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AN INCONGRUENT INHERITANCE: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF J. H. HUTTON AND THE SEMA NAGAS

Introduction

Professor J.H. Hutton is popularly remembered in the Indian context for his voluminous work *Caste in India* (1946), and his racial classification of Indian population. Indian social science researches echo his monographs on the Naga tribes as an epitome of colonial scholarship; but unlike his British counterparts such as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Verrier Elwin, whose works became influential in shaping Indian anthropology, Hutton's academic influence waned over the years with the development of Indian anthropology. He is also remembered as an influential political agent among the Naga tribes, and not many are aware of the pinnacle of his academic years as the William Wyse Chair of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University. To most Nagas, he is known as the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills who wrote monographs on two major Naga tribes. J.H. Hutton is still remembered by the Naga tribes, but his legacy is perpetuated mostly through hearsay stories passed down the generation. With respect to the colonial rule, the important point of departure in the Naga oral tradition is that: the human agents form the locus of discussion and not the colonial institutions. This has created diverse perspectives and viewpoints on colonialism where the colonial rule is appraised and critiqued as an entailment of actions and influence of the colonial agents. This phenomenon has also made colonial discourse among the former British subjects like the Nagas more complex and ambiguous, and not in congruence with the mainstream academic and populist discourse on the British Raj.

The discourse of ambiguity and ambivalence among the natives toward colonialism has not received its due attention in a former British colony like India.[1] For scholars writing from the perspective of the colonised—the subdued position—the methodological and analytical dissemination of colonial conditions and experiences have been committed to unravel the maladies of colonial imperialism affirming that the logical outworking of colonialism has

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insidiously altered the destiny of the colonised (Asad 1973; Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; Nandy 1983; Said 2003[1978]). Consistent with this development the indigenous discourses have critiqued colonialism to subvert insidious colonial practices embedded in various aspects of the societal and cultural life in the former colonies. However, on closer introspection the 'perception' of colonialism cannot be put in a straitjacket category of the victim and the oppressor, for that would dismiss numerable narratives and viewpoints riddled with ambivalence and unconventional interpretation of the colonial condition and experiences. Reflecting back from the post-colonial milieu it is evident that from imagining the inhuman display of 'exotic' native for gawking revellers at Piccadilly to narrating legends of white colonial officials, today, represents the various imageries and narratives of colonialism. Thus despite the increasing methodical critique of colonialism among the academics and scholars, the ambivalence toward the colonial patrimony and encounters still persist widely. However, in most cases, the discourse on colonialism tends to get confined to the disembodied dissemination on colonial institutions and practices and less on the perception of the people themselves.

Whose narrative is it anyway?

One of the genres of contemporary writings on colonialism involves a protagonist, usually a popular colonial agent, around whom the whole discourse is tethered. One such treatise in the Indian context may be said of Ramachandra Guha's (1999) oft-quoted work on Verrier Elwin *Savaging the Civilised: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals and India;* such a treatise attempts to interpret the tribal world through the eye of the protagonist, often a literate perspective on the subject. Interestingly, how the natives perceives colonial agents and institutions are not afforded the same importance as what the colonial masters have recorded about their subjects. Even when diametrical discourse describe the same colonial processes (see for instance Ferguson 2004; Mishra 2012), the contention pertains to the literate community and rarely on the groups, which have thrived primarily as oral cultures. Here what can be argued is that the colonial agent's authoritative writings on the tribal world, and the tribal community narrating conflicting stories of the same political agent invariably represents the same social reality. In both forms of knowledge production, the characteristic interpretations get reified within the multilayered reality of social life.

Thus reflecting on the development of ethnographic method, the attempt is to critique the colonial ethnographic discourse through the multiple reading of the text, the multi-centric reading of history, and understanding the multifaceted interpretations of social processes inherent in every discourse. In the Indian context, the lacuna observed in most ethnographic critique on colonialism is that they evade the multiple voices, conceptions, perceptions and differential experiences of the colonial condition. This stance is not to

absolve the skewed hierarchy inherent in all aspects of colonial rule especially in the Indian tribal context,[2] which is a given fact, and has far-reaching ramifications. However, at the outset it is important to mention that the predisposition of individuals and social groups to view bits and parts of the colonial experience and conditions in affability need not be seen as uninformed lots or as still shackled to the insidious effect of the colonial condition. The submission is that just as every contemporary anthropological discourse is viewed as a confluence of multiple views, differential voices and multi-layered interpretations, or at least attempted to be rendered as such; the emergent views and perspectives in the ethnographic process should be afforded to the colonial discourse where the various contesting discourses and narratives, as highly irregular and localised as they may be, must be considered for a thick description of the social processes. The anthropological critique of colonialism in a context like India must also recognise that the contemporary ethnographic writings do not peddle themselves as value-neutral, for each assumes a positionality or perspective dispensing characteristic interpretations (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Cushman 1982; Marcus and Fischer 1999[1986]).

The present work is a critical reflection of colonial experiences of the colonised and not a discursive critique, for an attempt has been made to embrace various perspectives to afford the ambivalent narratives and perceptions among the Sumi Naga[3] pertaining to J.H. Hutton, the political agent, and the British rule in the Naga Hills.To locate an influential colonial administrator like J.H. Hutton within the framework of a conventional colonial critique may overstate, many a times, the obvious: where the themes of power, dominance and subjugation, important as they are, can obfuscate the multiplicity of views and interpretations that are deemed indispensible to ethnography. The idea is to locate the matter against a wide range of variables and developments constituting the social reality. In this context, the focus is not on John Henry Hutton—a privileged cog in the colossal Raj machinery, but J.H. Hutton, whose life and career was a product of his time; an individual entangled in a differential web of social relations with the colonial institution and the natives; an individual driven by pervasive human ambition and desires; a person from a snobbish English society with stifling class stratification; a white man drawing awe, admiration and contempt of the natives he lived and interacted with; and importantly, a writer pertinently shaped by the prevailing intellectual climate of his time.

Hues of singularity: contesting narratives and imageries

In the Indian context, one of the vivid imageries of British officials as caricaturised in art, literature and other forms of visual representation are that of potbellied, chubby-cheeked with snooty demeanour riding a horse or an elephant surrounded by brown-skinned foot soldiers in turbans; or couched ostentatiously on a palanquin carried by natives; or nestled in a fluffy divan

attended to by host of native servants. These visual imageries and caricatures are popularly recalled to assert the power divide and subtly recreate the colonial conditions in the consciousness of the people till today. The perception of the civil servants in then Naga Hills[4] does not deviate much from the popular imageries: the sprawling bungalows; the native interpreters (*dobashis*)[5] at their beck and call; the entourage of half-clad natives, or in the case of Eastern Naga tribes, the fully-naked coolies, faithfully following their white masters on official village tours; and a wise British administrator (as perceived among the natives) arbitrating a case are common. These assumptions and imageries have been aggravated by the colonial agents themselves through their corresponding letters, tour diaries and academic publications. For instance, Hutton (1921a: 13) describing an incident during one of his official tours in the Naga Hills writes,

> the Semas who went on the Chinglong expedition in 1913 then saw naked tribes for the first time; the coolies, catching sight of a string of naked Konyaks coming towards them, put down their loads and burst into fits of uncontrollable laughter at this sight of men who, though hardly less naked than they were, wore no three-inch flap.

The common perception of a political agent like Hutton is that of a powerful individual commanding authority of the natives, exuding confidence; not one, unnerved by recalcitrant natives, afflicted by regular bouts of diarrhoea and malaria, longing for female company, or assailed by ubiquitous homesickness that can quash the strongest of human fortitude. Interestingly, the prevailing imageries and memories of J.H. Hutton, one often come across among the Sumi, fall in the former category: the narrative of authority and a privileged protagonist.

> The case was unsolvable. Both were from the chiefs' lineage (*kukami lagha*), and were powerful *dobashis* in their own right. Hezukhu Zhimomi of Sheyipu was then the Head *Dobashi* under Mokokchung *elakha* (sub-division), while Kuhoto Zhimomi of Sukhai was Head *Dobashi* under Kohima *elakha* (sub-division). The dilemma was both were courting Kuhozu's daughter, a popular chief from Yepthomi clan; however, neither of them revealed, out of two daughters¯Hetoli or Kiholi—whom they wanted to marry. And moreover, neither of them wanted the other to be successful in courting. Thus this became entangled in a prolonged litigation. Kuhoto would summon Hezukhu at Kohima *dobashi* court for case hearing; while Hezukhu would do the same by summoning Kuhoto at Mokokchung *dobashi* court, and this continued for a long time. The case came to the notice of J.H. Hutton who was then Deputy Commissioner at Kohima and he summoned them both to arbitrate the case. Hutton then said, "Hezukhu and Hetoli names begin with the initial H, and Kuhoto and Kiholi begins with the same initial K, so they should marry accordingly." And the case was solved.

The story told by a chief from Yepthomi clan at Zunheboto,[6] the Sumi administrative headquarters, is one among many such narratives existing in the repertoire of Sumi oral tradition pertaining to the colonial political agents. It is important to note that the popular narratives of the British Raj and its

agents among the Sumi does not come from the stuff of academics or scholarly work till today. The critique and the memories of the Raj revolve around the perpetuated stories, pithy sayings and idioms involving the actors—mostly the privileged natives and the colonial agents—in which the colonial administrators are the focus of such discussions, and around whom much of the memories of the colonial days are recounted and relived. In such a context, J.H. Hutton is a kind of protagonist who swoops in to create an imaginative space in the collective memory and imageries of the people, which for ages had thrived primarily on oral tradition and narratives.

In the case of a privileged colonial officer describing a native, an alleged behavioural capriciousness and bodily imperfection has been a consistent theme of representation. However, this process is not a one-sided affair, for often, one comes across the inhabitants commenting pejoratively on white men's strange ways and idiosyncrasies; and in some instances, racial metaphors and connotations that could have made a conceited Victorian squirm in discomfort have been part of the colloquial lexicon. Such imageries and metaphors are recurring themes narrated as part of the colonial experience among the Naga tribes in contemporary social life. Thus among the Sumi the perception and construction of a colonial agent is not only that of admiration, awe and respect, but also one of contempt, prejudice and parody. An astute observation implied as a precautionary note, although which might seem to a contemporary reader a predisposition of British officials' vainglory, can be put in the words of an ICS cadre, Evan Machonochie:

> To the raiyat [peasant] the visit of a "saheb" or a casual meeting with one has some of the qualities of excitement... It will be talked of for days over the village fire and remembered for years. The white man will be sized up shrewd and frankly. So take heed unto your manners and your habits! (Cited in Ferguson 2004: 188).

The elevated status and inevitable self-importance were part and parcel of a British civil servant's career. However, what had far-reaching influence was the transposition of that role into the idiom of oral narratives among the natives. This was an outcome of the hierarchical interaction, which was a part of colonial experience. However, the folk tradition appraisal of colonial agents is far removed from the wider entailments of the colonial rule; instead the oral stories on colonial agents like Hutton, both admiration and criticism, is reflective of the complexity of oral cultures negotiating colonial encounters.

In the case of the literate community there is a duality of interpretation concerning the hierarchical interactions between the natives and the colonial administrators. This duality of interpretation gives contrasting perspectives, but the appraisal of colonial agents is carried out in relation to the wider influence of colonial domination. At this level of interpretation, involving the literate fraternity, the British officials as the focal point on the treatise of colonialism offers us conflicting treatises, although the interpretations are

usually based on ostensible social and historical facts. The two common perspectives can throw light to the issue at hand. The first perspective offers us a heroic, if not, at least a suave British official negotiating his English values with the subjects; in contrast, we have the other perspective portraying the same as a dubious character—a pawn in the larger imperialistic design. The juxtaposition of two contradicting interpretations, amid multitude of discourses and writings, may be presented to rest the argument. The first may be put in the words of Niall Ferguson (2004: 184), the formidable British historian, who observed:

> Between 1858 and 1947 there were seldom more than 1,000 members of the covenanted Civil Service, compared with a total population of which, by the end of the British rule, exceeded 400 millions. As Kipling remarked, 'One of the few advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability. . . At the end of twenty [years, a man] knows, or knows something about, every Englishman in the Empire.' Was this, then, the most efficient bureaucracy in history? Was a single British civil servant really able to run the lives of up to three million Indians, spread over 17,000 square miles, as some District Officers were supposed to do? Only, Kipling concluded, if the masters worked themselves like slaves.

The second interpretation, which may be deemed as the perspective of the colonised in contemporary parlance, embraces a great deal of scholars especially from the former colonies. In this context the academic and scholarly treatise is inherently based on the critique of the whole colonial enterprise. For instance, an Indian anthropologist writes:

> The deceit, cunning, and duplicity of the British administration of which Hutton was a part towards the Nagas are clear in his writings... Although an untrained anthropologist, he was pretending to do science. This was, indeed, ironical because he could not be both objective and a ruthless oppressor denying the basic freedom to the people he administered. It was actually a complete dehumanisation of an enterprise that is basically humane. Anthropology has the capacity to transform but this was not part of his understanding (Misra 2003: 49-52).

In folk narratives the critiquing of colonial conditions and modes of interaction is not the overriding theme. As such the imageries and narratives of colonial agents are not a discursive critique, but rather contingent on the complexity of social life; where on a closer observation, the perception and description of a colonial officer like J.H. Hutton swings back and forth from that of a hero to a dubious character and then to a distant stranger. Here the underlying notion being that: who the narrator is and to whom, why, when and where is being narrated form significant aspects of the folk narrative. The discursive and methodical critiquing of the colonial conditions and practices, which is largely confined to the Sumi intelligentsia, is consistent with the modern consciousness, and which has been inherited as part of the modern discourse on self-determination and universal human rights.

A British officer and an anthropologist

In *The Sema Nagas,* J. H. Hutton made a rather chauvinistic remark on the physical appearance of Sumi women: 'Among the women, however, ugliness is the rule' (Hutton 1921a: 8). This alludes an ethnocentric proclivity and total indifference toward an intersubjective appraisal of much discussed tribal aesthetics, because in Sumi tradition the celebration of beauty had been the most substantive theme in folklore, folksongs and poetry.[7] It is evident that the timeless legend of female protagonists such as Anishe, Ghonili and Khaolipu—embodying femininity and beauty—was prevalent in his time. This is one of many instances of an outright dismissal of what the natives thought of themselves and others, rather the ethnographic representation mirrors the subjectivity of the ethnographer unapologetically. Hutton's monographs on the Naga tribes were more of a reflection of the British society: the yardstick of art and aesthetics, technological progress, knowledge and power were juxtaposed with the early twentieth-century European society. He was from a political milieu when his country was ostensibly a world superpower; and indeed, his writings on Naga tribes affirm the wielding of that authority and power.

Hutton's monograph on the Sumi can be located at the backdrop of the British academic and public life. *The Sema Nagas* was published during the reign of two theoretical approaches: evolutionism and diffusionism. The structural functionalism had not yet gained prominence in British anthropology, thus most of the leading intellectuals were in either diffusionism or evolutionism camp. Hutton nowhere mentions his allegiance to any theoretical school (perhaps his focus was elsewhere grappling the realities of the Hills); nevertheless, his monographs evince an evolutionist bent. Interestingly around the same time two eminent Egyptologists, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith and William James Perry took the helm of affairs in propagating diffusionism in British anthropology. Elliot Smith had begun to propagate diffusionism after having worked in Egypt between 1900 and 1909, prior to Hutton's sojourn in the Naga Hills. Also W.H.R. Rivers, one of the stalwarts of British anthropology, who became a diffusionist, was showing ambivalence toward the evolutionary enterprise finally denouncing it in 1911(Kuper 2005: 142-43). Incidentally, Hutton's monographs *The Angami Nagas* and *The Sema Nagas* were published simultaneously in 1921, two years prior to William J. Perry's (1923) widely read work *The Children of the Sun*.

W.H.R Rivers' encounter with the Indian subcontinent took place in South India. He had spent few months in the Nilgiri Hills among the Todas in between 1901-1902, and had published his monograph on this Nilgiri Hills tribe (Rivers 1906). In retrospection, the socio-political milieu of that time was substantially different, if comparisons were to be made between the tribes settled in the Nilgiri Hills and the Naga Hills. The Todas were pastoralists showing historical traces of coexistence with the Hindu civilisation; they were

comparatively forthcoming posing no threat for Rivers. Conversely, the historical context under which Hutton worked was far more difficult. His foremost responsibility was to usher in conciliatory measures and arbitrate the internecine tribal warfare to facilitate the upper hand of the British in the Hills, thus his role as an administrator ostensibly overshadowed his anthropological interests. By then G. H. Damant had been gunned down by the Angami at Khonoma; Captain Butler had been speared by the Lotha; Lieutenant Holcombe had been killed along with his entourage by the Nagas of Ninu in North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (Michell 1973: 213-14), and the same fate awaited any British political agents, if at all the administrative vigilance would fail in this frontier region. Hutton's relation with the Naga tribes could have had dire consequences had he not handled them emphatically with acumen and tenacity. He mentioned a personal combat posed to him by an anonymous Naga warrior, similar to a Victorian duel, which he downplayed in his writing (Hutton 1921a: 168). Thus it was apparent that the colonisation of the Naga Hills by the Raj did not necessarily mean total immunity for its agents. Needless to say when his counterparts were leading comfortable lives back in England, he was beginning his career as a civil servant in one of the most difficult areas of the Indian frontier. By comparison with the harsh reality posed by the Naga Hills, the intrigue posed by theoretical debates would have seemed trivial. Hutton was more of a field administrator than an armchair anthropologist, and thus that may be one of the reasons why his writings showed less sophistication with regards to the prevailing theoretical developments.

J.H. Hutton was a quintessential evolutionist; that is what his monographs portray, and which was a reflection of the intellectual climate of his time. His meticulous search for quantifiable data and their interpretation reveals a positivistic underpinning. His keen interest in identifying and classifying the plant and animal species also evinces his naturalist disposition. His monographs were largely written for European audiences when positivism was popular in the academic circles. Thus we see a detached 'administrator-ethnographer' insulated from the Naga subjects in his quest for objectivity. What can be surmised is that, Hutton is an epitome of shifting identities grappling contemporary ethnography. We see Hutton as a practitioner of European science, a loyal servant of the Crown, and a means through which the Europeans could peep into the so called "exotic" Naga world. However, one of the important facets of his personality rarely draws our attention: notwithstanding the skewed power relations, Hutton was confidant of his Naga subjects and was considered a friend by many. His proficiency as an administrator and arbiter is still narrated among the Naga tribes.

Reversing the roles: shifting power relations

The transition of Sumi society from the colonial period to Indian independence is analysed by academics and policy makers mostly in terms of

institutional and structural changes. Nevertheless, as important as they are, the embedded realities of daily social life reveal a far-reaching implication at the level of personal life stories, experiences and narratives. A case example may be presented from the life of a prominent Sumi public leader, Kawoto Sukhalu, who had served as *dobashi* under Charles R. Pawsey, the last Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills.[8] His lineage had commendable history of associating with the British Raj; his father, Hutoi Yepthomi, served as *dobashi* under J.H. Hutton, while his grandfather, Sukhalu Yepthomi, a reputed Sumi chief, was a close confidant of the British colonial administrators. From what he narrated not many sympathised with the predicament of the Sumi *dobashis;* and it is also unlikely that the British administrators who served in the Naga Hills knew that the *dobashi* system they instituted to assist them became a bane for the personnel. They were the initial so called collateral damage in the wake of the armed struggle between the Indian army and the Naga insurgents. The Sumi *dobashi* were the first intellectuals in the community by virtue that they knew the basics of colonial law and governance, and could speak Assamese to mediate as interpreters between the masses and the British administrators. When the Indian army operation began in the interiors of the Naga Hills, their assistance was required to tour the rural areas since they were familiar with the region and the way of life of the villagers. Thus being seen in the company of the Indian soldiers, they were labelled as Indian spies and became soft targets for the Naga insurgents, while on the other hand refusing to aid Indian soldiers amounted to harassment and accusation of aiding and abetting the Naga insurgents. Kawoto Sukhalu told of his tumultuous transition from a well-respected position under the British rule to perpetual insecurity during the Indian army operation.[9] Also one of the most respected Sumi *dobashis*, Kuhoto of Ghukhuyi, a Zhimomi chief who had served as Head *Dobashi* under the Raj passed his final years under house arrest in Satakha at the behest of the Indian state for his sons' involvement in Naga nationalism.[10]

On asking if he knew J.H. Hutton, Kawoto said he did not meet him in person but that his father had high respect for Hutton.[11] Nevertheless he told of his amiable relation with Charles R. Pawsey while serving the Raj. Kawoto had hosted Pawsey at his residence on the latter's visit to Nagaland in 1965 during the peak of Naga national movement. During conversation Hoyili Ayemi, Kawoto's wife, reminisced her meeting with Pawsey, who according to her spoke broken Sumi and was courteous. Charles Pawsey bemoaned the situation in Nagaland, and his words were, 'the situation is grim and things are no longer the same.' Kawoto also narrated that on one occasion while guiding Pawsey's entourage, they were scheduled to enter the Sumi region after touring the Ao Naga areas; however, Pawsey was stopped by the Sumi insurgents at Lumami village and they had to negotiate with the underground leader, General Kaito Sukhai, to allow entry into the Sumi region. Charles Pawsey was a brilliant civil servant and popular among the Naga tribes and

thus this embarrassing situation during his visit to Nagaland had nothing to do with his charisma or personality. It was as simple as this: the power dynamics had changed and as an outsider in a new socio-political setup, he no longer had authority over his former subjects. Given the ambivalent political context, J.H. Hutton would also have had received the same indifferent treatment had he been in Pawsey's place. The incident reveals a dethroned ruler who was too a commoner to influence the reality that had usurped the place of his once powerful kingdom.

The differential narratives and indigenous discourse

To reiterate the argument, the ambivalent narratives and perceptions find a lesser representation in the discourse of the colonised. By equivocated narratives, it does not necessarily mean a genial interpretation of colonialism, but pertinently the differential experiences and narratives of the colonial conditions. In the case of the Sumi, the oral traditions perpetuated and recorded in the folk memories are not totally reflective of the actual historical happenings and encounters, but shaped by parochial interpretation of the colonialism as a genre of discontinuity from the wider entailments and implications of the British Raj. Here as observed the differential narratives of either the colonial condition or its agents do not portray or reflect the British Raj in its insurmountable glory, but rather the cultural and social processes of the colonised having a continued tradition and existence in the face of upheaval concomitant with colonial expansionism. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has argued that the term 'research' is in itself a West contaminated epistemological stance and thus viewed with scepticism among indigenous communities; however, she also opined that certain aspects of colonial condition and experiences are perceived in affability by the colonised. The latter underlying subtlety of colonial encounter is what can be identified as a component of the larger ambivalent colonial narratives and discourse. Another important aspect of the narrative of ambivalence is that the nature of colonial condition and its entailment is held in comparison with the discourse and practices of nation-state with respect to the treatment of its indigenous peoples in the post-colonial period. As such this particular development is also seen among the Sumi. The decolonising of research processes seeks to change the discourse of the West as a privileged position or the only reliable epistemology; however, in the process, the 'subaltern' within the subaltern voice, as recognisable in ambivalent narratives and perceptions, need be realised as an important part of socio-cultural processes and thus amenable for ethnographic scrutiny and representation.

At the backdrop of this nuanced interpretation of colonialism, the colonial agents such as J.H. Hutton present a case of methodological dilemma to the indigenous discourse on self-determination and colonial hegemony. The problem pertains not so much on the structural and institutional changes, but

rather the self-effacing and dynamic aspect of socio-cultural life. In this case the emphasis is not on the balance-sheet of colonial subjugation but rather individuals and communities perpetuating their tradition and narratives while negotiating with the inevitable influence of colonialism. This is also true of the intersubjective interpretations, where diverse viewpoints emerge when the subject, in this case, the colonial officer, is located within the differing positionality and experiences of the colonised. For instance during interview with an elderly Sumi,[12] who grew up during British colonialism, he mentioned that J.H. Hutton became a mere clerk in a press office in London after his departure from the Naga Hills assuming a mediocre position in his society. While in the Angami village, Jotsoma, the elderly people still narrate of Hutton coming riding on a horse (a symbol of power) for official visits. Still more so while a section of Sumi intelligentsia tries to critique the blatant display of power and dominance recruiting Sumi men as physical labourers during World War I, on the other hand some take pride in the presumed Sumi tradition of bravery in warfare; and importantly, the Sumi till today narrate stories of the humorous experiences at sea, and the fortitude and brotherhood of the Labour Corps in a foreign land,[13] and rarely on the ethical and moral responsibility of the colonisers. However, in these narratives the key personality, the colonial officer, J.H. Hutton, who facilitated the recruitment, finds rare mention in the Sumi narratives on the event. What we see is a selective appropriation and perpetuation of social processes and events reflective of the group and individuals, and not a discursive appraisal or thematic understanding of colonial processes and conditions. Here the colonial institution and agents are not the focus, but rather the narratives and imageries, which portray the Sumi encounter, suppression and negotiation with the British colonialism.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, the recurrent narrative of British colonialism in Sumi social life is pertinently a domain of oral tradition, where the positionality and representation of the individuals, groups and community have shaped the nature and direction of colonial discourse. This similar process is reflected in the narratives and imageries pertaining to popular colonial figures like J.H. Hutton. As a matter of fact the Sumi saw only parts of Hutton's life and his work. His subjects had a glimpse of a powerful British officer commanding their allegiance and respect. Hutton's private and professional lives were two different realities, and thus much of what exists in the oral narratives pertains to his professional life. The Sumi do not know the kind of society he became part of back in England; if he had married and survived by children; if he had hoarded wealth during his stay in India; or if he had kept a personal dairy like Malinowski (1967) vilifying the Sumi way of life, all these are best left to imagination and speculation. This obliviousness regarding Hutton's whereabouts after his departure from the Naga Hills pervades the Sumi masses. But nevertheless what can be argued is that colonial agents like J. H.

Hutton have left an indelible impact on Sumi society. From what is evident in the ambivalent narratives and perception of the British Raj:today, the legacy of the colonial administrators has outlived the glory and might of the British Empire.

NOTES

1. The analysis is mainly from the perspective of Naga tribes and does not reflect the pan-Indian experience.

2. The term 'tribe' is deemed pejorative in contemporary anthropological writings. However, in the Indian context, tribe is regarded as a constitutional category legitimised by article 330-340 of the Indian constitution, which sanctions reservation rights for jobs in government institutions and state funded educational institutes. The Nagas in general reckon the term 'tribe' not only to assert their ethnicity but also to benefit from these advantages.

3. The Sumi are one of the sixteen tribes of Nagaland along with the Ao, Angami, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Liangmai, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Rongmei, Sangtam, Yimchungur, and Zeme. The Sumi were named as Sema Nagas in colonial reports and literature, which is considered an outsider's connotation for the community. The ethnonym Sema Nagas became a widespread usage following the colonial encounter.

4. The Naga Hills was a creation of the British Raj carved out for administrative viability to be recognised as a District of Assam. The Naga Hills District of Assam and the Tuensang Division of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) were brought together as a separate administrative unit under the Indian republic as Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA) IN 1957, and was later recognised as the sixteenth state of Indian union named as Nagaland on 1 December 1963.

5. The term '*dobashi*' had been derived from the Assamese word '*do-bashias*' which literally means two dialects. It gained popular usage among the Naga tribes to refer to both the institution and personnel. The *dobashi* acted mainly as interpreters and assisted the British administrators on matters pertaining to the inhabitants that invariably had direct bearing on the colonial policies and administration of the tribes.

6. Interview with Hekuto Yepthomi, *gaon bura* South Point West colony, July 2013, in Zunheboto.

7. The chapter on folklore in *The Sema Nagas* did not have an entry on love and romance. This came as a surprise since Sumi folklore is replete with love theme comparable to Shakespearean tragedies.

8. Kawoto Sukhalu and Zutovi Achumi were the last Sumi *dobashi* under the British Raj in Kohima District. As told their period of service coincided with the Japanese invasion of Naga Hills during the World War II.

9. Kawoto Sukhalu recounted his miraculous escape from an ambush in the mid 1970s, where the Naga insurgents killed K.K. Gupta, the first Deputy Commissioner of Zunheboto district. He was the lone survivor of the ambush.

10. Kuhoto's sons, Kughato Sukhai and Kaito Sukhai, became important functionaries in the separatist Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN). Kughato Sukhai served in FGN as Prime Minister, while Kaito Sukhai served as Defence Minister.

11. Interview with Kawoto Sukhalu, chief of Kawoto village, December 2012, in Zunheboto.

12. Nivishe Tsakhalu of Surumi is today considered as one of the knowledgeable elders remembering Sumi oral history. Based at Zunheboto district, he retired as Political Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner, the highest post a *dobashi* may attain in his career.

13. A poignant story still narrated is about a Labour Corp named Kuhoi Zhimomi who faced an excruciating death while at sea. The story goes that his testicles were crushed in freak accident while unloading cargo at a dock. He was a recruit from Kiyeshe.

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