side. The story begins with flash back technique of the narrator who witnessed the killing of a young man by shooting in the crowded market of Kohima. In fact, the person shot dead is the victim of the fractional politics in Nagaland. The narrator named; Mose gets terrified to see the atrocity in the market. He is nerved by the loss of humanity and cultural decline of the land. He recalls the day that once he was a part for the cause of Naga national movement which had started against India.

Throughout his life, he had devoted himself for the sake of native Angami people but now situation is such that nobody wishes to establish the idealistic vision of heavenly bliss in Nagaland. This blissful land become the power centre of many small or big groups of diverse ideology and mission. Finally, it turns to be the centre of creating havoc and destruction to the life of innocent people.

Both the novels selected for the subtle analysis with subaltern geopolitics view, elucidates the layers of exploitation over the Angami tribe, one of the most powerful tribes in Nagaland before and after colonization and their resistance against the hegemonic power structure of ruling class that sets the 'gaze of surveillance' over the land of Nagaland through the military power. Nagaland turns into a State of surveillance merged with Indian nationhood by blurring the boundary line which used to work as a safe line for the Naga people as they never thought of being merged with India. The loss of sovereignty with the disappearance of the concept of Naga Nationalism strengthens the power of central government that prioritizes the idea of unified nation of India, ignoring the socio-cultural, political and religious tradition which shape the lives of Naga people. Both the novels explicate the constant struggle and resistance for the critical existence of Angami community and their lives during colonial period have been critical and wretched as they found their existence lost and exhausted. After the end of colonial rule, they dreamt of setting their glorious past with independence and sovereignty, but their dreams turned into nightmares with the interference of bourgeois National elite class. Every individual being's basic human rights began to be curved by the 'surveillance' of 'repressed state apparatus' (Indian army). Here lies the concept of double repression at the same time to curb the individual freedom and privacy. Living in fear that preoccupy the mind of any body is a kind of imprisonment. In this context, Foucault argues –

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and the periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which the individual is constantly located, examined and disturbed among the living beings, the sick and the dead- all this constitute a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (Foucault 197)

Considering the above backdrop, this study aims at examining various types of mechanism of exploitation on the Angami tribal community before and after imperial rule of the colonizer and how it continues even today. The study applies the lens of subaltern geopolitics to interpret and reinterpret the hegemonic power structures created with various issues related to appropriation of land and border line. The structures normalised with the discourse of power and knowledge, are propagated with hegemony, and thereby, situation is such that resistance becomes the only option for the survival of Naga people.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To elaborate on the domination, discrimination and resistance of Naga community from the time of colonization to the contemporary period, taking geopolitical issues as the focal point of discussion
2. To explain how the Naga people have been marginalized through instructional power over a period and resistance has been the only sword of existence
3. To explicit the modes of resistance of Angami tribe against the violence and atrocity of the ruling class

Methodology

To understand and analyse the role of hegemonic power structure for imposing the burden of subjugation on the marginalized community, a qualitative approach has been utilised. The qualitative method of textual analysis helps the readers to find out the layers of hegemony, power structure and mode of resistance. Antony Gramsci has elaborated the concept of cultural hegemony that has been applied to study the cultural exploitation of Angami tribal community. Michael Foucault has enlightened the concepts of power and resistance through institutions. The interplay of power and resistance is a way to expose the systematic victimization of Angami community during colonial, post-colonial and contemporary India. It also reveals how the act of resistance by marginalized voice becomes an inevitable action fight against the oppressive tools of Power. Louis Althusser's concepts of ideological and repressed state apparatus are so powerful to let the readers know the range of oppression to curb the basic human rights of the civilians. With the proper study of the concept of subaltern

geopolitics by Joanne Sharp, it is possible to know how the land and geographical boundaries becomes one of the primary sources of exploitation for the Angami tribal people. The primary role of this article is to reflect on how the

Literature Review

Antony Gramsci, an Italian Marxist critic, was the first person to use the term 'hegemony' in his essay *Prison Notebooks* (1971). To him hegemony refers to the power of the ruling class who direct their interest on the subaltern class through discourse. The discourse consisting of power and knowledge occupy the mind of the subaltern with consent. It also serves the act of entailing leadership besides ethico-political leadership. (Ramos, Jr, 1982) On the other hand, Dylan Riley has added a new meaning to the concept, hegemony by Gramsci. He deals with the changing meaning of hegemony based on area of research. He argues in his article titled, "Hegemony, democracy, and passive revolution in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*," that hegemony does not play the role of dictatorship and is creating supremacy not through physical force but through intellectual and moral leadership. In addition to this, Riley elaborates orientalism as an ideology produced by the colonisers on colonized people to manipulate them. Similarly, Brons (2017) in his article discussed about the impulsive nature of common people, who easily agree to adopt the ideas that never serve their own interests but the interests of elites or state authority through the power of Gramscian hegemony. He also elucidates his thoughts on psychopathic nature of culture, media and society who normalise what is not and encourage geocentricism. This study shows an interconnection of hegemony, power, knowledge, discourse, land, resistance and subaltern history. The intertwined relationship between these concepts and existing power structure has been studied in both the novels *A Naga Village Remembered* and *Bitter Wormwood* by Easterine Kire.

Power Structure and Resistance

Marxist ideology propagates the idea of power structure that exists in every society and creates binary. The concept of binary has to be consumed by the proletariat with the help of ideology which helps the subaltern class to conceive their status-quo position as true and perfect. Later on, Michael Foucault gives a new dimension to power structure that debunk the idea of binary. He argues that power structure and resistance are interdependent and connected. Where there is the power, there is the resistance. Similarly, Stoddart (2007) furthers the concept of Marxist ideology that develops the insight for better understanding of injustice and social inequalities. He elucidates the fact that power is not fixed but it flows in multiple directions throughout everyday life. Van Dink (1989) developed a theoretical insight about power structure by which he bridged the gap of structural power and structural discourse. He formulated a macro level investigation on the power structure of social groups and institutions and a micro level analysis on discourse formation.

Many theories and knowledge system from subaltern writers have been used and applied over the hegemony and resistance by tribal people in India over a period of time. Ranajit Guha, a subaltern historian in India has developed many insights and understanding about the problems of tribal population. He argues that discrimination, prejudice and social hypocrisies are the tools of dominant class to hinder the survival of subaltern people. He raises the question of schismatic atrocities of mainstream society, which often represent the modern socio-political circumstances of India. Sarkar in his book *Modern India* (2014) details the tribal resistance movement against the power structure of the colonizer, who systematically encroached the land of tribal area. He highlights the regional and sub-national movement of tribal people against colonization as a part of national movement. Chakraborty in his essay, *Habitation of Modernity* (2002) examines the influence of colonial legacy to outreach the power structure and hegemony of post-colonial India. He also sheds light on the concept of interplay of local culture and power of colonial imposition. So, it can be said that the tribal people were not victims of hegemonic power structure of dominant groups; instead, they possessed the capacity and resilience to challenge the stereotype. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antony Gramsci first used the term, 'subaltern' to refer to the group of people from military position, who are of inferior rank. Later on, the term has been applied in many contexts with inferior meaning by various scholars of south Asian studies. Most of the scholars and critics conclude that the subaltern study is the voice of marginalized people meaning the history from below. Spivak in her substantial essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak* argues that subaltern is not given the access and space to the institutional means of representation, and they are spoken for rather than speaking for themselves. Mill elaborates narratives of the colonial bias and prejudice that have contributed to the marginalization of the voice of Naga people.

Domination of Angami Tribe through Cultural Hegemony

The enforcement of military power by the colonizer smoothened their way of cultural hegemony on the native people of Nagaland. They imposed their own administrative power to control the cultural domain of the native tribes. The tribal people were made to feel they are inferior to the colonizer so that they need to follow the colonial narratives. The inferiority complex made them feel that they are other in their own land. With the extortion of land, the colonizer appropriated the tribal culture and traditions of Angami people by the establishment of missionary projects that captured the psychology of commoners. Sato, younger brother of Kevi in the novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, is fond of missionary education, denying the customary laws of tribal community. He never wished to train himself with warring skills going to dormitory, a place for the males, who are obliged to go and train themselves. The indigenous practices they used to do gathering together at some places and feel united, have been eroded by the new policies of colonizers, who marked those indigenous practices as primitive and old. The land they considered as the abode of heaven as they performed all their rituals on the soil, has been snatched from the hand of clan members. After colonization, People of Nagaland are still not freed from colonial legacies of cultural hegemony in contemporary times by various internal and external pressures Indian Nationhood. Movement of Naga Nationalism after independence of India was not only for the political sovereignty, but also for the cultural survival of native culture. The cultural hegemony is concerned with the consent of those who agree to follow the ideology of dominant groups. Karl Marx in his book, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) wrote, “the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class”. With the colonial legacy Indian government policies still promotes state official narratives by suppressing Naga history and resistance movement as reflected in the novel, *Bitter Wormwood*.

Conclusion

This study aims to demonstrate the influence of subaltern geopolitics in the lives of Indian tribal people, bearing the elements of the cultural hegemony and the power structure of the colonial and postcolonial period with Easterine Kire's *A Naga Village Remembered* and *Bitter Wormwood*. The power dominance over the Angami Tribal people by the hegemonic class has been elaborated in the fictional representation of Kire. The study employs subaltern imaginaries and geographical location (the tribal belt) and analyses hegemonic power structures within the framework of subaltern geopolitics. The study elaborates on how power structures are maintained through land acquisition and political power conflict. The subaltern community did not possess the conception of land ownership, and the people with powerful positions exploited the lives of tribes through bondage workers, low wages, and appropriation of cultural autonomy self-determination. By analysing Angami people's life in different periods, colonial and post-colonial, it is evident that the power structures have been consistent, and it can be traced to the encroachment of the land. Thus, the study concludes with the proposition that the tribal community (Angami tribe) must resist the authorities and power structures to survive.

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