

Reading Nagamese '*MakroLi*' as a Pastoral Lyric

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to study *Makro Li*, the indigenous group song of the Chakhesang tribe of Nagamese people with reference to the conventions of pastoral poetry. The song offers a glimpse into idyllic village life in the hilly countryside and invokes the utopian vision of purity and innocence in tranquil pastoral life. The lyrics are also interspersed with nuances of post-pastoral eco-poetics. The folk song thus echoes elements of pastoral and post-pastoral poetry and offers a glimpse of Nagamese culture through the description of workers in their paddy fields.

Keywords: Nagamese songs, Pastoral poetry, Makro Li

Ngamese is a language spoken in the state of Nagaland situated in the north-eastern part of India. It is a creole derived from different languages such as Assamese, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Nepali, and various Naga languages. The Nagamese speakers are culturally very rich. *Makro Li* is an indigenous group song of the Chakhesang tribe of the Nagamese people. It is a group song which narrates the story of young lovers through which we can relate to culture and traditions of the Nagamese speakers. It offers a glimpse into idyllic village life in the hilly paddy fields. This paper offers an explanation of the regional lyrics and compares the song with conventions of pastoral and post-pastoral eco-poetics. The paper provides a

figurative meaning of the lyrics based on the reading of its literal translation from authoritative sources.

Lines 1 and 2:

Sohimozhosoniidiyole

Sohimozhosoniidiyol

The song starts with the males in the chorus describing their arrival on the fields of Zain the pursuit of their beloveds, who have apparently gone to work. They try to attract their attention and display their affection which they cannot do publicly in their village (or the *phili*). The setting of the song in the calming recess of Nature away from the hum-drum of routine village life sets the song in a surreal dream-world.

The speaker in the song thus narrates - I feel sad when you aren't there. Enjoying each other's company is bliss. The line is repeated twice as per the conventions of the tradition of Nagamese songs. The opening lyrics thus begin with the deliberation about the hurdles in the much sought after union of lovers and the 'arduous-hope' of finding 'bliss'.

Lines 3 and 4:

Enothatsii lo zazho leno

Biiyiswu no mhiisosii muse

These lines describe a situation where the young lovers steal glimpses of each other in paddy field. The conventions of their society demand that they should not display their affections for each other publicly. Therefore they do not call out and address each other by their names. In the given lines, the male speaker says that today as he walked in the plains of Za he sighed and called out to his beloved in a melancholy voice full of yearning. He was careful however not to take her name in public.

Line 5:

Nohaniiliitsiyosemaze?

After beckoning his beloved many times the speaker becomes impatient. Uncertain whether his beloved could actually hear and understand his love for her, he speaks out loud and asks - whether she heard him calling out for her in the last and final time? He thus contemplates whether his lover is aware of the fact that he loves her. Sending his message across to her is a gruelling task for him.

Line 6:

Kiiselano a khokhipiinsahuvori

The events unravel on a happy note and the girl whom the speaker had been summoning confirms that she indeed heard the melancholy cry of her beloved and in response came looking for him while carrying her basket or the *mukho* as it is called in local parlance.

The *mukho* is a traditional basket made of bamboos which young women carry while going to the fields. In their baskets they carry their food, water, locally prepared rice beer and tools which they need while working in the fields. They stuff the baskets with firewood which they collect on their way back home from the fields in the evening. In fact, as per tradition, the young girls are not supposed to go to the fields without the baskets. It is also interesting that traditionally basketry is a handicraft practised by the males. The song beautifully reflects the cultural practises of the Nagamese people through the *mukho* and becomes a symbol of love.

Lines 7 and 8:

Avuzokhodiyoelilataze?

Avuzokho lo tehti boyo

The song streams into the sublime zone of natural countryside, an ideal space for love to blossom. The two lovers wonder where they should go and look for a leisurely place where they can talk to each other in solace. They decide that they should climb up the hill and sit under the shade of a tree. The picturesque hill being away from the humdrum of the fields would be an ideal place to be as they would get some privacy to talk to each other. The shade of the tree and the natural view from the hills would be a perfect setting for their conversation. The ‘hills’ and ‘trees’ become a spiritual space for purity and bliss in the song much on lines of the way they are used as troupes in pastoral poems such as in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Passionate Shephard to His Love*, 1599:

Come live with me and be my Love,
 And we will all the pleasures prove
 That hills and valleys, dale and field,
 And all the craggy mountains yield.

The setting of the hills also offers a glimpse into the cultural traditions of the Nagamese people who climb uphill carrying food and *hezo*(rice beer) in bamboo baskets to enjoy them under the shades of the scanty trees growing in the hills while taking a break from working in the fields.

Lines 9 and 10

Bapiiliibabaptliiba

A bapiilii he piiliikiikro

These lines suggest that the couple are sitting together on the same seat. They also share the local delicacy, the rice beer called *hezo* and take sips from the same bamboo container. The lovers thus share the meal just as they sit together sharing their thoughts. Being in love they feel bound together in the harmony of oneness. The ideal world of

harmony, balance and bliss evoked in a natural setting in pastoral poems echoes in these lines.

Line 11

Himidzupii a vu doliisii

After having sipped the rice beer together the lovers proceed to share yet another delicacy stored in the basket. They begin to enjoy a preparation which is a mix of sticky rice mixed with mashed sesame seeds. It is a popular regional delicacy which they relish in their village. Besides sticky rice is an exotic variety of rice in their village as it grows in selective areas where the land is cultivable and the temperature is suitable. The simple act of sharing food becomes medium of expression of love for the young couple who act in a pure unison which each other in delightful interlude away from the realities of existence.

Lines 12,13 and 14

Tie-i/ kiimolii /tiirii /tiikhra /a /miitso/ vori

Nenyorhiipii a kho lii siize

Eno/ kiiva-I/ teho

Just as the couple begin to enjoy the meal together, nature intrudes like an enemy in their blissful union. Nature which had also offered shade and aesthetic pleasure now changes its temper and casts a spell of rain and wind. They cannot stay together any longer and must return back. The boy chivalrously asks the girl to let him carry the basket for her. He wants to help her in sharing her the load. He does so in apparent contradiction to the tradition of the village life where women carry the bamboo baskets with food, drinks and tools but the men don't carry anything to the fields except their *dao* which is used in the fields.

The song follows the convention of pastoral poetry which follows the course of nature as a process filled with beauty – both in its blossoming and withering. The lyrics are a reminder of the natural process of life which change like the changing mood of the nature and

the changing seasons. It also flows the undercurrent that the idyllic union between lovers is a fleeting moment which would inevitably be wiped out in time.

The arduous uphill journey of the lovers becomes a metaphor for the trials of the lovers in their efforts to find true love and bliss. However, the song is imbued with post-pastoral shades of grey which proclaim Death as the ultimate reality of bubbling passion. Francis Ledwidge reverberates a similar post-pastoral sentiment in the following lines of his poem, June:

Ay! Soon the swallows will be flying south,
The wind wheel north to gather in the snow,
Even the roses split on youth's red mouth
Will soon blow down the roads all roses go.

Lines 15 and 16

Nosheviliimi dziiveri

Midziizihi che

As the weather turns hostile, the young lovers decide to go back to the village where they would meet people and would soon be apart on their separate ways. The boy pleads the girl that she shouldn't marry someone from another village. He suggests that suitors may try to charm her with lofty words, wealth or other qualities but warns that she should not get trapped. However, the girl doesn't expressly clarify that she would resist the suitors for her love. It is uncertain whether they are really destined for a common future together.

Nature thus plays both a uniting and a dividing force upon the lovers who are but performers of a predestined script. The song thus reflects the ethos of the bubbling effervescence of pastoral poetics which it integrates on a more mature note with the realism of post-pastoral vision.

Line 17

Midzuvesadirahimone

The song ends on a tender note when the girl responds to her beloved by telling him that she does not have a choice but to choose a better and easier life. She does not assure the boy that she would not consider other suitors and marry him. The boy also does nothing effective to persuade her. The song thus echoes the tragic reality of human existence where dreams of an idyllic blissful crash against the shores of reality of existence. It is indicated that the pure bond of the ties with her beloved would soon be erased from her mind when she steps into the practical world of village life.

To put in a Yeatsian sense as we tread on the paths of life, the ‘falcons’ move apart from the ‘falconer’ and people trapped in the materialise of existence increasingly move away from the path of bliss shown by the Creator. The simple village song thus captures the most elevated reality of existence in a most sensuous light.

The girl reflects the traditions followed by her society where marriages are arranged according to social factors and considerations other than emotions. The tender emotions of young people are beautifully described in the song like a fresh break from the routine work and societal norm. However, their love and dreams of togetherness which were acceptable under the cool shade of the tree away from daily life can’t survive in practical life. The song ends on a sentimental note with the dreams of young lovers appearing as a beautiful flash in the regular routine of life.

The pastoral and post-pastoral forms of poetry are generally construed as anti-thesis of each other. However, the lyrics of *Makro Li*, present the two approaches as mutually inclusive complements rather than as disparate and discrete ideologies. The song is interspersed with undercurrents of pastoral and post-pastoral poetics.

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