



The Songs of the Silenced

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Abstract

Art as a platform is where individuals can express and expound the mind without limitations. While the mind knows no bounds, society has different cultures, unwritten and written rules which try to restrict the possibilities of imagination. As we know that there are also arts which are seen as illegal or something to be frowned upon. Art can be for art's sake as well as art for a purpose. The paper looks particularly at music as art with a purpose of questioning, rebelling and reflecting the society. So, even though there are restrictions, music as art tries to challenge the boundaries created by society, government, gender norms and so on. Often the oppressed part of the society tries to rebel by using music as a medium to convey their ideas. The idea of using music as protest is not restricted to any particular culture. Dalits have used drums and songs to protest against the oppressors. Similarly, the African-Americans have used music to protest i.e., Rap and Hip Hop. Sometimes the lyrics can be used metaphorically to understand the situation or it can be used consciously to make the people aware of the violence or problems in society. When it becomes a conscious act, music becomes political.

The paper has selected Manipuri music taken from the band, Imphal Talkies and selected songs by Tapta, a Manipuri singer. It tries to look at the critical responses towards various platforms in the form of songs. While there is the notion that the North-Eastern voices aren't heard, it tries to make people hear it through music. Their songs and lyrics have been selected to show the elements of protest which questions the government as well as the society. Through the paper, there will be an understanding of the restrictions of political music yet there is a conscious rebellious reply. By doing so it tries to bring the awareness of the oppressed North-Eastern states.

Keywords: music, music as protest, music and politics

Introduction

Art, as we see, hear and create, can be taken into account in different ways. It can be just an art of art's sake or it can be used as a medium to question, challenge and protest. In most institutions that we have in the society in terms of gender, race, class, caste etc have most of the time used music to fight back. It becomes a non-violent way as well as something different to what the oppressor has used against them. Music intertwining with politics or social issues is not something new as we see today. In America, the growth of Rap and Hip-Hop were a conscious way of presenting the point of view of the people. It was a conscious act to challenge the racist society as well as a classist society. In the K-pop genre of South Korea, the artists have started to focus on topics of gender, society, government and the idea of materialism that prevails in their culture. This act of using music as a protest helps people make aware of what is happening in society. Sometimes a voice is erased hidden the paper tries to focus on two particular banks which have been vocal about it for cities that have been committed in Manipur and Northeast Music used as a protest does not limit to any particular genre. We find the rise of K Pop which uses Hip-Hop or commercial music. African American uses rap, Hip-Hop, Dalits uses folk and the list never ends. The music that are selected have different genres yet they have the same idea of spreading awareness and making the voice heard.

Analysis

One of the themes of the paper is to show how the singers have written a song which comments on the constant control of man over the environment as well as the people who live on the land but are now seen as commodities. In Loktak, the only floating lake in the world, there was a drive taken up as a way of cleaning the lake but it was more about taking over by the government for commercial purposes. In the song "Loktak Ngami Isei" by Imphal Talkies, the persona mocks at the people that it isn't the lake which is polluted but the etiquettes of the politics of those who want to take control of the people. The persona of the song is a fisherman. This can be a conscious act to show the narrative of the native people of Loktak. The song talks about the occupation of places by the government in the name of development which disrupts the life of the people. The people who have made a home in the place are the ones who know the land and the changes that come. Development is good for the country while also keeping in mind that it does not disrupt the lives of the people. The persona brings the idea of how houses are burned down to send the people away which are an act of stealing and forcing the people out of their land. A form of colonialism where there is no concept of acknowledging the people who have made a livelihood in Loktak. The

persona questions the government of who they are to snatch away their lives and their right to live. In the music video, it also highlights the dirty politics of people getting beaten up for protesting against the government not to take their home away. This act of violence shows how even in a democratic society, one is not allowed to question the government, and if they do they are seen as someone who is against the motherland.

Tapta, a Manipuri singer in his song, “Luraba Laijado Turel duda chelhoude”, brings the concept of the spirit which guards the river and talks about how the spirit isn’t there anymore. This is a mockery towards the people of how they are treating the river as well as the environment as a dumping ground. There seems to be no realization of how there is a connection between nature and human beings and he says how without this realization there will be the only downfall of the humans. He says in the song that the river is the heart of the sea and this connection has been broken by human beings. The two songs here try to take an environmental perspective and are conscious of how development, dumping of garbage will eventually lead the nature too. This is a cry for awareness and also to make the people and the government think of nature as a source of our life not as a commodity or a dumping ground.

The second theme of the text is the concept of violence due to AFSPA, protest and the constant strikes that happen in Manipur as well as other parts of the northeast. In “Lullaby”, it takes the persona of a child who gives a narrative of how their playground, home and schools are taken away due to strike, violence and protest. In this text, the singer does not comment on one side of the story but is critical of both the armed forces as well as the people protesting. It questions the society of the loss of the rights to education. The song is presented in the form of a rhyme. It shows that the gunshots and the violence have become a lullaby. This makes us conscious of the fact that violence has been normalized to the point that the kid sees a sit lullaby. The kid’s voice can be a way to the innocence and give the perspective of children who are stopped from going to schools due to gunshots and fire. The dying and the killing of the people are compared to the falling of leaves during autumn. In the music video, there are the constant pictures of kids going to school which can be a comment on how schools and colleges were closed for months in Manipur and this still happens now and then. This is a situation where people have come out from but rather continue to live till now. When education is closed, when books are burned, it affects the larger section of people. He mocks at the people of how they were so focused on their goal of fighting and killing that they had forgotten there they have created a barricade to the child’s life. On the other hand, in ‘Mama ng tumli’ which means “My mother is sleeping”, is a narrative of a child where the child had lost her mother due to open fire. This text also talks about the violence of the armed forces

against the people. The music video consists of footage of the violence that happened during the early 2000s. Both the text uses the perspective of a kid to make sure that people are aware of the loss of lives to a large extent. The artist also talks about how people are more concerned about the death, of the footage forgetting the lives that are left behind and affected to a large extent. He questions and accuses of the people as they are blinded and deafened due to the violence. The artist also constantly comments on the number of general strikes and bandhs which affects the daily life of the people. We also see how it largely affects people who earn daily for their food. The violence has created segregation among people. The song is an outcry of a kid longing for her mother. While we look for the greater good, we forget the people who are affected.

The song 'Ei Sirage' means 'I will die' is about the people affected due to poverty. Phumga is a traditional stove where people in Manipur have associated with their childhood days. Folktales are told while being around phumga. The artist talks about the loss of the tradition, of the peace as we tend to become violent every day. He compares himself to a starved dog who barks and no one does give attention to. There are constant images of dying which can signify the loss of hope. This can be seen as to how he sees himself as a barking dog that doesn't make sense and people not giving importance to the cries due to the change of the state which only deteriorates and gets worse in terms of education, culture and the segregation among people. The text acts as a witness to the atrocities in the society and therefore ends up being pessimistic as he feels that there is no more hope to the problems that are arising.

Conclusion

With the analysis of the different texts, the paper focuses on the idea of how there are a conscious intertwining of music and politics. By doing so, it makes the people question the atrocities that are taking place in the state and therefore to be more vocalize rather than being ignorant of the violence which is spreading. While the tunes and the instruments make people hum a tune, the lyrics and the music video give weight to the song and make people think and take up action. Language has never been a barrier in music and these music videos aren't just about the melodies of the folklore or commercial music but are voices waiting to be heard and also making sure that it gets heard. People are oppressed all over the world but the people rise as even if they whimper or voice it out and that is what matters. The paper highlights the different themes such as environment, violence, poverty and Education. This shows how their music have been used to educate people and have been expanded to different areas to make the people aware and to take up action.

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