Music has always been a part of the Naga culture and tradition. Prior to the advent of Christianity folksongs were part of their day to day life. The folksongs of the Nagas are mostly about their social, religious, cultural, and everyday life. The Sümi Nagas in particular have varieties of folksongs which include agricultural songs, love songs, war songs, hunting songs, lullabies, orphans' songs etc. With the coming of the Britishers the traditional folksongs were replaced by western Christian music and gospel songs. The Naga traditional musical instruments like the Bamboo Mouth-Organ, the Cup Violin, the Bamboo Flute, and the Trumpet were replaced by western musical instruments like Piano, Guitar, and Violin etc. This paper aims to understand the folksong of the Sümi Nagas in the light of colonialism and examine Sümi Naga folksongs as the representation of their history.

Keywords: Folksong, history, identity, colonialism, postcolonialism, culture,
reflection of the history of its people can be seen. This paper aims towards analyzing one of the folksongs of the Súmi Nagas in the light of colonialism. According to Pramod K. Nayar, “colonialism can be described as the process of settlement by Europeans in Asian, African and South American territories. Colonization found its climactic moments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was an exploitative mechanism” (154). This paper will not only study the reflection of colonialism present in the folksong of the Súmi Nagas but it will also study how their history can be reread through their folksong.

Súmi Folksongs: A Reflection of their History

Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines the word rereading as, “an act of reading something again especially from a different perspective”. This paper thus aims towards rereading history and understanding of the once colonized Nagas from their own perspective which is vividly portrayed in one of the Súmi folksongs entitled ‘She Aqhi Kuthu Azughilo Cheye!’ (Oh Three Months in the Ocean). This folksong was sung and composed by the Shena Old Labour Corps in France during the First World War when the Nagas were under British imperialism. It was during this time that British recruited thousands of labour corps from the different parts of the colony for assistance in the war:

When there was a call to go to war theatre in France, it was unimaginable that two thousand Nagas responded, out of these two thousand Nagas, Semas responded by 1,000 men, Lothas 400, Aos 200, Regnmas 200 and Changs with other frontier tribes 200. One could imagine that among many Naga tribes, only five tribes responded to go to war theatre in France” (A Memorabilia of the Sema Nagas’ Participation in the First World War, 10).

They marched out of Naga hills on April 21st 1917. It was a totally new experience for the Nagas as they were never exposed to the outside world before. The enthusiasm for adventure might have kept their energy intact throughout the voyage until they were introduced to the ‘perilous trials’ of the war. They were warriors, but this was a war different from the wars they had fought before.

On reaching France they were divided into groups. Their colonial masters made them swing their daos and spears in the air and vent out their typical Naga war cry. The Britshers keenly took pictures of this splendor and later on these pictures were circulated into the German territories which made the foe’s believe that the Britshers had brought an extraordinary race of people known as Nagas from the north eastern side of Indian sub-continent to fight against the Germans. (A Memorabilia of the Sema Nagas’ Participation in the First World War, 12)

Below is the “song of the forgotten legends”, a folksong sung by the Sumi labour corps in France. A sincere attempt has been made to translate the song into English for the assistance of the non native speakers.

She Aqhi Kuthu Azughilo Cheye! (Oh Three Months in the Ocean)

Hoi she holo holon iiliholo huuo huuo huuo
Hoi she alo alono iliilialo huuo huuo huuo
(The above lines act as an introduction to the folksong.)
Hoi she Nagami France ghuhalo cheye huuo
huuo huuo
Oh Naga people on the way to the war in France
Hoi she aqhi kuthu azughilo cheye huuo huuo
huuo
Oh three months in the ocean
Hoi she aqhi kuthu yegehi ithumla huuo
huuo
Oh three months land I did not see
Hoi she aqhi kuthu ami ithumla huuo huuo
huuo
Oh three months fire I did not see
Hoi she aqhi kuthu ipu ithumla huuo huuo
huuo
Oh three months my father I did not see
Hoi she aqhi kuthu iza ithumla huuo huuo
huuo
Oh three months my mother I did not see
Hoi she aqhi kuthu lomi ithumla huuo huuo
huuo
Oh three months my sweetheart I did not see
Hoi she ni ghuha tono kilo wocheni huuo
huuo huuo
Oh I have won the war and home I’m going
Hoi she ni idewo niyeghi toluye huuo
huuo huuo
Oh to my land I have reached
Hoi she ni idewo niluzalo cheye huuo huuo
huuo huuo
Oh to my field I have returned
Hoi she avi noghi niveshelo igha huuo
huuo huuo
Oh mithun you cry near my field
Hoi she igha kuathino nilosuye huuo
huuo huuo
Oh when you cry my heart aches
Hoi she awuduno nikitsulo igha huuo huuo
huuo huuo
Oh the rooster crows above my house
Hoi she igha kuathino nilosuye huuo
huuo huuo huuo
Oh when you crow my heart aches
Hoi she atsulino nilashelo igha huuo
huuo huuo
Oh the dog in my pathway cries
Hoi she igha kuathino nilosuye huuo
huuo huuo huuo
Oh when you shine my heart aches
Hoi she aqhi noghi nilashelo yesu huuo
huuo huuo huuo
Oh moon even you shine by my pathway
Hoi she yesu kuathino nilosuye huuo huuo huuo
huuo
Oh when you shine my heart aches
The above folksong composed and sung by the Sümi labour corps in France is an important historical testimonial of colonization. This song takes the listeners back to the time of colonization where the Sümi led by their British masters took part in the First World War. This folksong is a representative of the anguish and desolation of the Sümi Nagas who went to the battle field to fight alongside their colonial masters during colonization.

This folksong can be divided into four parts; In the first part of the song the singers sing of the Nagas going to the war in France. This is denoted by the third line of the song, “oh Naga people on the way to the war in France”. The second part is about the process of the journey in the ocean. This part of the song expresses the grief of the Sümi labour corps in France who sing of their pain of journeying in the sea for months without seeing the land. They sing of how they miss their land, home, and family. In the third part, the singers sing about going home after winning the war. This is also denoted by a single line in the song as they sing, “Oh I have won the war and home I’m going”. The fourth part of the song is about homecoming; the satisfaction and happiness of reaching their homeland. They sing of the joy of being back to the land they have been born into and the land they belong to. Their emotions are so deeply connected to their land that even the cry of the rooster makes their heart ache and even the moon that shines upon their pathway seem to be heartbreaking. They sing of how everything about/in their homeland makes him sad after his return from the war. This represents the emotional and spiritual connection of the Sümi Nagas with their beloved land. A sense of patriotism towards their motherland is thus reflected in this folksong. In order to express themselves they have beautifully woven their emotions into a song which will forever live in the hearts of their people. It is not surprising that the song does not focus on the “victory” of the war, the war which they had fought for their colonial masters. They do not sing of the joy of winning the war. In fact, more than the victory of the war they are overjoyed with the homecoming. The fact that the process of going to the war and also about the end of war is denoted only through one line each in the song depicts that more focus is on their feelings and emotions rather than the ‘war’. The ‘war’ seems secondary to them. This may be because they feel less connected with the great ‘Other’. In Lacan’s theory, the ‘other’ with small ‘o’ designates the colonized and the ‘Other’ with capital ‘O’ has been called the grande-autre or the great other. The ‘Other’ has always been alien to the Sümi Nagas and even the war they had fought was not their war but “their” war. Thus this is also representative of the disconnectedness of the ‘other’ as the colonized Sümi Nagas did not identify themselves in any way with the ‘Other’.

Den Ben Amos in his essay “Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context” says, “in its cultural context, folklore is not an aggregate of things, but a process—a communicative process” (9). As a “communicative process” this folksong is an attempt to communicate about the long forgotten history of the Sümi brethrens who gave away their lives for the sake of their colonial masters. Thus, they leave behind their mark in a postcolonial world with their song as the story of their anguish and misery; a song which will be passed down as a historical account of their experiences. Frantz Fanon in his book The Wretched of the Earth writes, “the oppressor, in his own sphere, starts the process, a process of domination, of exploitation and of pillage, and in the other sphere the coiled, plundered creature which is the native provided fodder for the process as best he can” (39). A reflection of colonial domination and exploitation can be seen in this folksong as the tribal men who had known no other world than his own small world confined to his village and clan are being taken to fight in a battle where ‘strange’ kind of arms were used. The only weapons he was skilled at using were the daos and the spears which were inefficient in comparison to the armaments that were being used in the battlefield. Thus, leaving him only with these ‘inefficient’ weapons to protect himself in the Great War. In this regard J. H. Hutton in his book The Sema Nagas writes, “as in the other western Naga tribes, the principal offensive weapons of the Sema are the spear and the dao; the crossbow, originally perhaps borrowed from tribes further east, is also used. The only defensive weapon is the shield, unless we may include “panjis”. No defensive armor is used by the Semas, not even a cane helmet”. (18)

CONCLUSION

“Folksongs express the dreams and prayers and hopes of the working class”
Hank Williams

Folksongs, apart from being creative are very expressive in nature. Thus, the Sümi Nagas who were a part of the First World War took it as a means to document and express their experiences of the war through their song. They have written history through their song as their song is a source of information of the real account of their experiences and struggles under British Empire. It is also representative of the relationship between the native and the ‘settler’ which is ruled by hegemony. It is reflective of the fact that the native is always bound to ‘obey’ the ‘settler’. However, the native
is someone who is “overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority” (Fanon 41).

REFERENCES
