Becoming Modern: Transitions in Everyday Culture, Naga Hills, 1890s-1950s

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Contents

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis titled "Becoming Modern: Transitions in Everyday Culture, Naga Hills, 1890s-1950s" is an outcome of my own research work carried out in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG), under the supervision of Dr. John Thomas, Department of HSS, IITG.

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Certificate

This is to certify that this thesis titled "Becoming Modern: Transitions in Everyday Culture, Naga Hills, 1890s-1950s," submitted by Vikavi K. Assumi, Research Scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, to the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, embodies research work carried out under my supervision. The present thesis or parts thereof have not been submitted anywhere else for award of any degree or diploma.

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Abstract

The thesis examines the cultural transitions that occurred in the everyday life of the Nagas, especially the Sumi Nagas from the late nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century, and the extent to which such transitions became crucial for the construction of the modern Naga self. The cultural transitions in everyday life, which was mediated by British administrators, American Baptist missionaries and the larger aspirations of the Nagas to become 'modern', has been examined by tracking the changes that occurred in the domains of clothing and bodily practices, food and dietary practices, habitation and spatial practices.

The Nagas are a collective of 40 to 60 tribes living between the Brahmaputra River in South Asia and the Chindwin River in South East Asia. The scope of this thesis is limited to Nagas who inhabited the Naga Hills and the adjoining areas that eventually came to be incorporated within the Indian nation-state.

The consolidation of British control and the arrival of American Baptist missionaries in the late nineteenth century, and the resultant events and processes initiated profound and far-reaching changes in the socio-cultural and political life of the Nagas. The attitudes and interventions of missionaries and administrators, the spread of Christianity, the two world wars, of which the latter had a direct and dramatic impact on the local people, the growing prevalence and flow of money economy, and the greater integration with global network of ideas and commodities were indeed important catalysts of this change. These changes became the backdrop for the growing urge during the first half of twentieth century, especially among the emergent Naga middle class, to

become ‘modern’. Of course, within a colonial context, to become modern, circumstances had compelled them to subscribe to the reasoning and practices of the missionaries, state and capital.

Introduction

This doctoral thesis examines the cultural transition that occurred in the everyday life of the Nagas, with special reference to the Sumi Nagas, from the late nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century, and the extent to which such transitions became crucial for the construction of the modern Naga self. This cultural transition, which was mediated by the attitudes and interventions of British administrators, American Baptist missionaries as well as the growing desire among the Nagas to become 'modern', is examined by tracking the changes that occurred in three important domains: clothing and bodily practices, food and dietary practices, habitation and spatial practices.

The Nagas are a collective of 40 to 60 tribes living between the Brahmaputra River in South Asia and the Chindwin River in South East Asia. They inhabit the region that stretches from eastern Arunachal Pradesh in the north to the Lushai and Chin Hills of Mizoram in the south, from eastern Assam in the west to the north-western Burma in the east. The scope of this thesis is limited to Nagas who inhabited the Naga Hills and the adjoining areas that eventually came to be incorporated within the Indian Union. Within this, there will be frequent references to the Sumi Nagas, who inhabited the central region of Naga Hills, which includes the Zunheboto District, parts of Niuland and Kiphire Districts, and some of the adjoining districts in present day Nagaland.

The consolidation of British control and the arrival of American Baptist missionaries in the late nineteenth century, and the resultant events and processes initiated profound and far-reaching changes in the socio-cultural and political life of the Nagas. The attitudes and interventions of missionaries and administrators, the spread of Christianity, the two world wars, of which the second one had a more direct and dramatic impact on the local people, the growing prevalence and

flow of money economy, and the greater integration with global network of ideas and commodities were indeed important catalysts of this change.

These changes became the backdrop for the growing urge, during the first half of twentieth century, especially among the emergent Naga middle class, to become 'modern'. Of course, within a colonial context, to become modern, circumstances had compelled them to subscribe to the reasoning and practices of the missionaries, state and capital. They appropriated, in specific ways, what they encountered and experienced to construct their 'modern' self. This is something that is detailed in the first chapter of the thesis.

In spite of claims such as Latour's (1993) that we have indeed never been modern, a cultural-intellectual shift vaguely termed 'modernity' is believed to have originated in Europe in the fifteenth century but by the eighteenth century, it developed into "the historically embodied form of the Enlightenment, seen as a conglomerate of philosophical outlooks".[1] Some core characteristics that define this new age would include autonomy of reason and law, empiricism, science, progress, secularism, universalism[2], democracy, technology, the nation-state, citizenship, a public sphere, human rights, industrialisation, urbanization, individual ownership of property and individualism.[3] However such an unproblematic summarising of the modern as a monolith disregards the 'multiple modernities' that emerged by the twentieth century, when societies beyond Europe began to adopt distinctive ways of modernising themselves.[4] Notwithstanding the need to 'universalise' lying at the heart of the modern project, parameters employed in understanding and

[1] Javeed Alam, *India: Living with Modernity*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. P. 7).
[2] Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024, p.21).
[3] Couze Venn and Mike Featherstone, "Modernity". *Theory, Culture and Society. Vol 23 Issue 2-3, 2006.* p. 459.
[4] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries (*Durham and London: Duke University Press, p 1).

critiquing European modernity does not suffice in discussions of the lived experience of modernity in India as well other non-European societies. The alternative modernity of the Indian experience is marked by a dominant concern for social and religious reform and change during the colonial period. Colonial India's modern imaginary was influenced by the West which it admired for what was perceived as its liberal/progressive ideas, science, reason and spirit of material success. However, at the same time, there was an attempt to found the reformed nation on the ancient spiritual principles laid down in Hindu scriptures. As recipients of a colonial modernity, the Indian intelligentsia displayed an ambiguous relationship with the British administration and the new ideas they had imported into Indian society, epitomised in Gandhi's disillusionment with British imperial civilization and its policies alongside the rejection of the acquisitive industrial culture. Gandhi and others were deeply suspicious of what they saw as modernity's mandatory linkage with colonialism and capitalism[5]. In fact, an alternative historiographical exposition of modernity exposes the location of its birth coinciding in the dispossession and subjugation of the Americas and foregrounds its historical nexus with political and economic power.[6]

Partha Chatterjee explains that the Indian experience of encountering modernity has been a blend of great benefit as well as profound exploitation, which inevitably leaves us dubious of modernity as a phenomenon.[7] While the synthesis and contestations between the new and the traditional, between rationality and religion and between development and culture continued to dominate the postcolonial Indian imaginary, post-Independence Nehruvian India was driven by a more immediate imperative of consolidating political independence, order and unity, and of modernising

[5] Javeed Alam, *India*, 8.
[6] Couze Venn and Mike Featherstone, "Modernity". *Theory, Culture and Society. Vol 23 Issue 2-3, 2006.* p. 458.
[7] Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p 174).

its society and economy and thereby reinforcing the power of the new nation-state.[8]Thus faith in the power of science and technology, and the ideals of rationalism and secularism became the dominant characteristics of the temper of Nehruvian India. However, this dominant liberal quarter of the Indian intelligentsia came to be challenged at various levels, first by a rightist group, which believes in putting a militant Hindu ideology before scientific or technological progress, and secondly by progressive ideologues and activists who criticise the exclusionary and elitist position in the Nehruvian project and mobilise the subaltern voices of peasants, tribals, the Dalit and women to challenge the bourgeois domination of postcolonial Indian politics.[9]

Accusations of elitism directed at the dominant bourgeois nationalist discourse of history and politics in India is validated when one recognises the multiple vernacular modernities that have existed within India, with the case of the Nagas along the India-Burma frontier providing a most stark example. While not unlike the rest of the subcontinent, modernity in the Naga Hills arrived through colonial exposure and intervention, the development of a modern Naga society has had its own distinct trajectory and character. A development that occurred only in the late colonial period of Indian history, the colonial-Christian syndicate ushered in a new era in the Naga Hills. Naga modernity, thereby, is an evolving phenomenon and far from complete. This study covers the earliest half century of this temporal history to recognise the drastic transformations initiated in the Naga Hills at this that set into motion a process of drastic transformation of its tribal lifeworld. Although it proceeds with an understanding of the broad markers of modernity as it has evolved in metropolitan Europe and in postcolonial India, the thesis is an analysis of the distinct nature of the imposition and gradual participation of Nagas in a new political-cultural order. The discourse

[8] Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024, p. 63).
[9] Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity.*

of modernity has inevitably assumed the existence of that which is labelled ‘tradition’ as its binary other, against which it is defined and situated. However, this thesis has not worked with a priori watertight definitions of either categories, but seeks to analyse and establish what both modernity and tradition have come to mean in the Naga world and how these meanings have taken shape. As scholars have noted, unlike in the European context, modernity in India has not marked a complete break with its pre modern institutions. This thesis has tried to examine the unique ways in which Naga society has co-opted modern institutions while also shaping them in accordance with the need to at least partially continue its previous modes of belief and practice, resulting in a continuous engagement with and redefining of what modernity and tradition stand for in the Naga cultural context.

In the thesis, the term ‘modern’ is being used not as an objective set of prescriptions, ideas and practices to which Nagas, devoid of any agency, had to fit in. Rather, it is being used in regard to how Nagas, through their specific exposure to the colonial and missionary advances, chose to become during the late 19th and much of 20th century. The focus is on the specific ways in which they encountered and appropriated that which is modern for their own socio-cultural and political requirements. Both, locally and globally, the world around them was changing, and that change was often spoken about in terms of being part of modern times. Nagas felt the need to adapt to these changes and in their own way, become ‘modern’. Of course, this was happening within the limits and possibilities set by the missionaries and administrators.

The attitudes and interventions of the administrators and missionaries were two-fold, often opposed to each other, pulling the Nagas in two distinct directions. While the former was keen to make a ‘noble savage’ out of the Naga, freezing and showcasing them in time, making them worthy of adorning the museums in Europe, the latter was more interested in making ‘civilized’ and

'Christian' subjects out the Naga, enabling them to shed their 'savage' self and embrace 'civilized' ways. It is in the midst of these pressures exercised by these two contradictory desires, enacted in the everyday life, that Nagas constructed their modern self in the first half of twentieth century.

There were two larger processes that became the basis on which the aspiration of Nagas to become modern came to be articulated – Christianization and political autonomy. In other words, the act of converting to a new religion and asserting their demands for political autonomy, free from the control of British as well as India, became the ground on which they came to press for and articulate their modern self. Both these processes, and the spaces they opened up for Nagas in defining their self runs through the discussions in the third, fourth and fifth chapter.

The cultural transitions that embodied the local urge to become 'modern' is most obvious and can be best understood by examining facets of everyday life. Historians and anthropologists have often tended to pay little attention to or exclude what is generally considered mundane and everyday life. The 'everyday' has generally been perceived either as a mere reflection of larger structural transformations or as an inconsequential domain not worthy of serious attention. However, in recent times, several scholars have stressed the importance of understanding the 'everyday' in the history of communities and things. Historians of culture are increasingly realising the importance of understanding the dynamics of everyday life, as it mediates as well as get transformed by the structures that they are a part of.[10] More importantly, everyday practices and behaviours, which are often taken for granted, are increasingly being looked upon as sites where 'hegemonic' power operates. Hegemonic power, which is seemingly invisible, operates in the everyday, in the most

[10] Alf Ludtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

mundane of activities, but resulting in deeper transformations.[11] It is in this context that examining the cultural transitions in the everyday life of the local people become relevant.

The thesis examines three domains of everyday life among the Nagas - clothing and bodily practices, food and dietary practices, habitation and spatial practices – and trace the transitions they underwent within the larger context of the events and process that defined Naga life from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century.

In terms of shifts in the clothing and bodily practices, the semi-naked state of the Naga body was a source of much anxiety for both the missionary and the administrator alike, and hence, it often became the object of their reformist as well as orientalising impulses. As a result, the various social, cultural, and religious significance of the existing bodily and sartorial practices came to be either overlooked or misunderstood.

Prior to the incursions of the missionaries and the colonial administrators, clothing played a very crucial role in determining the social status of a person. Each of the distinct Naga tribes had their own elaborate set of costumes. Every clothing was a signifier of certain meanings. One was identified by the clothing he or she put on. Clothing displayed one's social status. Interestingly, one could not wear the clothing of their choice. A married man had different set of clothing from an unmarried man and likewise was also the case among women. It was by the costume that a person came to be identified as a chief, a warrior, a rich or a poor man. Clothing had certain profound meanings attached to its wearer.

[11] Jean L. Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol.1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

The coming of the missionaries and their notions of what is ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ had a significant impact. The meanings that were once attached to clothing and ornaments came to be altered. With the growing circulation of ideas, via missionary work, of sin and shame, of what is clean and unclean, of what is moral and immoral, new attitudes and practices related to body and clothing gained popularity. For the missionaries, cleaning and clothing the body meant instilling civility, modesty and reverence to their god. The urge to cloth the Nagas in their attires became an important mission for them while undermining the minimal cloths that the Nagas wore.

British administrators had a different understanding from that of the missionaries. They shunned any attempt on the part of the Nagas to wear ‘modern’ clothing. Through admonitions and policies, the youth were restrained from adopting ‘modern’ clothing and compelled to dress in ‘customary’ manner. Such attitude often bred much discontent among the emergent modern school educated youth and middle class, and for them, putting on trousers, shirts and hats became a means of protesting against what the colonial administration tried to impose on them. This was especially the case in the 1930s and 40s when Nagas were eager to adopt western clothing as part of their efforts to become modern.

By the late 1940s, as the aspiration of the Nagas for self-determination became intensified, they increasingly felt the need to not identify with the Indian expectations to ‘primitivize’ the ‘tribal’. Hence, while they didn’t discard their traditional attires, their attire took the form of a political stand. Most of them continued to wear the western clothing that the missionaries had introduced to them, especially since the Indian government also looked down upon their efforts to become ‘modern’ and not remain ‘noble savages’.

In terms of food, except for some exceptions like salt, much of the ingredients that went into the cooking came from within the Naga society. In fact, much of the dietary system of the Nagas was informed by an economy that was self-sufficient. It was primarily based on high consumption of meat, rice and locally produced vegetables. As Naga society began to interact with the plains, gradually, oil, spices and dairy products began to be used. The use of these ingredients that came from the plains was marginal to begin with, but over the years, they began to be more widely used.

Feasting was integral to the various rituals and ceremonies associated with pre-Christian beliefs. Before the sowing of crops, the blessing of the gods was invoked by offering animal sacrifices and performing various rituals, which was then followed by feasting. When there was plentiful harvest, feasting and celebration were also acts of showing gratitude and showering praises to their gods. Besides the feasts associated with sowing and harvesting, the rich and the prominent households also had the responsibility of organising a feast for all the people in their community every once in a while. It was in organising a feast that their social status and power came to be acknowledged and recognised; and their responsibilities to the less privileged within the community came to be affirmed. The elaborateness and the frequency of these feasts decreased over a period of time, especially in the light of the displeasure expressed by the missionaries over the fact that such occasions often involved excessive consumption of rice beer.

Along with feasting, Nagas also observed fasting rituals. During the *genna*[12] period much of what is part of everyday life came to a standstill: it was forbidden to travel, to have sexual intercourse or to eat certain types of food. A genna period can last several days, and depending on the occasion, had to be observed either by the whole village or by certain individuals. A collective genna was

[12] *Genna* is the collective or individual abstention from all work on a particular day or period.

for example connected to feasts of merit or as in today, with annual festivals like the spring festival that marks the beginning of a new agricultural cycle. Genna is found among all Naga tribes.[13] Fasting during genna was a way to propitiate the gods either for favour or forgiveness. With the spread of Christianity, the idea of fasting took on a new form with new theological meanings. Fasting and praying became acts of repentance, introspection and means to seek heavenly grace and blessings from God.

Temperance and the introduction of what the missionaries identified as 'healthy' dietary practises had a significant impact on the health and food culture of the Nagas. For instance, rice beer played an important role in the everyday life of the Nagas. It accompanied them for every occasion like feasts, rituals, marriages, harvest time and even before and after the war. It was an ordinary yet an important drink. Usually, most Naga homes had a separate room for the preparation of rice beer – an evidence of the important status that rice beer had in a Naga diet. However, with the spread of Christianity, the consumption of rice beer came to be considered a 'sinful act'. New meanings were attributed to what was earlier considered a pure, sacred and healthy ingredient of life.

An important source of anxiety for the missionaries, which runs through in their attitude towards existing bodily practices, dietary practices as well as spatial organisation of homes and villages, was what they deemed as the 'unhygienic' and 'unhealthy' state of being. When it came to existing places of dwelling, informed by certain notions of 'cleanliness' and 'hygiene', the missionaries found them to be unhealthy and unhygienic spaces. Naga houses had no windows and most tribes maintained rooms for their cattle attached to their living rooms, and this did not go well with the

[13] Shimreichon Luithui, *Naga: A People Struggling for Self-Determination* (International work group for Indigenous Affairs, 2001).

missionaries. It became part of their evangelising mission to encourage converted Nagas to build separate spaces for their pigs, cattle and fowl and to construct houses with windows so as to allow the passage of fresh air. Similar efforts towards introducing 'clean' and 'hygienic' practices are evident in how the converted body ought to be maintained as well as how food ought to be prepared.

The spread of Christianity often divided villages on religious lines, often leading to the converts constructing new villages and settlements, or reorganising existing villages and settlements. The geographical layout of the village subsequently changed. Houses came to be far more spread out rather than in close proximity with each other as in earlier times. Natural markers of boundary came to be replaced by fences.

During the Second World War, Nagas bore the brunt of the extensive destruction and damage that happened in the north-east. According to government estimates, about 2780 houses in the Naga Hills and 9103 houses in Manipur had been totally destroyed. The actually number would have been even more.[14] The reconstruction program that was initiated by the British after the war brought in new construction materials, utensils, agricultural tools etc. This period saw the gradual replacement of traditional house with the newly designed pukka houses essentially made with material that had been imported from other parts of India, and the gradual urbanisation of certain villages.

In all the three domains discussed above, the changes that came about were far-reaching. It laid the foundation for the socio-cultural developments that occurred from 1950s onwards, especially

[14] John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the formation of the Naga Political Identity* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), 100.

in the light of Indo-Naga conflict and the effects thereof on people and places. Clothing, dietary and habitational practices became sites where Nagas self-fashioned themselves into 'modern' subjects.

Historiography

Most of the historical writings on the Nagas have been pre-occupied with questions related to either their political assertion for self- determination or their encounter with Christianity from the late nineteenth century onwards. Interestingly, each of these writings have examined either of the above-mentioned questions in isolation from the other; as if the formation of political identity and the spread of a new religion had no relation to each other despite the fact that it was happening parallelly.

Most of the writings on the political history of the Nagas have been a study of the leaders and organizations related to the political struggle of the Nagas for self- determination, and the sequence of political manoeuvres that have unfolded from the first half of twentieth century onwards. Among others, this includes the writings of Asoso Yonuo, M. Horam, and more recently, Atai Shimray and Marcus Franke.[15] While offering detailed accounts of the movement among the Nagas for self-determination, these writings are limited in two important respects: (1) beyond the leaders and the political organizations, they don't illustrate the role of the masses in the movement; (2) they don't delve on the important ways in which religion and culture mediated the formation

[15] Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study* (Delhi: Vivek Publishing House,1974); M Horam, *Naga Insurgency* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1988); Atai Shimray, *Let Freedom Ring: Story of Naga Nationalism* (New Delhi: Promila & Co. Publishers 2005); Marcus Franke, *Wars without End: The Case of the Naga Hills*, Diogenes, 2006.

of a Naga political identity vis-à-vis the ways in which the political movement impacted the religious and cultural life of the Nagas.

Most of the writings on the spread of Christianity have tended to be hagiographies that celebrate the work of the missionaries, both foreign and local, and have generally portrayed the process of Christianization as a 'civilizing' process, leading Nagas to espouse more 'civilized' state of being. This includes the writings of church historians like Frederick Downs, P.T. Philip, Joseph Puthenpurakal, Keviyiekielie Linyu, and various local church historians.[16] These historians often fail to critically examine the effects of missionary work and the spread of Christianity on the local culture. Even when they write about the effects, it is often described in celebratory terms, wherein Nagas are characterised as becoming 'redeemed' and 'modernized'. Frederick Downs, who is known for his pioneering writings on the history of Christianity in north-east India argues that of the various factors that made socio-cultural change inevitable in the hill areas of North-East India, Christianity was the primary agency in the formation of a new cultural synthesis. Downs defends the missionaries and argues that Christianity offered the best option for tribal acculturation to modernization.[17] These writings fail to acknowledge the fact that alongside colonial powers, missions also held the 'civilizing responsibility' which is also known as the 'white man's burden' as their shared goal. Moreover, as Lal Dena illustrates in his book on the missionary work among the tribes inhabiting the hill tracts of Manipur, these writings also tend to remain silent about the

[16] Frederick S. Downs, *The Mighty works of God: A Brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India: The Mission Period* 1836-1950, (Gauhati: Christian Literature Centre, 1971); P.T Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland* (Guwahati: Christian Literature Centre,1976); Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions in Nagaland* (Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute,1984); Keviyiekielie Linyu, *Christian Movement in Nagaland* (Kohima: Author,2004).

[17] Downs, *The Mighty works of God.*

complicity that the missionaries maintained with the British administration in strengthening the colonial rule in the region.[18]

Marking a departure from the existing historical writings on the modern political and religious histories of the Nagas, John Thomas in his book entitled, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the formation of Naga Political Identity*, discusses the extent to which the spread of Christianity mediated the formation of a Naga political identity. He doesn't narrate the history of Christianity in the region as one that remained unrelated to the formation of modern Naga identity. He illustrates the important interventions that missionaries made in the everyday culture of the Nagas, and eventually, refashioned the existing Naga self. Missionaries were dismissive of the everyday cultural practices of the Nagas and referred to them as 'unclean' 'heathen' and 'sinful' and worked towards encouraging the Nagas to give up their old ways of life and put on new habits and practices which was in contrast to their earlier practices. This transition created new notions of time, space, body, and aesthetics among the Nagas.[19]

Besides what has been hinted by Thomas in his work, there is hardly any work on the cultural history of the Nagas in the modern times. This may be the case primarily because so far scholars have looked at Naga 'culture' as a frozen entity or because of the general preoccupation with political history.

Though historians have not engaged much with socio-cultural dynamics and practices, anthropologists have attempted to do it. For instance, Dolly Kikon in her articles, 'Fermenting

[18] Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India with Particular Reference of Manipur and Lushai Hills*, 1894-1947 (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988).

[19] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 29.

Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the Nation's Table in India' and 'From the Heart to the Plate', discusses how the dietary practices of the Nagas become the site where the Indian nation-state asserts its dominance over the Nagas. In another article, 'From Loincloths, Suits and Battle Greens: Politics of Clothing the 'Naked' Nagas', she discusses how clothing has been a site of contestation between the colonial and post-colonial states on the one hand, and the Nagas on the other - a contestation over what Naga 'culture' is.[20] Besides, there are also individual works by the various scholars whose writings are represented in the book edited by Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstein, titled, *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*. One of the limitations of some of these anthropological works is that they tend to focus on a particular artefact or practice outside of its historical context – a tendency to be ahistorical, wherein culture becomes just a static field of activities.

It is here that the proposed research becomes relevant, wherein culture is not looked at as static or frozen, but dynamic. It is always in the process of becoming and evades our urge to pin it down with any certainty. Understanding the everyday cultural transitions among the Nagas may enable us to move away from perceiving Nagas as some remnant of a 'primitive' or exoticized past, but instead as a people who have been constantly redefining themselves as well as shaped by the circumstances they find themselves in.

[20] Dolly Kikon, "From Lion Cloth, Suit to Battle Greens: Politics of Clothing the 'Naked Nagas'," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dolly Kikon, "Fermenting Modernity, Putting Akhuni in the Nation's Table of India," (South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 2015), 320-335; *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India* Ed. Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstein (Gent: Snoeck Publishers, 2008).

Body and Clothing in Global and South Asian Contexts

Bodily and sartorial practices have been an important site of examination when it comes to understanding the everyday cultural transitions in any given society. Body and the clothing put on it has been a site to represent, contest or impose one's ideas over the other as well as one that has assumed new meanings and interpretations across different spaces and times. There are a large number of monographs and articles that have been written on the history of bodily and clothing practices, both in the global and the South Asian context.

Daniel Roche, in his work titled, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime*, examines the culture of dressing and notions of fashion in the seventeenth and the eighteenth-century France. Roche uses a large sample of inventories to explore the differences between the various social classes in the amount they spent on clothes and the kind of clothes they wore. He argues that dress codes reveal cultural codes. 'Behind the Apparel', Roche remarks, 'I believe that you really can find mental structures'.[21] In Eighteenth Century France, for instance, conforming to a particular dress code was a way for an individual to show that he or she was noble, or to attempt to pass for noble.[22] Clothing, therefore, was a clear marker of one's social standing within a highly hierarchized social order.

David Kuchta, in his work titled, *The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing and English Masculinity, 1688-1832* writes about the identity struggle between the middle class and aristocratic Englishmen, and how clothing became an important tool in this struggle to assert power and

[21] Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the African Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[22] Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History*? (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004).

influence over the political culture of English Society. For the aristocrats, political participation was defined in terms of masculine renunciation of luxury and this becomes a way of explaining why women, to whom luxury and lavishness is attributed, were denied participation in the political action of the nation. By the end of eighteenth century, power was not simply concentrated in the hands of the aristocrats, and the middle-class reformers appropriated the earlier aristocratic language of public virtue for their own political ends. They argued that luxury and effeminacy were central to the 'hereditary honors and titles of nobility' that produces a proud and a tyrannical aristocracy. Middle class political reformers thus reversed eighteenth century aristocratic men's claims to masculinity and political legitimacy by ascribing these virtues to middle class men. According to them, political legitimacy was determined by manliness, modesty and frugality. Thus, a reformation of politics began as a reformation of character.[23] Clothing the body thus carried multiple meanings for the English Society wherein it was used as a tool to enforce one's political status over the other. It gives us an understanding of the society which was male dominated and how they appropriated clothing as a means to signify some section of the society as weak beings who are not capable of politically representing the society.

Kutcha's work becomes relevant in examining the ways in which the emergent Naga middle class fashioned themselves, and how clothing and the construction of a new physical appearance became a means towards establishing their social and political significance. In the Naga context, the construction didn't merely overlap the construction of what it means to be masculine or feminine

[23] David Kuchta, *The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing and English Masculinity*, 1688-1832 (University of California Press, 1996).

in the 'modern' situation, but also became laced with projecting notions of what became religiously 'significant' over and above the 'heathen'.

Jean and John Comaroff, in the second volume of their study on colonial evangelism and modernity in Tswana titled: *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol.2, illustrates how as part of their 'civilising mission', the missionaries persuaded the Tswana people to clothe themselves in the European garb. To the European Protestant sensibilities, the unrestrained, unclothed heathen body was not the fit abode for a vigilant Christian conscience, nor was a heathen hut a place to nurture industry in the divine cause.[24] Moral degeneracy had to be reversed by material self-improvement.[25] And their campaign to clothe the Africans, therein became inseparable from other aspects and axes of the civilizing mission.[26] One of the important aspects about the work of Comaroffs is their emphasis on the fact that changes in clothing and other sites of everyday practice did not happen through any exercise of brute force, but through an exercise of hegemonic power over a period of time, involving interventions in the mundane and everyday life of the colonized people.

There is much to be drawn from the Comaroffs in understanding the cultural transition among the Nagas. the attitude of the missionaries and the colonial administrators towards the existing bodily and clothing practices of the Nagas, and the interventions they made through a hegemonic exercise of power in the everyday life of the Nagas, and how the 'dialectics of modernity' produced the modern Naga subjects.

[24] John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol.2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[25] Comaroff and Comaroff, 8.

[26] Comaroff and Comaroff, 236.

There have been notable works on the history of clothing in South Asia. One of the earliest works was an essay by Bernard Cohn titled, 'Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the 19th Century'. In this essay, Cohn demonstrates how clothing, which is otherwise considered insignificant to the larger question of colonialism, has helped the British administration to control and subjugate its subjects during the colonial period in India. Though clothing may be a part of everyday life that we care little about, a minute change in the way one dressed or made to dress had a major impact on the colonial relations of power. As Cohn writes, clothes are not just body coverings and matters of adornments, nor can they be understood only as metaphors of power and authority, nor as symbols; in many contexts, clothes literally is authority.[27] The British imposed on their Indian subjects a certain kind of dress code that would maintain uniformity and distinction between them and Indians. Moreover, as in the case of Gandhi, clothing also became a means to protest against the colonial rule. For him, the use of indigenous or swadeshi products was a sacred mission.[28] In the Naga context, John Thomas, in his work, illustrates how important it was for the Naga leader, Jadonang, to dress himself like a British, wearing a red hat, long trousers, shirt, coat and shoes, to invert the existing symbolic world of relations. In fact, Jadonang's attire and attitude provoked the British to the extent that he was imprisoned for a week.[29]

Emma Tarlo, in her work titled *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, elaborates on the problem of what to wear rather than on what is worn. She demonstrates how different individuals and groups have used clothes to assert power, challenge authority, define or conceal identity, and

[27] Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its form of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 114.

[28] C. A. Bayly, The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society,1700-1930, *in The Social Things of Life: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* Ed. Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 285.

[29] Thomas, *Evangelising The Nation*, 73-74.

instigate or prevent social changes at various levels, from the village to the nation.[30] Tarlo's ambitious study illuminates the extent to which choices of what to wear did not convey a stable, singular meaning, and that clothing choices should, therefore, be interpreted both as signs of identification and signs of disassociation.

In her work, *Dressing the Colonised Body; Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka*, Nira Wickramasinghe explains that in Ceylon, the main object of the nationalists under the colonial rule was indeed to make the Sinhalese people proud of their own products, culture and habits. She further explains how the entry of world market and industrialization changed the power dynamics in the identity formation of its people. Wickramasinghe delineates the importance of the politics of identity and clothing for the construction of 'modern Sri Lanka'.[31] Lisa Trivedi, in her work, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, explains how and why Gandhi used a simple piece of textile material, Khadi, as a tool to forge unity cutting across different languages, religions, castes, classes and regions to fight the colonial rule.[32]

Clothing the Naga body was wrought with various social and political meanings, and the existing scholarship provides us various frames through which we may understand that history. While most of the scholarship on the history of clothing touch upon the distinct ways in which that history unfolded in caste societies across different regions in India, especially as the nation transitioned from colonial rule to post-independence nation-state, there is hardly any work on how this history may have unfolded in the case of tribal communities, especially those tribal communities that on

[30] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[31] Nira Wikramsinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2003).

[32] Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India,* (Indiana University Press, 2007).

the one hand, enthusiastically espoused modernity, and even aspired for their own nations, but on the other, whose aspirations for cultural and political self-determination remain incomplete and unfulfilled, whose societies never witnessed any transition from colonialism to independence.

Dietary Practices in the Global and South Asian Contexts

From the moment that humankind learned the art of making fire, and the art of cooking food using fire, they have been involved in the process of self-actualization. Levi Strauss remarked that for the indigenous people of South America, cooking food was 'the invention which made human beings human'. [33] It was the expression of their subjective minds. Hence, no society had the same approach to cooking or the same dietary practices. Moreover, food became the site on which various social and cultural meanings came to be constructed as well as the site on which various contestations of power occurred. Food and dietary practices has been the subject of numerous anthropological and historical works, especially in the global context, though less so in the South Asian context.

In, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Sidney Mintz illuminates and discusses the social and economic history of sugar production and consumption in Europe particularly in England and its colonies. He examines the power structures that made it possible for sugar to become the first luxury-turned-necessity commodity, which propelled a revolution in diet and lifestyle, particularly in the working class during the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism. Sugar's history is one that closely aligns with themes of conquest and control. Slavery became an important feature of sugar production. Slave labour was the crux upon which sugar

[33] Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, The cultural dimension of food (Parma: Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition,2009), 4. https://www.barillacfn.com/en/publications/the-cultural-dimension-of-food.

production, and ultimately consumption, was built. Without the system of forced labour, plantation owners would not have been able to sustain such high outputs or retain nearly as much profit, supply would not have been able to keep up with demand, and sugar prices may not have fallen sufficiently or quickly enough for the working class to adopt it in their everyday diet by the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Mintz points out, while England was getting rich on slavery in the New World, it was setting itself up to become rich off the proletariat labour in the homeland.[34]

Arjun Appadurai, in his work, 'Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia' examines the dietary practices of Tamil Brahmins in South India and shows how food plays an important role in maintaining caste relations. Cuisines and recipes which seem to be very ordinary social means of interaction has many social obligations and constructions. In the Hindu caste system, food is related to moral and cosmic relationship and therefore it is held sacred.[35] Gastro-politics for Hindus brings out the concepts and distinction of high and low, self and other, inside and outside. Food carries many meanings and it keeps changing in different social contexts although revolving around the same idea of priority and status. Food, therefore also helps us in understanding the social position and status of a community, a family and an individual person.

In, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,* Caroline Bynum discusses food and food metaphors which was prominent in the 13th and 14th century Europe. Food divided rich from poor and sharing food with the hungry was primarily a symbol of benevolence. Food also had religious significance.[36] Christians linked salvation with the individual

[34] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin Books: New York, 1986).

[35] Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro- Politics in Hindu South Asia: Symbolism and Cognition," American Ethnologist, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Aug. 1981): 494-511.

[36] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

reception of god in the eucharist, which they described by appeal to graphic metaphors of nourishment. Tasting the broken body of Christ in the eucharist, Christians became one with the suffering flesh crucified on the cross and obtained their salvation. Also, Bynum talks about how medieval women developed the notion of food as a sacred symbol. For instance, women 'thought of God as food' and were particularly devoted to the eucharist.[37] This idea demonstrates that women, much more than men, saw food as central to their lives. Food was closely connected with religious sanction particularly for women. As they were lacking status and wealth to renounce, women renounced food during medieval period. In Bynum's work, we see that in restraining oneself from excess intake of food, the way is paved to attain salvation. This work has much relevance in thinking about the significance of feasting and fasting in the pre-modern and modern times among the Nagas. The extent to which meanings attributed to feasting and fasting may have changed under the influence of Christianity among the Nagas in an area worth exploring.

The Cultural Dimension of Food, a pamphlet brought out by *Barilla Centre for Food and Nutrition*, traces the evolution of food and dietary practices over the time. It illustrates how food is very much linked to religious practices in almost every society. Food symbolism has many ramifications. One of the most relevant symbolism in many religious traditions is one that concerns the relationship between food, knowledge and sin.[38] There are ritual traditions that allowed certain food practices in one religion while considering it a taboo in the other. This work also goes on to explain the relationship between food and men, the feast of merry making in the convivial atmosphere where the exchange of culture and emotions are shared within a community. This pamphlet also traces

[37] Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History*, (Oxford: Polity, 2008).

[38] Barilla, "Centre for Food and Nutrition," 10.

how the advancement of science and technology created a space for different kinds of culinary practices especially with the mixture of different cultures. Taking an example of United States where different type of people settled in and of recent times, where the practices and consumption of fast foods are leading to many health complications, it talks about how food and diet has become a very serious health concern, the result of which is the spread of the concept of nutritional diet for a healthy living. The concept of 'good' and 'bad' food has become all the more important in food practices today.[39]

Arjun Appadurai's article, 'How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India' discusses cookbooks produced in a particular society at a particular moment in history. The idea of developing cookbooks, according to Appadurai, is a post-colonial construct, an outcome of the urge of middle-class urban women to explore cuisines beyond their cultural touch. India in the past was disinterested in cuisines and recipes other than that of their own culture or region. It was embedded in ideas of morality and purity within the caste society of India. However, with the coming of modern technology, resources and outreach programmes to different regions of the country due to employment opportunities ushered a new era of inquisitiveness to taste and explore cuisines other than their own.[40] In this new outreach, as a result of new employment opportunities to different part of the country, the middle class especially its women began exploring and trying new cuisines of the others irrespective of their caste hierarchy and regional affiliation. Here, we see how cuisine, which was held sacred and distinctive in Indian Society, became less so, and a means through which cultures interacted with each other. As Nagas began to encounter and interact

[39] Barilla, "Centre for Food and Nutrition,".

[40] Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.30, No.1 (Jan. 1988): 3-24.

with other cultures and regions from the middle of twentieth century onwards, the changes that may have come to the local cuisine is an aspect to further explore. Besides, it would also be interesting to look at the changes brought into food culture by the emergent urban middle classes among the Nagas as part of their exposure to other cultures, and their urge to distinguish themselves from the 'traditional' and the 'rural'.

Chen Liu in her article, 'Food Practices, Gendered Intimacy and Family Life in Contemporary Guangzhou: Gender, Place and Culture', tries to bring out the issues related to food and gender in urban Guangzhou (the largest city in south China) where changes in consumption of food and the related cooking and dietary practices have tended to reconstitute conventional understanding of gender role in domestic Chinese households. Generally, household domestic chores were considered the domain of women, where the dominant assumption is that, 'men are the providers or breadwinners while women are nourishers, who are in charge of feeding the family'. The attempt of the author is to demonstrate how such narratives tended to be broken by urban families, although without undermining the fact that traditional ideas and practices continued in most parts of China.[41]

Utsa Ray, in her book, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* discusses how the Bengali middle class produced their own culinary culture during the colonial period which marked themselves distinct from the lower castes.[42] Middle class Bengali food came to be used as a sign to represent their class, caste and cultural identity. It is interesting

[41] Chen Liu, *Food Practices, Gendered Intimacy and Family Life in Contemporary Guangzhou: Gender, Place & Culture*, 24:1, (2017): 97-107.

[42] Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (Cambridge University Press: 2015).

to note that while many socio-cultural changes were taking place in colonial Bengal, they resisted the policies that tried to interfere with their dietary staple, for instance, rice. In fact, for the Bengali middle class, non-commercialization of their cuisine was seen as an embodiment of their aesthetic superiority.

Dietary practices vary from culture to culture with each having its distinct smell, taste and cultural significance. Yet, this variety exists in a field where each food begins to attain a particular meaning as well as a social status. Food gets implicated in the everyday politics of a society. It therefore becomes important to explore the transitions in the dietary practices among the Nagas and the various forces triggering such changes.

Habitation, Architecture and Spatial Practices

Houses and living spaces have been important sites of everyday transition. It has been in such sites that people have connected as a family or a community living within the locality. Missionary interventions in the construction of 'clean' and 'hygienic' homes and reconstitution of the village space, colonial reconstruction of houses and village settlements after the second world war, the emergence of the moneyed middle class eager to build cemented houses all contributed towards how houses and living spaces of the Nagas came to be transformed during the first half of twentieth century.

It is often assumed that 'modern' houses and settlements that came up in erstwhile colonies are purely colonial constructs. However, some of the recent literature questions such assumption. Swati Chattopadhyay in her book, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the*

Colonial Uncanny,[43] illustrates how the British argued for the need to civilize their subjects by proper town planning, better health care centres, schools and other buildings etc. The feeling of cultural superiority was central to how the British attempted to change and reform the colonized – something that was evident in how they attempted to make Calcutta into a modern city. However, she argues that it was not an enterprise that was entirely imposed on the colonized, a collaborative project of the colonizer as well as the colonized. Similarly, Preeti Chopra in her work, *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay* explains that the colonial city of Bombay was a product of collaborative alliances between the ruler and the ruled, thereby debunking ideas about colonial cities as solely colonial constructs.[44] Among the Nagas, while missionaries had an important role to play in producing a model of how modern villages and habitational spaces ought to be reconstituted, the growing number of Christian converts and an emergent Naga middle class became active agents in the construction of modern village settlements and houses.

In *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City*, William Glover examines the construction of Lahore as a modern city. In order to build Lahore as a modern imperial city, the British had to order and control Lahore, by laying out cantonments, model villages, and canal colonies in the hope that a suitably organized environment could have an educative effect on the people.[45] Also in his work, it is interesting to note how the Indian residents

[43] Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[44] Preeti Chopra, *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[45] William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: London, 2008), 45-26.

gradually reworked both the forms and meaning of their homes to accommodate the new technical, aesthetic, and cultural elements of colonial modern by the materials used in the construction of their houses, the various decorative design and house layouts.[46] It is interesting to note the parallels to this in the changes that were brought about in the architectural designs of Naga homes, especially following the encounter with missionaries and the colonial administrators.

Yasser Mahgoub in his article, 'Architecture and the Expression of Cultural Identity in Kuwait', explores how in the context of Kuwait, cultural identity came to be expressed in contemporary architecture. It focuses on the architects, the strategies, mechanisms, tools, and the media they used in expressing cultural identity in their work and enables us to understand the views and roles of Kuwaiti architects who are participating in the current efforts to achieve a localized cultural identity in architecture. Their attempts to influence the making and development of contemporary architecture in Kuwait.[47]

In *Locating Architecture, Post-colonialism and Culture: Contextualisation in Algiers*, Kahini Amal Djair explains how architecture plays an important role in producing different cultural meanings and how its meaning can also change depending on the broader political, economic and social context. The idea of home and living spaces in Algiers underwent changes during the reign of Ottoman empire and subsequently, as a French colony. It explains as to how newer housing

[46] Glover, 99.

[47] Yasser Mahgoub, "Architecture and the expression of cultural identity in Kuwait,", *The Journal of Architecture*, 12:2, (2007): 165-182.

pattern can contribute to producing newer ideas of homes and living spaces while also preserving and creating new experiences and meanings.[48]

While looking at some of these work on spatial and architectural practices, it is evident that they were everyday practices that produced new social and cultural meanings. In a colonial context, the production of such practices involved the active participation of the local agents who were in a process of becoming modern. In the Naga context, as missionaries were crucial in introducing and instructing what it means to become 'modern', social and cultural meanings produced by the missionaries were often appropriated by the local people as they constructed new homes and villages.

Chapters

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter titled, *Historical Background*, provides the historical context in which cultural transitions occurred among the Nagas from the late 19th century onwards. It examines the character of British rule and missionary encounter in the Naga inhabited areas, especially their attitudes and actions towards the existing social and cultural practices of the Nagas. It also examines the large-scale conversions to Christianity, the impact that the world wars, especially the second world war, had on the hills, and the emergent political movement for self-determination.

The second chapter titled, *Body, Clothing and the Modern Self*, discusses the transitions that occurred in how the Naga body is perceived, and meanings that were attributed to sartorial practices. It lays out the bodily practices and meanings, and the function of clothing prior to

[48] Kahina Amal Djiar, "Locating architecture, post-colonialism and culture: Contextualisation in Algiers," (The Journal of Architecture, 14:2, 2009): 161-183.

colonial and missionary encounter. Further, it examines the attitudes of the colonial anthropologist and the missionary, and the respective interventions they made to either 'clothe' it or to freeze it and primitivize it. It traces the changing sartorial practices among the Nagas with the spread of Christianity and the various contestations over it, especially in the context of carving out a distinct political identity.

The third chapter titled, *Food, Drinks and Dietary Practices*, discusses the transitions in the dietary practices of the Nagas. It discusses how, prior to colonial and missionary encounter, food was procured, prepared and consumed; the meanings food assumed in ceremonial practices and collective life of a village. It delves into the extent to which missionary notions of 'cleanliness' and 'hygiene' mediated their attitude towards the existing dietary practices. It further discusses the interventions made by missionaries in the food habits of the Nagas, especially through the new meanings that were attributed to feasting and fasting, and the campaign they initiated against the consumption of rice beer.

The fourth chapter titled, *Habitation, Architecture and Spatial Practices*, discusses the transitions in the organization and construction of village and habitational spaces. It illustrates how a village and a house was conceived, constructed and organized in pre-modern times. Then, it discusses the extent to which missionary notions of family, home and community life effected changes in how Christian converts reorganized the village and habitational spaces. The chapter also delves into the impact that the reconstruction and rehabilitation measures of the British administration following the second world war and the growing monetization of the economy contributed to the emergence of a market around infrastructural construction.

Sources

The research for the thesis involved archival as well as field work. The archival work included consultation of missionary reports, memoirs and other writings; tour diaries, ethnographies and writings of British administrators; anthropological writings; autobiographies, memoirs, photographs and other materials found in personal collections. Meanwhile, the field work primarily involved the collecting and engaging with oral histories gathered from a variety of community members, especially from the elders among the Nagas Tribes.

Missionary Sources

Working closely among the people on an everyday basis, missionaries provide one of the most enriching accounts of everyday life among the Nagas, albeit one that is laced with various kinds of prejudices and biases. It was the missionaries and the church workers that intervened in the everyday lives of the people and hence, testimonies of their successes and failures in initiating cultural changes among the people they worked with are valuable sources of information. Missionary sources included annual reports, conference proceedings, magazines, letters, photographs, memoirs and autobiographies. The missionary sources were accessed in the libraries of theological colleges such as Eastern Theological College, Jorhat; Clark Theological College, Mokokchung; and Anderson Theological College, Aizuto.

Besides the missionary sources, a few souvenirs and other publications of various local churches were also consulted. The personal collection of various church leaders and church workers was of much value. The Nagaland Archives and Research Centre (NARC), which is the personal collection of the church leader, V. K. Nuh, was especially valuable in this respect.

Anthropological and Administrative Sources

Nagas have been the subject of several colonial ethnographies. Most of the colonial administrators wrote extensive field notes and often went on to write detailed ethnographies on the various Naga tribes. The published works of J. P. Mills and J. H. Hutton are the most obvious examples. Among those who were not colonial administrators but still wrote extensively in similar vein as colonial anthropologists include Christopher von Furer-Haimendorf, Ursula Graham Bower and T. C. Hodson.

The various tour diaries, field notes, reports and photographs of the colonial anthropologists were accessed in the *Naga Database* maintained by the University of Cambridge and the Nagaland State Archives, Kohima.

Local Sources

An important category of sources that was accessed were the writings, often self-published, of various local church and political leaders. Beginning in the 1980s, many of them began writing autobiographies either in English or in the Vernacular. Some of them even wrote memoirs that remained unpublished. They also have a personal collection of photographs, books and pamphlets, which were also accessed, though in a limited way.

Sources from the Field

Besides the above-mentioned archival sources, oral histories were gathered from the field. To a large extent, Nagas continue to live within an oral tradition, where passing down memories and stories from one generation to the other continues to be practiced. It was felt important to access this tradition. Oral history, as a methodological tool, has developed over the last few decades and

using the works of scholars like Paul Thompson, Barbar W. Sommer, Mary Kay Quinlan and others, an effort will be made to access the memories of the local people, especially the elderly. Oral history is also important to access everyday life, as traditionally, oral history has been largely concerned with the personal, intimate and the everyday.

The oral testimonies have been collected primarily from the Sumi Nagas who are situated in the Pughoboto region of the Zunheboto District, the Sumi Naga villages in the Kiphire District and Sumi Naga villages in the Dimapur District. As the Sumi Nagas are geographically scattered over many areas unlike the other tribes, there were so many commonalities as well as differences in oral testimonies, which became important and valuable for me to explore.

Chapter 1

Historical Background

The cultural transitions that occurred in the Naga Hills during the first half of twentieth century was closely tied to the social and political churning that occurred in the region at the time. This social and political churning was marked on the one hand by the consolidation of British advances and the spread of Christian missionary work initiated by the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society; on the other, by the increasing urge of the local people inhabiting the region to unite their disparate self into a singular political identity. The agendas and desires of all the three sets of actors, often at variance from each other, had an important role in triggering the transitions that occurred in the cultural landscape of the region. An illustration of this social and political churning, and the trends it unleashed is what this first chapter aims to address.

The chapter will first discuss the establishment and expansion of British administration and American Baptist missionary work in the Naga Hills. It will thereafter discuss the divergent yet demanding attitude and approach of the administrators and the missionaries towards the existing socio-cultural institutions and practices of the Nagas - while the anthropological interests of the administrators drove them to 'protect' the Naga tribes from outside influences and freeze them in their 'primitive' state, the evangelizing impulse of the missionaries drove them to introduce reforms and 'civilize' them. It was in the midst of these contradictory cultural expectations and demands put on the local people and the pressures put on them by the two world wars, which had a direct impact on their lives, that they strove to become 'modern'. They increasingly adopted a religion that provided them with access to spiritual and cultural resources that would give them access to modernity. They also organized themselves into a modern 'nation' that strove to be

independent from any external political control. The concluding section of the chapter will elaborate on this aspect.

Administrative Expansion into the Hills

The Yandaboo Agreement of 1826 heralded a new era in the history of Assam and its surrounding hills. The treaty led to the subsuming of the erstwhile Ahom kingdom under British administration and the new region came to be administered as part of the province of Bengal. It was eventually constituted as a Chief Commissioner's Province in 1874 and was declared as a scheduled district. In September 1905, it became a part of the Lieutenant Governor's Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In April 1912, it was separated and converted into a chief commissionership with a legislature. It then became a governor's province in 1921.[49]

As the British East India Company gradually established its hold over the plain's kingdoms of Assam and Manipur, it maintained a rather cautious approach towards the hill areas of the region. To some extent it continued the policy of non-interference in affairs of the hill populations followed by the Ahom rulers. The colonial government had no intention of extending direct administration over the hill areas. In 1873, the British passed the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations Act which provided for the demarcation of an 'inner line', mainly aimed to demarcate the limits of the territorial jurisdiction of the district officer. Section 2 of the Act allowed the government 'to prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification…a line to be called the Inner Line, and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein'.[50] The inner line usually extended along the foothills and it was partly motivated by the colonial need to protect

[49] S. K. Chaubey, *Hill politics in Northeast India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1999), 11.

[50] Chaubey, *Hill politics in Northeast India*, 15.

its commercial interests along the foothills from the frequent raids of hill tribesmen. The Naga Hills was brought under the 'Inner Line Regulation' in 1877. In March 1936 the Northeast Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) together with Naga, Lushai and North Cachar Hills were declared as Excluded Areas of Assam.[51] Since the nineteenth century, more specifically 1911, the British adopted a 'forward policy' of extending loose political and military control over the hills.[52] British superintending officers were appointed for these areas and punitive expeditions undertaken to control the tribes residing in the hills with the primary intention of protecting the foothills from the habitual raids of hill tribes.

The first encounter between the British and the Nagas was in 1832, during an expedition led by Francis Jenkins and Robert Pemberton, colonial officials who were trying to further tea cultivation in Assam. In fact, the discovery of the indigenous tea bush – *Camellia Sinensis* along the foothills of Assam proved a fateful event as far as the hill tribes of the province were concerned; it was the protection of tea plantation areas, located mostly along the foothills, from frequent tribal raids from the hills that necessitated British political and military intervention into the affairs of the hill tribes. The British conducted ten expeditions in the Naga Hills during 1839-1850. During this period, the British conducted no less than 10 military expeditions into the Naga areas to pacify and subjugate the Nagas.[53]

The beginning of formal British administrative presence in the Naga Hills happened in 1866 when the Sub Divisional headquarters in North Cachar was abolished, and the portion lying to the west

[51] Samir Kumar Das, *Governing India's Northeast: Essays on Insurgency, Development and the Culture of Peace* (New Delhi, Springer, 2013), 25.

[52] Das, *Governing India's Northeast,* 25.

[53] John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the Formation of Naga Political Identity*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), 13.

of the Dhansiri, and the region on both banks of the Doyang River were formed into a new district with its headquarters at Chumukedima. In 1867, a station was established by the British at Samaguting, mainly with the intention of preventing raids on the lowlands. It was followed by the opening of a school and a dispensary and the construction of a road connecting Samaguting to the plains.[54] In 1872, the Naga Hills was categorized as an 'agency' and the deputy commissioner was renamed as a 'political agent'. However, the first step towards formal annexation of the Naga Hills took place in 1874 under Captain James Johnstone, when he brought three villages under his control and collected revenue from them.[55] Johnstone pressed for 'the advisability of establishing a regular system of education, including religious instruction, under a competent clergyman of the Church of England' and 'pointed out that the Nagas had no religion.'[56] In February of that year, the charge of the Naga Hills was handed over to the newly appointed Chief Commissioner of Assam.

Meanwhile, in December 1875, a military expedition headed by Capt. John Butler was attacked at the Lotha village of Lakhuti and Capt. Butler was killed. Earlier that year, a survey party led by Lieutenant Holcombe was attacked at Ninu, resulting in the death of the lieutenant and eighty other men. In 1878, Wokha was occupied and placed under a sub-divisional officer. In 1878, the British headquarters were sought to be shifted to Kohima by the newly appointed Chief Commissioner, as the British wanted to move the headquarters to a more interior part. Mr. G. H. Damant was

[54] B.C. Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam Since 1858* (Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press, 1964), 87.

[55] Talichuba Walling, "The First Major Challenge against the British Colonialism by the Nagas: 1879-1880". 2, https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:26058/datastreams/CONTENT/content.

[56] Chakravorty, *British Relations*, 94.

appointed as the new Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills District.[57] A revolt was mounted by the Angamis against British occupation of the area at Khonoma in which G.H. Damant, along with close to 50 other men of his troop, were killed. The killing of Damant by the Angami Nagas in 1879 sparked off the battle of Khonoma.[58] A punitive expedition was undertaken under the command of Col. Johnstone, a political officer at Manipur with fortifications from other plains stations. All Naga villages who had participated in the attack were punished. The event unsettled the British but it also brought to them the urgency of strengthening their hold upon the Naga Hills, most parts of which were brought under the British control over the remaining colonial years. In 1881, Kohima became the administrative headquarters of the Naga Hills. Following the establishment of administrative and military stations at Kohima and Wokha, the British set about expanding their control over these areas. In the 1880s, British control was extended to the Ao and Sema villages. Resistances were put up by Naga tribesmen throughout this period, most of which were met by ruthless military retaliation and punitive expeditions.

British presence in the Naga Hills lasted for a little over hundred years. During this period, the colonial policy was largely one of minimal administrative control. Initially the British administration had followed a policy of non-interference in the hill areas and continued with the annual payment of *posa*, a subsidy paid by the former kings of Assam according to an ancient agreement with the hill tribes. But with the expansion of tea cultivation, it became necessary to define a boundary line till which British jurisdiction applied. The demarcation of a boundary also

[57] Chakravorty, *British Relations*, 3.

[58] Dolly Kikon. "Educating the Naga Headhunters*:* Colonial history and Cultural Hegemony in Post-colonial India." in *Cultural Genocide and Asian State Peripheries*, ed. Barry Sautman, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 139-163.

became necessary to regulate the movement of speculators in the growing trade interests in tea and rubber in the province. The boundary, referred to as the Inner Line was declared along the Himalayan foothills in the northern districts of Lakhimpur and Darrang in 1875 and 1876 respectively. Gradually, the Line was drawn all around the northern, eastern and south-eastern borders of the Brahmaputra Valley. In 1877, the Inner Line was demarcated along the Naga foothills. By 1942, all the hills except the Khasi, Garo and Mikir areas were brought under Inner Line regulations. According to Mackenzie, the Inner Line was meant to largely serve an administrative purpose and did not imply granting of sovereignty: 'Beyond this line the tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing a personal influence for good among the chiefs and the tribes'.[59] However, there remained much confusion regarding the administrative policies in the territory under the Inner Line regulation as colonial officers were found to extend political control and influence beyond the permitted measure in these areas. Meanwhile, the movement of non-official personnel continued to be restricted across this line. The British had also provided for an 'Outer Line', which did not denote an international border, but functioned as a limit beyond which no political presence was exercised at all.

The hill areas of the Assam province were initially categorized as 'Backward tracts' according to the Government of India Act 1919. Based on the recommendations of the Simon Commission, the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order was passed in 1936, according to which The Naga Hills District, along with the Lushai Hills, the North Cachar Subdivision of the Cachar District and the frontier tracts were declared as 'excluded areas'. The Garo Hills District, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the Mikir Hills were declared as

[59] Chaube, *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, 14-15.

'partially excluded areas'. These areas were directly administered by the Governor and the elected ministry had no juridical authority over them. They were excluded from the jurisdiction of the legal codes of British India, which indirectly granted autonomy and legitimacy to the indigenous punitive codes and institutions. The excluded areas did not have any representation in the provincial legislature and were administered by the Governor-in-Council as his reserved jurisdiction. The partially excluded areas were represented by one member in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Their administration was the partial responsibility of the ministry but the Governor was charged with a special responsibility for the maintenance of peace and good government.

In the face of the approaching withdrawal of colonial rule from India, the British had developed a secret plan to retain all the excluded and partially excluded areas of Assam along with the tribal areas of Burma in the form of a crown colony. Robert N. Reid, the then Governor of Assam who headed this plan, called 'Coupland Plan' after – Reginald Coupland, stated their belief that they are 'responsible for the future welfare of a set of very loyal, primitive peoples who are habituated to look to us for protection and who will get it from no other source'[60]. The British believed that the peoples of these areas are not ready to be a part of the modern administrative system being adopted by the Indian constitution and they will be sufferers in the hands of Indian politicians. The plan was summarily rejected by the hill people as well as the Indian National Congress. However, the protection of the excluded and partially excluded areas was taken up as an issue in the Constituent Assembly debates, leading to the creation of the North-East Frontier (Assam): Tribal and Excluded Area Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. Based on the recommendations of the sub-committee, which came to be called the Bordoloi

[60] Robert Reid, "The Excluded Areas of Assam", The Geographical Journal, 103, 1/2 (1944), 18-29.

Committee after its chairman Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Prime Minister of Assam, the sixth schedule was included in the Indian Constitution ensuring special provisions for protecting rights of the tribal populations of these areas. It provided for special constitutional safeguards to protect the traditional customs, cultural practices and institutions as well as the natural resources and land of the people within the scheduled areas, thereby continuing the policy of specialized administration of these areas followed during colonial times.

Consolidation of Missionary Work

The expansion of British administration coincided with the beginnings and spread of Christian missionary work in the Hills. The latter was to become a major catalyst of socio-cultural change in the Naga Hills. Christian missionaries had already established themselves in the plains of Assam even before the British had expanded their administration into the hills. To begin with, the colonial administrators were not in favour of missionary work in the province as that would unnecessarily disturb the existing social balance and may become a cause for destabilizing the hold of the Company over Indian affairs. However, the Charter Act of 1813, which allowed missionary activities, as elsewhere in India, opened the possibilities for the entry of Euro-American missionaries in the region.

The American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, who were already stationed in Burma, were the first to begin missionary work in the region. They entered the region at the invitation of Francis Jenkins, agent to the Governor General in Assam, who firmly believed that missionary work would have a civilizing and disciplining effect on the hill tribes who were increasingly becoming a threat to the new tea plantations.[61] As early as 1836, Nathan Brown, a linguist and O. T. Cutter, a printer,

[61] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 13.

who were previously stationed in Burma, set up the Sadiya Mission.[62] Subsequently, another mission was also established in Jeypore by Miles Bronson with the intention of working among the Singpho and Naga tribes in the region.[63] In 1839, following a violent insurrection by the local Khampti people, the Sadiya mission was shifted to Jeypore. Meanwhile, Bronson shifted to Nam Sang, in the Tirap district in the present state of Arunachal Pradesh, to work among the Nocte Nagas. The missionaries did not find much success among the hill tribes at this point. By 1841, the missionaries had also established centres at various locations in the plains with the hope to exert more influence on plains people. Nidhiram was the first Assamese convert baptized by Bronson in 1841.[64]

Bronson undertook the first survey among the Nocte Nagas in 1839 and went on to establish a mission centre among them in 1840. He established a school among them and began steps to translate the Bible into the local language. Through his close relations with the eldest son of the village chief, he was also able to exert much influence among the villagers. However, due to unfavourable climatic conditions and ill health of family members, and changes in missionary policy, Bronson was compelled to move back to the plains, to Nowgong. After which, for three decades, there was hardly any missionary work among the Nagas. In fact, there were very few missionaries left in the entire province by 1857.

[62] Frederick Downs, *The Mighty Works of God: A Brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India: The Mission Period 1836-1950*, (Christian Literature Centre, Gauhati, 1971), 17-18.

[63] C. Walu Walling, *All is Light! All is Light! Source Materials on History of Christianity*, (Impur, Nagaland: Literature Department, Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang), 2001.

[64] Downs, The Mighty Works, 26.

A man from Merangkong Village named Lonjanglepzuk was baptized by S. M. Whiting in the year 1851. However, he was later killed in a hostile attack during a visit to his native village.[65] In March 1869, Edward Winter Clark arrived in Sibsagar and was put in charge of the Mission and Press. He came into contact with some Ao Nagas who were in the habit of visiting Sibsagar, and encouraged an Assamese Christian covert, named Godhula Rufus Brown, to familiarize with their language. It is through Godhula Brown that Clark came into contact with an Ao man named Supongmeren, who was baptized in 1871. Subsequently, Godhula visited Supongmeren's village, Molungkimong, and during the course of next seven months, succeeded in converting nine men from the village while also establishing a village chapel.[66] In December 1872, Clark became the first European missionary to enter the Naga Hills when he visited the same Ao Naga village and together with Godhula converted fifteen more people in a matter of four days. By 1876, Clark took up permanent settlement in the Ao area. They then founded a separate village comprising of the new coverts, Molungyimsen, in the vicinity of Molungkimong (also referred to as New Molung in some accounts).[67] Building such villages purely on religious lines was to become more frequent in the following decades, as Christianity spread. They were to be 'exclusive spatial zones' that operated as per the rules and directives set by the missionaries and later, the church.[68]

Christian influence gradually began to spread in the Ao Naga areas and a mission centre was soon established at Impur in 1894. It became the headquarters of the Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang or

[65] Mary Mead Clark, "A Corner in India" (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 5.

[66] Rederick Wijunamai, "The early story of Christianity in Northeast India", (Himal Southasian, October 2020); H. Visor, *The Naga Baptist Family*, (Kohima: Council of Naga Baptist Churches), 9.

[67] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India From Beginnings to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 431.

[68] John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 4.

the Ao Baptist Church Association established in 1897 and continues to be so till this date. Evangelising efforts among other tribes was met with much more initial resistance. The Angamis, who had always been known for their fierce resistance to all foreign influence and structures, were comparatively harder to find favour with for the missionaries. It was only after the extension of British control over the Angami area after the Angami-British War of 1878, that mission work began among the Angami population. Mission work among the Nagas picked up pace from 1880s and 90s onwards. It was carried forward from centres established in three places – Impur, Kohima and Ukhrul – and spread among the Angami, Lotha, Sema and Tangkhul tribes to begin with. Subsequently, to all the other tribes, which are today part of the Naga conglomerate. Notably, it was primarily through the agency of local evangelists rather than American missionaries that Christianity eventually spread to the rest of the Naga tribes.

Evangelical work among the Sema or Sumi Nagas began in effect through the efforts of Ao and Angami converts rather than missionaries.[69] E. W. Clark had planned a separate mission for the Semas which was founded in 1890. However, the first Sema was baptized only in November 1906.[70] Among the Semas, there are the northern and the southern Semas. While the beginnings of Christianity among the former was largely under the influence of the southern Angami converts, among the latter, it was largely under the influence of the Ao converts. Subsequently, the early converts among Semas worked closely with the American Baptist missionaries such as Sidney

[69] S. Yevito Sema, "*A study of the development of the native leadership in the Sema Baptist Churches in the Post Missionary Era since 1955 upto date*" (Masters' Thesis, South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, 1995), 7-8.

[70] Najekhu Yeptho Sema, "A *study of the growth and expansion of the Baptist churches in Nagaland with special reference to the major tribes*." (Master's thesis, Bethel Theological Seminary, USA, 1972).

Reivenburg, H. B. Dickson, J. E. Tanquist, Ivan Bengt Anderson and Robert F. Delano in furthering the spread of the new religion.[71]

H.B. Dickson, the missionary in charge of the Sema area prepared the first reader in the Sema language in 1908. He was succeeded by Joseph Eric Tanquist in 1912. He translated the Gospel of Mark into the Sema language with the help of one of the early Sema converts. The first Baptist church was established at Ighanumi Village in 1912. The third Naga Baptist association to be formed was the Sema Baptist Kughakulu (Sema Baptist Convention). It was started in 1922 with its centre situated in Mokokchung.[72] Since the second decade of the twentieth century, evangelism among the Semas gathered momentum with gradual expansion in the number of converts and the establishment of numerous churches. A mass movement among the Sumis began in 1927. Tanquist reports that about 1000 Christians without much preparatory work on the part of the mission were added to the church and within two years' span of time, i.e. by 1929, Sumi Christian numbers increased to 3000.[73] Mostly under the aegis of local evangelists, converts and congregations multiplied until, in 1938, there were seventy-eight churches, twenty-four schools, and over 8,000 baptized believers.[74]

Robert De Lano, the last of the American Baptist missionaries left the Naga Hills in 1955. By then close to fifty percent of the Naga population, cutting across different tribes, had converted to Christianity. In the subsequent years, through the initiatives of the Naga Baptist Church Council and local evangelists, Christianity continued to spread, especially in the Eastern Naga areas,

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[71] Vilibo K. Yepthomi, "*A Historical Analysis on The Contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries towards the Sumi Naga Christianity*", (Master's Thesis, Serampore College,2014).

[72] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 442.

[73] Tanquist Report, 1936.

[74] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 442.

bringing the percentage of Christians among the Nagas close to 95 percent by the turn of the twenty-first century.[75]

Administrators, Missionaries and Local Culture

The attitude and approach that administrators and missionaries had towards the existing socio-cultural institutions and practices of the Nagas was crucial in respect to the changes that occurred in latter's everyday culture during the first half of twentieth century. It is important to note that the administrators and missionaries strongly disagreed with each other and seldom saw eye to eye when it came to their attitude and approach towards existing socio-cultural institutions and practices of the Nagas. The heated exchanges between the two is most evident in how each wrote about the local culture and society. Interestingly, while the two debated and fought over the local culture and the trajectory it ought to follow, the Nagas themselves were deemed by both to be incapable of defining and determining their own socio-cultural history. They were assumed to be passive agents who were not in a position to determine the course of their own history.

Since the second half of nineteenth century, there has been a vibrant ethnographic tradition among British administrators/officers working in the Naga Hills. Andrew West divides this tradition into an earlier military phase when British were yet to administer parts of the Naga Hills and the later administrative phase when British had extended their administration into the hills. While the objective of earlier phase was to identify the land and its inhabitants for military and strategic purposes, the objective of the latter phase was to procure detailed ethnographic information in order to ensure efficient administration and dispensing of justice. During the latter phase, there was greater urge to record in writing the cultural practices of the Nagas and collect artefacts that

[75] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 118-119.

represented their material culture. Most importantly, the thrust of the administrators cum ethnographers during this phase was to be able to 'rescue' and 'preserve' knowledge about the 'pristine' cultural life of the Nagas, which was perceived to be under threat of extinction. They were keen to record life *as it is* and how they thought life had been.

In their representation, Naga culture was static, pristine and unaffected by 'civilization' – of humans in their 'primitive' and 'natural' state. However, given the missionary urge to 'civilize' them and the influence of plains dwellers, their culture was under the threat of extinction. Hence, the necessity to protect and preserve them through the act of recording their way of life. This attitude complemented the political urge of the British administration, as seen in the earlier section, to separate, contain and bind the hills and its inhabitants from the influence of the plains. Moreover, to leave Nagas to themselves as much as possible. As West says, it was their firm belief that 'the hand of administration should be light and the military role to provide security, fitting with government's need for economy.'[76] While the practice of head-hunting was generally addressed as disruptive of law and order, an administrator-ethnographer like J. P. Mills felt it did not warrant the kind of public outcry that it tended to invite. He highlighted that there were far more children below the age of one dying in a city like Bombay, more than half, than the number of deaths caused by head-hunting.[77]

It was this urge of the British administrators to enforce primitivism on the Nagas that made them extremely critical of the missionaries and the new religion that they had brought to the hills. They felt that the missionaries with their aggressive attitude towards altering the existing socio-cultural

[76] Andrew C. West, "*Writing the Nagas: A British Officers' Ethnographic Tradition*", History and Anthropology, 8: 1-4, 68.

[77] West, *Writing the Nagas*, 69.

practices, beliefs and institutions, and their urge to 'civilize' them, were a threat to the existing way of life. J. P. Mills elaborated on this vividly in the appendix to his monograph, *The Ao Nagas,* wherein he critiqued the lifestyle that had been adopted by the new religious converts under the direction of the missionaries, especially the break and incompatibility it represented with the existing social, cultural and economic sensibilities and practices of the Nagas.[78] Mills also referred to the new notions and sensibilities hitherto unknown to Nagas had suddenly crept in and the decline of sociability that was becoming prevalent among the converted.[79]

While the British administrators were eager to contain, primitivize and freeze the local people in their course of development, the American Baptist missionaries wanted to erase existing cultural norms, practices and ways of being and replace them with what they understood to be 'Christian' and 'civilized'. The missionary establishment was dismissive if not hostile towards the existing cultural norms, practices and institutions. Becoming a Christian was considered antithetical to retaining any ties to the existing cultural norms, practices and institutions, hence to be discarded.

The effects of missionary intervention in culture was far more potent than that of the British administrators. This was primarily because the sphere of intervention was the everyday life of the local people, sustained over a long period of time. Missionaries lived among the people. They put in place various institutions and the practices, which in turn became sites of promoting, instructing, disciplining and nurturing local people into adopting new sensibilities, aesthetic and lifestyles. They encouraged them to break with that which was 'savage' and 'heathen' and adopt that which was 'civilized' and 'Christian'. Even in areas where the missionary was absent, this sort of

[78] J.P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 419.

[79] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 410-424.

intervention was carried forward under the leadership of local evangelists, pastors and teachers. As the subsequent chapters in this thesis will demonstrate, the effects of this intervention in the sartorial, bodily and dietary practices, and in how living spaces and settlements was to be organized was far reaching.

The American Baptist missionaries operated under a normalized set of principles that had been drawn from the history of their relations with Native Americans in the American frontier, where the latter was seen as a 'savage' lot who needed to be controlled, disciplined and disempowered. This was considered necessary for building the 'city on the hill' – an exclusive politico-religious construct - that they imagined and aspired for. Missionary work among the Native Americans, which had the backing of the state, contributed a great deal towards breaking up their families and communities, prohibiting them from following their existing beliefs and socio-cultural practices, replacing their cultures and languages with that of the European immigrants.[80]

The American Baptists, upon arriving in the Naga hills, proceeded with similar aims and methods, and in collusion with the colonial state, set upon a mission of refashioning the local people in the image of the 'white man'. They classified the pre-Christian Naga life as 'heathen' and made practical interventions towards substituting them with objects, practices and notions that were deemed 'civilized'. They were intolerant towards religious beliefs apart from their own and this intolerance, over a period of time, came to be instilled among the Naga converts too, generating aversion towards their own pre-Christian beliefs and practices. The new converts were restricted from observing traditional rituals and a meticulous routine of itinerant preaching tours was undertaken to prevent natives from slipping back into the old 'heathen' ways. They opposed

[80] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 15.

dancing, drum beating, village feasts and festivals, the ceremonies surrounding births, marriages, and deaths, traditional styles of clothing, polygamy, and initiation ceremonies, in short anything that was associated with their pre-Christian social and cultural life.[81]

Opening of schools, publication of literature in local languages including translations of the Bible and catechism, opening of dispensaries etc. were important activities undertaken by evangelists in Nagaland, which often received state sanction and aid. While they opened up new possibilities, the fact that their primary motive was to teach the new religion can't be denied. Miles Bronson, who is credited with introducing writing in the Naga Hills, was mainly aiming to "communicate to them some truths of the gospel".[82] Education in the hill areas of Assam was almost entirely handed over to the missionaries by the British administration. E.W. Clark has categorically mentioned the dissemination of the gospel being the chief objective of introducing school education among Naga children.[83] During his evangelical work among the Ao Nagas, Clark stated that school education was aimed at instilling knowledge of the Bible above all other things:

> "We feel that no education will ever be successful among these wild people that is not based on the most rigid morality and a strong living, spirituality. Hence, with all our efforts to raise the intellectual standard it is ever our chief aim to present Jesus Christ as the source of all true knowledge as well as the only fountain of moral and spiritual life."[84]

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[81] Hoineilhing Sitlhou, "*Straying beyond Conquest and Emancipation: Exploring the Fault lines of Missionary Education in North East India*", (*Indian Anthropologist* 39,1/2, 2009), 73.

[82] H.K. Barpujari, *The American Missionaries and North-east India, 1836-1900 A.D.: A Documentary Study*, (Spectrum Publishers, 1986), 237.

[83] E.W. Clark, "Naga Mission" (Molung. Baptist Missionary Magazine, 68(7): 371, July 1888), 259.

[84] E.W. Clark, "Minutes, Resolutions and Historical Reports of the fourth Triennial Conference", held at Gauhati, December 24, 1904, to January 1, 1905, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1905), 61.

Following the introduction of school education, the missionaries and evangelists prohibited the local children from attending the *morung*, which was dismissed as a relic from the 'heathen' past. The *morung*, known by various names among various Naga groups, was a boys' dormitory which was an important institution for educating and instructing the younger members of the village in every custom and code of communal existence specific to the group, besides serving as a conduit for passing down oral traditions through generations. The *morung* was the centre of the village life, acting as a hub around which most social events and activities of the village would be organized. With the introduction of mission schools and the discouragement of young children from attending the *morung*, this institution which had otherwise been central to propagating tribal customs down generations, gradually became irrelevant, putting an end to the continuity of various vital aspects of the local traditions. The significance and the effects that the decline of the *morung* in the local life is discussed further in the thesis.

In a similar vein, through the process of promoting modern medicine among the people, the missionaries consistently depreciated the value of traditional medicine men and healing practices, which had hitherto been an integral part of local cultural and bodily existence. Interventions in the field of health were accompanied by adjustments in the living spaces and everyday habits of the local people. Western ideas of hygiene and modesty were imposed over the new converts and alterations were introduced in their living spaces and clothing habits. Consumption of traditionally brewed alcoholic drinks, which often served as an important mode of socialization was discouraged. Reforms were also initiated in the interpersonal relationships between the sexes. The

self-congratulatory note in the following observation made by S.A. Perrine reveals the goals of the evangelists in transforming almost each aspect of the everyday lives of the Nagas:

> Some of the Christians keep their person and homes and food comparatively clean, perhaps I should simply say, cleaner than the heathen. They do not eat rotten flesh, and the money they once spent for drink, opium and false worship is making them prosperous. They have adopted a mode of burial and a more decent dress than the heathen. They are becoming more conscientious in the relation of the sexes.[85]

The missionaries, in their writings, mostly used the word 'heathen' to refer to the hill-people of North Eastern region, whereas, the word 'savage' or 'barbarian' is commonly found to have been used by the colonial administrators.[86] It is these changes at the material and intangible levels, as much as the anxieties produced by them, that have reshaped the world of the Nagas and led to the development of a modern Naga identity. While the arrival of Christianity effected unsettling changes to the social fabric of Naga lives, it has also acted as an important agent of unification among the scattered Naga groups, who have found a common banner under which to forge a modern Naga identity. Through this irreversible historical turn of events, Christianity has become a central element of the modern Naga identity and consciousness. It is this history, operating at the mundane and public levels, which is discussed over the course of the ensuing chapters

[85] Minutes of the Conference of the Assam Missionaries of the American Baptist Missionary Union. February 11th to 19th 1899.

[86] Sitlhou, *Straying beyond Conquest*, 69.

The World Wars

The First World War had an indirect and unforeseen effect upon the direction of history in the Naga Hills. In 1917, the British issued an order seeking recruits for labor corps from the Naga Hills and Manipur for the war. This was an unprecedented invitation for the people of the hills, most of whom had never ventured much beyond the vicinity of their own villages. About 4000 men, including Nagas and Kukis, were recruited and sent to France.[87] Among the Nagas, there were 1000 Semas, 400 Lhotas, 200 Rengmas, 200 Aos, 200 Changs and other trans-frontier tribes, and about 1200 Tangkhuls.[88] The experience of the war and their travels brought the Nagas a fresh consciousness of their own location and identity, geographically and temporally. Initially there was much hesitation among the tribesmen to travel beyond the familiar limits of their world. It was the influence of chiefs and missionaries besides economic necessities that convinced most men to agree to enlist.[89] It was mostly the Christian converts and men who had received education in mission schools who volunteered for the corps. The experience of facing a trying journey and a brutal war together also helped to forge a sense of oneness among the Naga men belonging to different tribes and clans. It was shortly after the experience of the war that the Naga Club was formed in 1918. It comprised local mission educated men, mostly interpreters, clerks, schoolmasters and other government employees as well as those who had participated in the war as part of the labour corps. The expansion of colonial rule, Christian conversions, weakening of traditional village authorities and exposure to modern education had brought about strange upheavals as well as new possibilities in the lives of the Naga people. It was at this crucial juncture

[87] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 75-76.

[88] Radhika Singha, *The Coolie's Great War*: *Indian Labour in a Global Conflict, 1914-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[89] Singha, *The Coolie's Great War*, 168.

that the war brought in an added dimension to their gradual process of self-discovery and realization of the urgent need to take charge of their political destiny. The military recruitment for the war must be understood in the context of this 'emergence into public life of a small, newly literate tribal element, Christian and non-Christian, which began to press for education, employment, and a political space in the face of the colonial preference for 'indirect rule' through chiefs and headmen'.[90]

The formation of the Naga Club heralded the beginning of nationalist consciousness and political aspirations among the Naga people. In January 1929, when the Simon Commission visited Kohima, members of the Naga Club along with teachers, government functionaries, elders from various tribes submitted a memorandum to the commission pleading that 'our Hills be withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme and placed outside the Reforms but directly under British Government'.[91] The memorandum was signed by representatives of various Naga tribes. In consideration of the plea made by the Naga Club, the Commission recommended the exclusion of the Naga Hills from the proposed constitutional reforms in India. Consequently, the Naga Hills District, the North-East Frontier Tract, the Lushai Hills and the North Cachar Hills were demarcated as 'excluded areas' in 1937.[92] The formation of the Naga Club was a significant event not just in fostering a sense of solidarity among the Nagas, but also in leading them to pursue a common political destiny, which would prove crucial for the future historical trajectory of the Naga nation.

[90] Singha, *The Collie's Great War,* 163.

[91] Singha, *The Coolie's Great War,* 77.

[92] Singha, *The Coolie's Great War*, 78-79.

In contrast to the first world war, the second world war had a more direct impact on the Nagas as there were crucial battles that were fought in the Naga Hills and in Manipur. As part of the Burma Campaign, the allied forces fought with the combined might of Japan and the INA.[93] The British forces recruited the local people as guides, porters, spies, stretcher-bearers and even for digging trenches. Some of them were recruited as soldiers and informants too. For instance, at Phiphema, Nagas like Nikhalhu, Zhuikhu and Dr. Nandiji acted as British informers. Reports of the Japanese were given to the British by not only the Nagas who worked for the government, but by even ordinary people who were tasked with the responsibility of informing anything that was deemed unusual. They even misled the Japanese by giving them wrong information, much to the advantage of the British. Hence, the British, in this way, used the valuable information provided by the Nagas to the fullest.[94]

During the war, the Nagas suffered severely from both the forces. In order to ward off the Japanese troops stationed at different Naga Villages, the British troops shelled Naga villages which led to many granaries being burnt and villagers being displaced. The Japanese troops stationed in different villages also burned down villages and their granaries. They often did not even spare even the household goods. Cooking pots once used were smashed; daos, axes and hoes were collected from the Nagas and thrown away in the jungle or into the rivers. The Japanese used Naga blankets and clothes and they destroyed them after use. Even the salt pan which was used to make local salt was also destroyed by them.[95]

[93] Khrienuo, "Naga Role in World War II", *Journal of North East India Studies*, Vol. 3(2), (Jul.-Dec. 2013), 57-59.

[94] Khrienuo, "Naga Role", 60.

[95] Khrienuo, "Naga Role", 63.

Although the Nagas suffered from both the warring troops, they tended to largely favour the British troops given their own familiarity with them. Moreover, unlike the Japanese, the British also tried to compensate for the destruction that was caused and relief was provided.[96] Asoso Yonuo remarks that, 'Nagas put extraordinary labour, showed spontaneous loyalty to the British and helped them in different forms in the hope that the British would not fail to do something for the good of their future.'[97]

Although the war had devastating impact on the lives of the Nagas, the construction of new roads and communication networks, railways and air links as part of the war efforts furthered the connectivity between local people and the outside world. The war itself had brought the outside world into Assam and the Naga Hills. Besides the Japanese, armed troops, personnel and technology from other parts of the world, such as USA, East and West Africa, Nepal, Australia, New Zealand, China and other parts of India descended upon the hills, initiating encounters experienced for the first time. Moreover, the post-war relief and reconstruction work became an occasion not only for the British to exhibit their paternalist and benevolent attitude towards the local people, and thereby reinforce colonial relations, but also introduced vast changes in the existing commodity culture. From food products to household goods to clothes, the local people increasingly looked to the outside world for supplies.[98]

[96] Khrienuo, "Naga Role", 65.

[97] Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study* (Delhi: Manas Publications, 1992), 147.

[98] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 100-101.

Becoming Modern

It is within a context of the administrative push to politically contain the hills and enforce primitivism, the missionary pressure to discard the existing self and 'civilize', and the increasing exposure as well as vulnerability that the two world wars forced upon them that the Nagas strove to access modernity and take charge of their history. Readily accessible resources and opportunities were tapped on to respond to the challenges they faced and become 'modern'. There were two important processes that had their beginnings in the first half of twentieth century and continued to unfold in a more pronounced way during the subsequent decades – the mass conversion movement to Christianity and the national movement for self-determination. Both these processes, which occurred parallelly and had a bearing on each other, were crucial in terms of how Nagas asserted their agency and constructed their modern identity. They became occasions for Nagas to begin a process of consciously and decisively transforming their everyday culture. Hence, it is important to delve into both these processes, especially as they unfolded in the 1940s and 50s.

An important political outcome of the war was that it generated a clearer understanding of how susceptible the region and its people were to the circumstances that were forced upon them by global actors and forces. They felt increasingly vulnerable for their existence and identity, and felt the need to consolidate themselves into a national community. The advanced line of communications, greater movement of people and commodities, emergence of an educated middle class and growing awareness of national liberation movements in various parts of Asia and Africa

also contributed towards cementing this need among the Nagas for organizing themselves into a nation.[99]

In more practical terms, the formation of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council did not fail to contribute towards this political direction. The council was one of the results of the second world war and was formed in 1945. One of the impetus for its formation was the support extended to it by the district commissioner of Naga Hills at the time, Charles Pawsey, who felt that administration and postwar reconstruction could be made more effective if there was a representative council that comprised educated Nagas cutting across different tribes.[100] However, once formed, the council took on a character that went beyond mere administration of British controlled territories and reconstruction. It became a political forum to deliberate on the political future of the Nagas. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council eventually resulted in the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in February 1946.

The primary objective of the NNC was to decide on the political status of the Nagas following the departure of the British from the sub-continent. Initially, NNC constituted of 29 members from the Naga Hills district, and subsequently, in the 1940s and 1950s, members from the Tuensang sub-division of the North East Frontier Agency in the north and from the northern and eastern hill tracts of Manipur in the south.[101] The NNC functioned like tribal councils generally did, wherein various issues of social and political importance were taken up and debated until a consensus was reached. Each family within a tribe made contributions towards the finances of the council. In order to voice out its opinion, a journal called *The Naga Nation* was published. It was widely distributed among

[99] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 101.

[100] Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, (P. Dutta, Shillong,1961), 51.

[101] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 102.

the local audience. It included the deliberations of the council, writings and speeches of the council members and official council memorandums. The council deliberated on the urgent need to unify the Nagas into a nation, and negotiate for their autonomous political status when the British left. In this respect, towards nurturing a feeling of oneness, a national flag and a national anthem was also conceived.

The formation of the NNC can be attributed to the emergent Naga middle class who had received modern education from bigger towns and cities, employed in new professions, and had shared the common aspiration for integration and political autonomy of the Nagas. Right from the beginning, there emerged a difference of opinion in the NNC, especially in terms of what the autonomous political status Nagas ought to be. While one section argued for complete autonomy, another section argued for an autonomous status within the ambit of the Indian Union. The latter section was of the opinion that Nagas, in terms of economic development, were still not in a position to be completely independent, and there was still much room for negotiation with the emergent Indian nation-state.[102] They repeatedly tried to articulate their fears, anxieties and desires to the constituent assembly, and the various Indian statesmen who were at the helm of affairs in Delhi. But, they were consistently disregarded and snubbed, and were often treated with a paternalist attitude. The failure to address the Naga representatives as equals and the repeated humiliation meted out to the latter, further radicalized the NNC, and by the late 1940s, the popular tide was shifting increasingly towards demanding complete independence – a position that was being clearly articulated by AZ Phizo, who had emerged as a popular leader.

[102] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 102-104.

By the early 1950s, the NNC was becoming increasingly assertive and so were the people across the Naga Hills and beyond. The gradual use of police and thereafter, armed forces, to suppress the movement and arrest its leaders, forced the NNC leadership to go underground, and eventually take to armed resistance. By the second half of 1950s, the growing confrontation between NNC and the Indian government had intensified, and had transformed into a full-fledged armed conflict.

Alongside this nationalist assertion, mass conversions to Christianity also gathered momentum during the 1940s and 50s. The American Baptist missionaries had produced the template for doing mission work and provided the initial push for it. However, the increasing rate of conversions that occurred among the Nagas, especially from the 1940s onwards, can't be fully attributed to their acumen, skills and agency alone. Existing scholarship on religious conversion among different Naga tribes during the course of twentieth century indicate that the activities and presence of the American Baptists were, in fact, negligible in places and moments where large-scale conversions occurred.[103] Besides, from the 1940s onwards, American Baptist missionaries were in the Naga Hills only for short durations and were not in a position to do any sustained work.[104]

Some of the recent studies, including those by local scholars, emphasize the greater role of local converts, teachers and evangelists, who travelled to the interior villages inhabited by their tribes and used local idioms, in making the new religion meaningful for the local people. Converted students and evangelists often organized themselves into gospel teams that would travel from village to village, preaching, praying, singing and conversing with individuals and families. The

[103] P. Thomas Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland*, (Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1976), 134-161; Richard Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among Nagas, 1876-1971", (Indian Economic and Social History Review, 21 (1): 1-44, 1984), 18-19; Keviyiekielie Linyu, *Christian Movements in Nagaland*, (Kohima, Author, 2004).

[104] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 119-120.

easier access that they had to villages and their familiarity with local languages and customs certainly made it easier for them to speak about the new religion with the local people.

Another reason cited for the rising rate of conversion from the 1940s onwards is the persistent social and political uncertainties that the local people experienced. The rate of conversions increased dramatically within a span of two decades, i.e. from 1941 to 1962, the rising rate of Christianity in the Naga Hills rose from 17.9 per cent to 52.9 percent.[105] One of the key reasons for the exponential rise of conversion could be attributed to the revival movement that began during that time. Revivalism paved way for those who were already converts to re-affirm their faith in the new religion they had become a part of. Itinerant preaching along with the idea of the second baptism with continuous self-purification to attain salvation during the judgement day of Christ became the soul of revival.[106] Triggered by the revival, conversion took a rapid pace under the initiatives of the local evangelists and church workers.[107]

To a large extent, the conversions that occurred during this period, under the initiative of local evangelists and church workers, could be attributed to the fact that the Nagas were eager to carve out a modern identity for themselves, one that was distinct from other nationalities around them, especially those they feared would culturally and politically subsume them. Towards this end, they used the material and cultural resources that the emergent public sphere, constituted by the missionaries, had made available to them. As John Thomas says, they 'drew extensively on the

[105] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 117.

[106] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation,* 119.

[107] Linyu, *Christian Movements*, 134-135.

public sphere generated by the missionaries since it represented the sole space where modernity, essential for the construction of a national identity, could be easily accessed'.[108]

The British and subsequently, the Indian administrators were antagonistic towards this. They had their own understanding of how a Naga self ought to be articulated, which often overlapped. As mentioned earlier, the British were averse to Nagas adopting 'western' styles, practices and beliefs and would rather remain a 'noble savage' frozen in time. This attitude often translated into policies, wherein rules and regulations were brought in to restrain, especially students and young people, from adopting 'western' clothing, haircuts, music, etc. Subsequently, the Indian administrators too objected to the 'Christian culture' that Nagas were adopting as it was opposed to the Indian 'national culture'. In fact, they went a step further and put restrictions of missionary work among Nagas. No longer could any foreign missionary work in the Naga Hills. In addition, during the course of armed conflict, the Indian armed forces often took to torture and killing of local pastors, deacons and lay leaders; desecration and burning down of churches and other Christian institutions. This sort of physical and symbolic attack on Christianity further bolstered the determination among the local people to resist that which was imposed on them. They were increasingly seen as acts of aggression on their freedom to access what is modern, and therein define their identity.[109] The agency asserted by the Nagas to defy British and Indian administrative imposition often depended on the religious and cultural resources that Baptist missionaries had put in place.

[108] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 120-121.

[109] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 121-124.

Chapter 2

Body, Clothing and the Modern Self

Human body and sartorial practices have been important domains of everyday cultural transition. How the body is made sense of, worked on and presented; the kind of garb that is put on, and the way it is put on are important cultural markers that have undergone transformation over a period of time. It has also demonstrated how a collective came to be classified or categorized and constituted by the observer as well as the observed. Presentation of the body and clothing, in this sense, was as much a conveyer of meanings as a means of self-fashioning. Bodily representation and clothing has hardly been the subject of much academic inquiry as it had been, for long, considered too mundane or every day to be taken as important in study of societies. However, the problem of what to wear/what not to wear, and how to make an appearance/how not to make an appearance, can reveal a lot about society, history, politics, culture, and above all, how people seek to manage and express their own identity.[110]

With regard to the Nagas, the question of bodily practices, clothing or the lack of it has played a crucial role in shaping their identity at many levels. Even the etymology of the term 'Naga', however tenuous and derogatory, has often been traced back to words, used by others in the region, that have sartorial meanings: from the Sanskrit word – *nanga* - signifying a state of nakedness to the Burmese word – *naka* – meaning people with pierced ear lobes.

[110] Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters- Dress and Identity in India* (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 1996), 1.

The ‘nakedness’ of the Nagas was a focal identity marker in the colonial perception. This often manifested itself either in the fascination that colonial ethnographers had for the essentialized image of the ‘naked’ Naga, worthy of being recorded and displayed in the ethnographic and pictorial works of the time; or in the derision that missionaries felt towards the morally ‘degenerate’ body and soul of the Nagas, which needed to be clothed and ‘redeemed’. It is in the midst of these competing claims made on the body, clothing and appearance that the Nagas fashioned themselves into modern subjects. This chapter undertakes an analysis of the bodily and sartorial practices, and their material significance in the pre-modern past; and the transitions they underwent during the first half of twentieth century.

I

Prior to the twentieth century, the Nagas identified and expressed themselves through their body art, clothes, and sense of style, generally unperturbed by the power and aspersions of those outside their fold, though held together by norms and prescriptions internal to their communities. Beyond just a matter of covering one’s own body, clothing was a marker of various social and cultural meanings. For instance, tattoos and ornaments, which formed an intrinsic part of how individuals and collectives presented themselves, were closely associated with rituals and social practices. The tattoos inscribed and the clothing put on the body were sites to represent, contest and establish one's idea of self in reference to the other and have assumed different meanings and interpretations across different spaces and times. For the Nagas, it was possible to identify a person’s social and

economic standing or an act of bravery one was involved in through the various articles of clothing.[111]

Traditionally, the Nagas practiced the art of weaving and spinning clothes for themselves. The Naga loom, also known as Indonesian tension loom, was a simple backstrap loom, with continuous horizontal warp consisting of six sticks serving the function of warp beam, lease rod, held stick, beating sword and extra warp beam. Cotton was the fabric that was commonly used for weaving clothes. Besides, cotton, nettle fiber and the fiber of wild jute grown by some tribes were also used for making cloth.[112] The common colours used across tribes included, among others, red, black, dark blue, indigo, white and yellow. Among the Sumis, blue, black and scarlet were commonly used.[113] The traditional method of dying was boiling the cloth or animal hair (used in ornaments) with the raw dyestuff and the process was repeated with mixing different raw dyes to produce different colour choices. Only a few colours were used, which, when combined, formed different patterns in their clothing. Nagas obtained these dyes from the wild plants and trees in the forests. Blue dye was obtained from the leaves of the *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*. This was a universal Naga dye and the plant was grown on the outskirts of the villages or in patches cleared in the heavy jungle. There was a slight difference in the method of preparation and use of the blue dye across different tribes. One of the most common methods of preparation of blue dye was to boil the leaves in the water in a big pot. Then the cloth or thread to be dyed was dipped in it and boiled for nearly an hour. It was then taken out and dried in the sun. If the colour did not get absorbed properly, the same process was repeated twice or even three times.[114] The scarlet effect was produced by first

[111] Alemchiba Ao, *The Arts and Crafts of Nagaland* (Kohima: Naga Institute of Culture, 1968), 125.

[112] Milada Ganguly, *Naga Art* (International Science Publisher: University of California,1993), 46.

[113] J.H. Hutton, *The Sema Nagas* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1921), 51.

[114] Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

dying the material with the yellow dye, extracted from a plant called *Lukuthoiye*[115] in Sumi and then re-dyeing it with the madder dye, producing a brilliant scarlet or crimson.

It was the men who collected the raw materials required for spinning, weaving and dying, from the nearby forests and brought them to the village. But, the responsibility thereafter shifted to women. All of the work related to dyeing, weaving and spinning were done by women. It was the women who manufactured clothes for their families. This division of labour was reinforced through the circulation of various myths related to spinning and weaving. For instance, it was said that if a man lights his pipe at the fire where a woman is dyeing thread, he will become a weakling and turn darker in complexion.[116] Another myth referred to how a man lost his strength just like the boiled dyestuff and acquired darker complexion just like the material dyed. These myths instilled fear of compromising prevailing notions of masculinity. The threat was one of emasculation if existing gender roles were crossed.

Certain roles were also assumed as taboo for a woman to perform or act as it had many bindings or restrictions within the community mores. For instance, a woman should not touch the weapons used by her husband to hunt as it may pollute the weapon and may not make the husband a good hunter thereafter. It was *genna*[117] for women to weave while their husbands were away at war, hunt or trade, as it was feared that their husband could get their leg caught in the creepers and meet with an accident. It was also forbidden for men to touch the materials used for weaving and spinning as he could become weak and fragile during war and hunting.

[115] An antidesma, a tropical plant in the family phyllanthaceae.

[116] Hutton, *Sema,* 51.

[117] *Genna* is the collective or individual abstention from all work on a particular day or period.

Furthermore, if a woman did not know the art of weaving clothes, it was unlikely for her to find a suitable groom.[118] It acted as a determining force to categorize women and accordingly place them within a social hierarchy when it came to searching for their potential groom. It became a matter of increasing social shame if a woman could not find a suitable suitor once she passed the prime of her age. Therefore, a woman who knew the art of cloth-making was considered a pride and honor to the family, someone who was well admired and looked upon favourably by the community. She also attained a privileged position in finding that perfect husband who could either be a great warrior or a rich man who has performed the feasts of merit and enjoyed social leverage. Therefore, knowing the art of weaving and spinning was considered an indispensable skill that Naga women had to cultivate.

Apart from certain special costumes, there were clothes which were worn uniformly across all sections of the community as daily wear. Generally, clothes worn by Nagas during their everyday chores were minimal. There could be several reasons why they wore minimal clothes. For instance, the Semas had a belief that wearing too many clothes would reduce fertility and therein affect the size of potentially large families.[119] It was mostly during the festive occasions and important instances such as village or community meetings that they would clothe themselves with certain elaborateness, according to their status in the society.

[118] J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1926), 90.

[119] Hutton, *Sema*, 18.

Along with shawls, apron or kilt, there was an array of ornaments that were worn by both men and women. For instance, for the Sumis, there was the *Avabo*, a circlet that was worn by great warriors. It was made from the hair of the bear with hornbill feathers attached to it. *Amlakha*, a beautiful baldric made of scarlet wool or scarlet goats' hair was worn by women to cover their breasts, and by men while performing rituals and dances.

Men wore wads of cotton in their ears. Necklaces, with some minor differences, were worn by both men and women. Interestingly, the ornaments, once made, were first tried on the dogs. This was to test the possible presence of evil spirits in the ornaments. A person who had taken the head or killed a leopard wore a collar of wild boar's tushes while necklaces made of conch shells were universally worn by Sumi men. Elephant tusks were worn on the arms, cowrie gauntlets on the wrist.

An essential accessory that every man had was a *dao* or traditional machete, and sometimes a spear. It not only served their purpose during warfare or raids but were used for their agricultural activities and clearing of forests. A spear also served as a walking stick. Among the Sumis, a belt embellished with cowry shells with fringes of crimson goats' hair was worn to support the wooden sling, in which the dao would be carried. On the left part of the belt several cords hung down knotted at the end and ringed with brass just above the knot so that the ends jingle as the wearer moves. A piece of cloth known as *Lapuchoh* was worn to cover the private parts. They were not known to wear leg ornaments in ordinary circumstances.[120] Sumi men often adorned their ears with cotton or aromatic flowers as part of their attire.

[120] Hutton, *Sema*, 11.

Wearing of *Akutsukukha* (headgear) and *tsukkoli* (earrings) was common among Sumi women. They were made using goat's hair and a wild orchid plant called *ayiko*. Prior to the spread of Christianity, only the wives and daughters of chiefs and warriors could wear them. However, subsequently, they came to be worn by Sumi Naga woman in general. *Akussa eno Assapu* (iron armlet and bangles) were used as protective attire against enemy attacks on them. Women wore a petticoat which would reach their knees ornamented with layers of beads. Women from wealthy or prominent households tended to adorn various kinds of necklaces such as *achiku, achipu, achi xathi*, *achikha* and *achigho*.

History of clothing among the Nagas can't be confined merely to clothes and ornaments that were physically put on, but also to images and designs that were tattooed on their bodies. Tattooing was practiced by certain Naga tribes. Most notably, it was practiced among Ao, Sangtam, Konyak, Pochury and several other Eastern Naga tribes. It was not common among Angami, Chakesang, Lotha and Sumi tribes. It was by the tattoo that different clans or tribes were identified. Tattoos were carved mostly on the face, chest, arms and legs. Both men and women, including young boys and girls, had different patterns of tattoos on them. It was women who carved the tattoos. Men seldom performed this art. In general, tattoos comprised of varied patterns made of geometric shapes and lines. Each tattoo signified a distinct meaning for its wearer. It was believed that tattoos would be the identification marker for them in the afterlife and therefore it was important to earn tattoos through their involvement in warfare, hunting and varied skills as well as their contributions towards community life.

Within the existing belief structure, every activity that was performed or practiced was believed to be under the watchful eye of the spirits. The fear of spirits was so ubiquitous among the Nagas that they would perform *genna* before any significant event such as sowing, reaping or before any

festive celebration within the community. They would also propitiate the spirits by offering them prayers and food to appease them against adversity and misfortune, particularly, crop failure, sickness or fire accidents, etc. Similarly, before one was allowed to put on certain insignia or clothing to honour their achievements, the recipient needed to observe certain *genna* rituals to overcome any evil. During this period, they had to abstain from certain kinds of food and could not have sexual intercourse. They were to maintain purity in order to be considered deserving of those clothes and ornaments. Among the Sumi tribe, there was a feast known as *apisa*, meaning cloth feast. This was a feast organized by a wealthy person to gain higher social status within the society, often referred to in generic terms as 'feast of merit'. During the feast, a mithun was killed and rice beer was provided to the whole village for six consecutive days. The villagers generally put on their best clothes and took part in the dances. Only a man who had given *apisa* was entitled to wear a shawl called *akhome*. Similar rituals had to be practised to be entitled to certain kind of outfit which signified their role and status in their community life.

From procuring of raw material to production and adornment of the finished cloth, every step had a meaning and ritual practice attached to it. Clothing the Naga bodies came with socio-cultural and religious sanctions. A warrior or a rich man must perform *genna* before putting on clothes or ornaments that were entitled to him. Certain clothes that had been specially designed for men of valour at war or in games, or who has performed several feasts of merit were conferred upon by the village chief. It was considered a matter of privilege or great reward to wear certain kinds of clothes, and the concept of clothing as such was never arbitrary. Individuals in the village were revered and graded according to the clothing they put on. A great warrior during raids would put on his full costume and attire as this would warn his enemy about his success and valour during war. On seeing warriors in full attire, the enemies were expected to either surrender or take

precautionary measures while fighting them. Clothing, thus, had deeper meanings, conveyed clear messages, and represented identity and status within a community.

An individual was identified by the clothing he or she put on. It conveyed the wearer's clan, age or stage in the life cycle, marital status, wealth and social position, proficiency in warfare, individual character or even sexual prowess. For instance, among the Aos, the general character of a man, whether he was strong like an elephant, had the foresight of a cock, or the stealth of a tiger was encoded in the clothes he wore.[121] Consequently, one could not wear the clothing of their choice. A married man had a different set of clothing from an unmarried man and so was the case among women. It was by the costume that a person came to be identified as a chief, a warrior, rich or poor, bachelor or married, etc.

All these clothing and ornaments came with socially sanctioned obligations. For instance, an ordinary man could not wear an elephant tusk in his arms as it was designed specifically to identify a rich person. Similarly, only warriors of renown who have performed all social *genna* could wear a blue cloth of mixed thread called *chini-pi*[122] or *genna* cloth. While the Aos wore clothes measuring about four feet six inches long by three feet six inches deep, it was assumed that wearing such clothes proclaimed a man's wealth or prowess in war.

The clothes and ornaments worn were that which was prescribed and earned within a community than chosen and owned at an individual level. They were badges of honour within a system where men and women played their social roles to earn what was suitable for them in their community life. Only a man who had taken a head, or was a great warrior or who performed the feast of merit

[121] Marion Wettstein, "The Ethnic Fashion Scene in Nagaland," Archiv (Weltmuseum Wien) Vol. 61-62: 31-50, 34.

[122] Hutton, *Sema*, 14.

or was a chief could wear particular insignias. Such insignias were recognized by their village as well as the neighboring villages. In most cases, even their wives and members of their families were entitled to distinct items of dress.[123] These insignias were of great value and importance to the Nagas because of the valor and achievements necessary to own and wear them. Thus, the clothes and ornaments they put on came with a sense of honour and merit attached.

From spinning and weaving to putting on the finished shawls, kilts or *mekhela*,[124] men and women alike had certain socio-cultural and religious functions to fulfil. The Nagas set a great value on their costume worn in ceremonies or on festive occasions, although some pieces were for everyday use as well. It was during important occasions that a person put on clothes or ornaments that they had earned for their skills at war, the heads they took or the feasts of merit they gave to their people. Ornaments and textiles recorded a man's position and that of his wife and daughter. All these insignias were highly desirable because of the achievements necessary to gain the right to wear them[125].

II

In the pre-modern times, Naga villages were independent of each other. The village organization governed their everyday life and activities. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, from the second half of the nineteenth century, with the coming of British administrators and American missionaries, the socio-cultural fabric of the region gradually began to change.[126] It is

[123] Milada, *Naga Art*, 42.

[124] *Mekhala* - A sarong like piece of garment used by women to cover the lower half of their bodies.

[125] Milada, *Naga Art*, 42.

[126] Piketo Sema, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland*, 1881-1947 (Scholar Publishing House, New Delhi, 2nd ed, 1992) 57.

pertinent to note that the control desired by them was not just political and economic, but also cultural.

As the British administrators and the American Baptist missionaries made their way into the Naga inhabited areas, the Naga body and everyday sartorial practices became a source of much anxiety for both the missionary and the administrators alike. They became sites of contestation, where new meanings came to be imputed and power came to be exercised. What ought to be and ought not to be done to their corporeal self; what ought to be worn and how it ought to be worn increasingly came under much scrutiny and control. In essence, they became the object of either their reformist or their orientalising impulses. In the light of these pressures and as well as the changing historical circumstances, there came about important shifts in the bodily sensibilities and sartorial practices of the Nagas. The meanings and sensibilities that they attributed to their body and the sartorial practices underwent crucial changes, paving the way to how Nagas constructed their 'modern' self.

It was the missionaries who first laid claim to the spiritually and morally 'degraded' Naga body and desired to civilise it. Considering the relative nakedness of the local people as an indication of the proclivity to be 'sinful', the missionaries were eager to reform, civilize and clothe the Nagas. From the standpoint of the missionaries, even a completely dressed chief, a warrior or a man who has given a lavish feast of merit, failed to pass the muster of decent dressing. Mary Mead Clark, wife of Edward Clark, missionary to the Ao Nagas, found the local attire of the people to be nothing but 'exhibitions of taste so degrading and repulsive'.[127] Hence, it was considered their obligation to get 'people, and especially the converts, to wear any dress in sufficient quantity to confirm to

[127] Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 54.

the most simple ideas of decency'.[128] In the first Association Meeting of the Ao Baptists, held at Molung, in 1897, the participants were encouraged to wear 'some costume, a little more clothing'.[129]

It may be noted that the missionary urge to clothe the local people was not isolated from other minute interventions they desired to make in their everyday. Mary Mead Clark, indicates that beyond religious and social topics, the first Association meeting of the Ao Christians held in 1897, had time set apart not only to discuss the issue of clothing but also 'changes in food, houses, sanitation'.[130] It was an overall revamping of the everyday life that was expected. Beyond large gatherings such as association meetings, these kinds of questions were touched upon as a whole also during itinerant preaching tours, house visits, school instruction, and other occasions of everyday contact with the local people.

The missionary urgency to clothe the scantily dressed Naga bodies was closely associated with their notion of decency, which marked those who were spiritually 'saved' from those who were 'unsaved'. As John Thomas illustrates, among the Baptists as well as the Methodists in the United States, the 'decency' of clothes one wore and how they were worn became crucial markers of how the 'saved' was distinguished from the 'unsaved'. On the one hand, notions of decency required them to abhor elaborate hairstyles, adornment of too much jewellery and wearing of extravagant dresses and fittings; and to adopt plain dresses and simple styles. On the other, related to the necessity to reify among women, ideals of 'modesty'. The fact that the notion of decency was being largely addressed in reference to women is noticeable. Hence, Clark's own appreciation of

[128] 'Wearing the Native Dress', BMM, Vol. LXX, No. 1, January 1890, CBCNEI, Guwahati, 3.

[129] Clark, *A Corner in India,* 143-144.

[130] Clark, *A Corner in India*, 143.

girl students in the mission school having adopted simple Assamese costume of jacket and body cloth in contrast to 'the habits of the older ones' who continue to follow 'the laws of the Medes and Persians'.[131]

Alongside questions of 'decency', missionaries also felt that changes in clothing practices would protect the local people from illnesses and diseases that spread the hills. Harriet Houston, a missionary working among the Lhotha Nagas, argued that the scant clothing of the people was one of the principle reasons why several Nagas died of Pneumonia each year.[132] C. S. Gunning, a British administrator appreciative of what missionaries had done to a woman suffering from scabies, indicates the scantiness of her clothing, alongside malnutrition, as factors that had aggravated her scabies, and how as a result of the good food, ointment, soaps and clothing, that she took to as a Christian, had healed her and 'in three months she was a different woman'.[133]

It is noteworthy, especially from the above instance, that clothing the scantily dressed body was related to notions of cleanliness and hygiene, which was another recurring theme associated with 'civilising' the Nagas. This notion will recur in the following chapters too as it encompassed the desired changes in sartorial practices, dietary practices as well as in how homes and physical surroundings were maintained. In relation to bodily and sartorial practices, an American Baptist mission pamphlet on Assam commented: 'The people of both plains and hills are ignorant of the first principles of cleanliness and care of the body and most of the prevalent ill health is due to

[131] Clark, *Corner in India*, 54.

[132] Howard Houston and Harriet, *Nagaland Adventure, 1947-53* (Kohima: Lotha Baptist Church Association, 1987), 14.

[133] *A Lepers Cry and God's Answer*. – Memoirs of C. S. Gunning. Commissioner of Assam.

unsanitary habit.'[134] In the light of this understanding, the missionaries insisted on the need to make the local people conscious of the 'unhygienic' and 'unclean' existence; and enable them to realise 'the importance of washing' and keeping their bodies clean.[135] The use of soap, powder, ointments and such commodities that 'cleaned' and 'protected' the body was considered essential and were promoted among the people.[136] Such commodities were new additions to the everyday life of the local people.

Beyond these commodities meant to initiate 'hygienic' habits and make the body 'clean', the new set of 'decent' and 'modest' clothing suggested by the missionaries, especially for the converts, increasingly made the local people depend on textile market external to Naga society. This was an important change as people had earlier depended purely on the textile produced by themselves, woven and spun by women of each household. Even the raw material was acquired by themselves from what was locally available. But, now that also had to be imported in.

In addition, a new technology had been introduced by the missionaries to enable to making and mending of modern clothing – a sewing machine. Early twentieth century was a period when sewing machines were increasingly being marketed and becoming popular across South Asia.[137] In the Naga Hills, it was the missionaries who were instrumental in popularising the machine. The missionary family, the Haggards, brought one of the earliest sewing machines to their mission

[134] Missionary Cameralogs: Assam, (Boston: American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1934), ABFMS, Geographical File, Burma- Assam, *1817-1959,* Acc. No. *3253* (Microfilm), NMML, New Delhi.

[135] Mills, *Ao Nagas,* 416.

[136] Narola Rivenburg, *The Star of Naga Hills: Letters from Rev. Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg, Pioneer Missionaries of Assam, 1883-1923* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1941), 112.

[137] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

station in Wokha. Commenting on its arrival, Clark says: 'The click, click of her sewing-machine, run by an Assamese under her superintendence, sounded very civilised and business-like on these far-away mountaintops, promising much as an elevating influence in clothing those who were gradually coming to realise their present insufficiency.'[138]

It is also important to note that sewing also became an important part of the curriculum for girls in the mission schools. In regard to the gendered division of labour when it comes to the production of clothes, not much changed. Girl students continued to be trained in the craft and women continued to be the sole practitioners of the craft. It is just that, what was being produced, the raw materials and machines being used to produce, and the fashion sensibilities that informed production had undergone changes. Women missionaries, most of whom accompanied the missionaries as their wives or family, played an important role in the promotion of sewing, knitting and embroidery among the local women.[139] The themes, motifs and patterns that was embroidered, the clothing that they were trained to sew and knit were, of course, different from what was suggested by existing local aesthetics and requirements, and often took its inspiration from European clothing and patterns. It lacked the semiotic significance that it earlier had, where material culture and practices were all tied together in a complex but harmonious web of meanings.

The market, prior to large scale conversions, also remained divided between the modern clothing and the existing local clothing. The converts, and especially those who attended mission schools were the first ones to adopt new kind of clothing. But, subsequently, as conversions increased and the need was felt among the people to assert, more forcefully, their 'modern' self, the transition to

[138] Clark, *A Corner in India*, 147-148.

[139] Minutes of the Assam Baptist Missionary Conference. Sadiya, Assam. December 8-13, 1937, 47-48.

missionary informed clothing practices became far more common. This is something that will be further elaborated later in this chapter.

III

If the desire of the missionaries was to clothe the local people, preferably in Euro-American clothing, the colonial anthropologists who also served as administrators were disparaging of the missionary efforts to change the sartorial practices of the local people. Christopher Heimendorff noted that the administrators were keener to pursue a 'policy aimed at the preservation of native culture'. Hence 'great care is taken to avoid imposing anything that could cause a weakening of the old village organization. Even the wearing of Western dress is discouraged, and is strictly forbidden to all Government interpreters'.[140] In the appendix to his celebrated monograph, *The Ao Nagas*, J. P. Mills wrote disparagingly of missionaries imposing 'a superficial civilization' upon the Nagas. Pointing out the unsuitability of western clothes for the daily activities of the Naga and the climate and terrain where they lived, Mills even went to the extent of suspecting if western clothing was responsible for the spread of pulmonary and other diseases among Naga converts.[141] This was in contrast to the missionaries, for whom, the lack of clothing was responsible for the spread of pulmonary diseases among the Nagas.

The attitude of the administrators/anthropologists stemmed from the fact that the 'savage' simplicity had to be frozen in time and 'protected' from the influences and changes in lifestyle brought about by missionaries. For them, the changes in bodily and sartorial practices adopted by Naga converts marked a departure from their 'former simplicities' and 'primitive decencies'. A

[140] Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas* (London: Methuen & Co.), 60.

[141] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 422.

past they were nostalgic about, where life was 'simple and pagan and brief and happy'.[142] The inability to freeze Nagas in time and preserve them as one would do in a museum informed the anxiety of the colonial administrators/anthropologists over the changing clothing practices.

During their travels in the hills, the colonial administrators/anthropologists discouraged local converts from taking to western clothing. During a tour of his village, Deputy Commissioner, C. R. Pawsey directed Kughato Sukhai, a young school going student, to remove his short pants.[143] Similarly, when the Sub-Divisional Officer of Mokokchung, E. T. D. Lambert, came to the outskirts of Mongsenyomti Village, Chiten Jamir, who was a young boy went along with his father to welcome him. As Chiten was wearing a pair of half-pants, Lambert approached him, raised the lathi and touched his half-pants, and asked his father to remove them.[144] The impact of such humiliating actions on the part of the British administrators was great and became crucial in terms of the clothing choices that Nagas made in becoming 'modern'.

During the late 1930s-40s, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills brought out an order disallowing student from dressing 'in a western way and to have his hair cut in the western mode' and imposed a fine of Rs. 2 on anyone found violating this order.[145] The order, which was applicable to mission and government schools in Naga Hills, further stated: 'Upto and including Class 2 and the first-year class of F. T. School all boys will wear Naga dress only and will cut their hair in Naga fashion'. For boys studying above Class III, it stated: 'Hair will be cut in Naga

[142] Ursula Graham Bower, *Naga Path* (London: John Murray, 1950), 2.

[143] Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 64.

[144] John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the Formation of Naga Political Identity*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), 49.

[145] T. Aliba Imti, *Reminiscence: Impur to Naga National Council* (Mokokchung: Author, 1988), 35.

fashion'; 'Naga clothes according to custom will be worn'; 'No boots, shoes or stockings will be allowed'; and

> "Shorts (half pantaloons) may be worn but they will be made of the handwoven cloth of tribal pattern. The Sub-Divisional Officer for the Mokokchung and Deputy Commissioner for Kohima Schools will decide on the pattern to be worn. Angamis may wear black loin cloth or black shorts according to custom."

In relation to girl students, the order stated: 'Girls will wear Naga clothes according to custom. Hair will be cut according to custom. Angami Christian girls instead of shaving their heads may wear their hair cut short but will not wear it in their present disheveled condition'.[146]

The examples mentioned above are of some direct measures through which colonial administrators tried to impose their understanding on the clothing choices and practices of the Nagas, especially the younger generations, who were eager to take to western clothing. Besides this, the colonial legislations prohibiting various customary practices had indirectly affected sartorial world of the Nagas. For instance, prohibition on traditional Naga warring practices and feasts of merit led to decline in the meanings and values that were associated with certain clothes and adornments that were acquired through such occasions.

Although, the colonial administration never directly imposed changes in the clothing habits of Nagas, bans on traditional Naga warring practices and feasts of merit led to the loss of meanings and value associated with certain clothing pieces and adornments that had to be acquired through such occasions, which gradually led to their decline in their cultural significance among Naga

[146] Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland, 1920-1935* (Guwahati: Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, 2008), 333.

communities. During 1883–84, bridle paths were constructed and made open for people in the hills. As an object of 'progress' opening up of new colonial roads paved a way for the tribes' access to new means of communication and exchange of goods with the plains.[147] The ban on tribal feuds and improvement in communication among clans and tribes also expanded the trade in clothing and ornamental raw materials, which led to the increased use of insignia that could be purchased with wealth rather than acquired through skills and feats. Meanwhile, the colonial administration introduced the custom of wearing a red shawl among village headmen and *dubashi*s, which became an invented tradition that came to be sustained over the subsequent decades, even after the British left.

IV

From the abovementioned sections, it may be clear as to what the expectations and efforts of the colonial administrators and the American missionaries were, especially in reference to the bodily and sartorial practices of the local people. As far as the latter was concerned, implicated in the larger socio-cultural and political developments sweeping across the world as well as closer to home, initiating changes in their bodily and clothing practices was a means towards re-imagining and re-fashioning their identity as modern subjects. It was one among the many appendages or signifiers that convinced them of their modern subjecthood.

The first ones among the local people to break away from the existing bodily and clothing practices were the younger generation. They were the ones who were eager to convert to the new religion

[147] Lipokmar Dzuvichu, "Roads and the Raj: The Politics of Road Building in Colonial Naga Hills, 1860s- 11910s," North-East India Studies Programme, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, (*The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50. 4 (2013), 473-494.

and bring about wholesome change to their own self. Between 1891 and 1911, most of the Christian converts were below 35 years of age, the most being within the 25 to 30 age group.[148] The spiritual and material possibilities that the new religion offered within a fast changing socio-economic and political context as a result of colonialism were numerous. According to Thomas, the introduction of money economy, the coming of new infrastructure, increased circulation of new technologies and commodities, the systematic undermining of traditional village authority and the growing powers of government appointed *gaonbura*s as key political brokers, and the emergence of new professions and opportunities had generated new aspirations among the younger generation. They increasingly felt the need to move out of existing community restrains and 'explore and experiment with what the new dispensation had to offer.'[149] It is in this context that the younger generation also felt the urge to study in the mission schools, go beyond the hills for higher education, and become young professionals. Many of them went on to become teachers, preachers, government employees, doctors, engineers, traders, etc. and comprise the emergent middle class among the Nagas. It is this class of people that put on western clothes as a way to identify themselves as educated and informed subjects, equipped with a 'modern outlook', representing the larger Naga community.

It is this class of people who faced the disparaging attitude of the colonial anthropologist and administrators. Hence, they increasingly felt the need to resist the efforts of colonial administrators to fix them as 'primitive' and restrain them adopting 'modern' ways of becoming. In the previous section, it was seen how colonial administrators through their directives in school as well as in their everyday interactions humiliated and admonished young people from adopting 'western'

[148] Thomas, *Evangelising*, 47.

[149] Thomas, Evangelising, 47.

ways. This attitude only heightened the determination among young people to challenge the imposition of primitivism on them. This is evident in what Chiten Jamir, about whom mention had been made in the last section, wrote about the humiliation he was subjected to by the SDO. He wrote: 'Apart from the fear, it hurt my feelings, my pride and I felt embarrassed and ashamed. I hated the White man. Why did he remove my half-pants? Did I steal it from him?' He swore that one day he would also dress like the white man and 'ride on the horse wearing pants, shoes, shirt, hat, and a lathi, just like him.'[150] In 1946, Aliba Imti, the President of NNC, also called for a rejection of British regulations in regard to clothing. He called on the students of Mokokchung High School to oppose the regulation on clothing and haircut, and famously said: 'I am the owner of my head'.[151]

By the late 1940s, as the political movement for self-determination became more intensified, more and more Nagas took on to western clothing as a way of distinguishing themselves from the Indians. It was not only a means of asserting the fact that they are culturally different from the generally dhoti-clad or saree-clad Indians but also of rejecting the predominant attitude among Indian administrators and political leaders who felt 'tribal' Nagas had to be 'protected' from foreign influences and integrated into India's 'national culture'.[152]

The political demonstrations that spread across the Naga Hills during the 1940s and early 50s witnessed people either putting on their traditional attires albeit with some modifications, or western clothing. Putting on traditional attires did not in any way signal a return to pre-modern notions of clothing or the meanings attached to such clothing. It was generally as an appendage to

[150] R. C. Chiten Jamir, *My Reminiscences* (Dimapur: Author, 2000), 3.

[151] Imti, *Reminiscence*, 35.

[152] Thomas, *Evangelising*, 121.

western clothing and styles. So, for instance, scarves, shawls and waistcoats were worn over shirts, trousers and dresses; and it was common for locally conceived designs and patterns to be embroidered on them.[153] This element of mixing what had existed with what had been received via missionaries became a common fixture in the subsequent decades.[154]

Given the background of the political movement for self-determination, clothing often became a powerful medium of articulating protest and political resistance from the 1950s onwards. Traditional wrap-arounds and other articles of clothing often became sites on which military excesses and lives of those martyred came to be narrated. For instance, among the Tangkhul Nagas, two important designs of the *kashan*, the traditional wrap-around skirt, that are worn by women are *Luingamla Kashan* and *Rose Kashan*. Both these locally conceived designs narrate the experiences of military atrocities that were committed on Tangkhul women during the anti-insurgency operations of 1970s and 90s. The colours and motifs embroidered into the *kashan* narrate the story of the torture and injustice suffered by Tangkhul women in the hands of Indian military and paramilitary forces.[155] The two *kashan*s are important examples of how 'traditional' designs, motifs, colours, etc. come to attain new meanings and become carriers of political symbolism for the Nagas as they lived out their subsequent history.

[153] Vibha Joshi, "Dynamics of Warp and Weft: Contemporary Trends in Naga Textiles and the Naga Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford," (University of Nebraska- Lincoln: Oxford Asian Textiles Group, 2000); Inaka Assumi, former Vice-President, Naga *Hoho*, interview on 21st June, 2022, New Delhi.

[154] Inaka, Interview.

[155] T. Horam, 'Weaving Resistance and Identity: Politics of Contemporary Textile Practice of the Tangkhuls' in *Materiality and Visuality in North East India: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Ed. Nongbri, T. and Bhargava, R (Springer, Singapore, 2021), 201-204.

It must be noted at this point that sartorial codes among the Nagas even during pre-modern times were never static in nature. Like all aspects of material culture, Naga clothing practices have been subject to change and evolution. In every age, these changes occurred as a result of various historical and cultural factors at play. Internal dynamics within the group, such as desire for upward mobility have also effected gradual changes in clothing within a clan or a tribe. Moreover, the rights to wear a certain piece of cloth or ornament was subjected to challenge and dispute and a clan or individual's right to use it changed over time according to their rise or fall in status.[156] The perception of Nagas as a group expected to remain in a semi-naked attire inhabiting a primitive landscape, and the tendency to essentialize their clothing and dressing styles are nothing but an extension of the colonial desire to objectify, museumize and fix the Nagas. Negotiating with various pressures and circumstances, the lived reality of the Naga people has undergone changes over the last century, and so have their bodily and sartorial practices.

What is evoked as 'traditional' dressing style of the Nagas is generally an ahistorical and essentialised image. With the advent of colonialism, spread of Christianity, emergence of modern political consciousness and the pervasiveness of money economy, notions, styles and meanings of clothing have changed. In the later decades of twentieth century, with the wider circulation of money economy and greater integration with the global market, the Nagas began to take to newer kinds of clothes, especially those imported from Bangkok or Korea.[157] Although we can observe the drastic transformation in the sartorial practices of the Nagas, the shift from the semi-naked

[156] Jacobs, J. et al. *The Nagas: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (Norton, 2012), 57-58; Marion Wettstein, 'From social Status to Ethhnic Identity: The Ethnic Fashion Scene in Nagaland' Archiv Für Völkerkunde, 61/62, 2013. 31-50. Verein Freunde Der Völkerdund, 34.

[157] Ayesha Saldanha, "India: The Korean Cultural Wave in Nagaland," (Global Voices, 2010); Livine Khrozhoh, (Reporter, Eastern Mirror, Nagaland, 2022).

body adorned with elaborate ornaments to a modern-day acculturation of fashion through imbibing arts and ideas from the media and the global market that is operating and being promoted due to Nagas desire for new material trends from the west and east alike has brought about a new outlook towards their self and their culture.

With the growing academic scholarship on culture and the need to revisit the past, there is also a growing trend of promoting one's culture. The clothes which were everyday attire for Nagas till the beginning of the twentieth century are now labelled 'traditional' clothes and reserved only for special occasions such as weddings, funerals or festivals. It is interesting to note that some churches have encouraged, though not mandated, their congregation to wear traditional attire for the devotional Sunday once in a month. These attitudes of the Church today are in stark contrast with their initial stance of disdain for the traditional attire that was once considered to be the 'bane' by those missionaries who introduced Christianity to the Nagas. Since the late twentieth century, Nagaland has witnessed the growth of a 'ethnic' fashion industry based on blending of traditional patterns and insignia with modern waistcoats, jewellery and modern clothing pieces with a traditional touch etc. As it was with the case of the Tangkhul Nagas, as already shown, modern designs which make use of contemporary and traditional elements have also acquired socio-political significance for the Naga tribes. The production and usage of such clothing and accessories is still strictly regulated by organisations and local bodies at the tribal level. However, the signification system of the 'traditional' clothes as used by the Nagas today has undergone deep transformation. While clothing and jewellery during the pre-colonial days encoded the identity of its individual wearer, today these pieces convey the identity of its users at the level of the tribe and also signify Naga national pride.

Many local as well as non-Naga scholars often approach questions of culture through the lens of 'salvage ethnography' and lament the 'loss' of the 'authentic' Naga culture. They express regret that the 'traditional' clothing has become commodified goods used to showcase the 'exotic' self of the Nagas in a market increasingly driven by the demands of the tourism industry. Instead of going down that road, this chapter has tried to approach culture as a dynamic entity. It has attempted to study the historical trajectory of Naga clothing habits over the course of a century with a focus on the various factors that have influenced Naga clothing practices at various points in this history and the ways in which the Naga people have responded to them.

Chapter 3

Food, Drinks and Dietary Practices

The production, consumption and social transactions around food was another important site of transition in the everyday culture of the Nagas during the first half of twentieth century. The deliberations and practices around food was closely tied to the their social, economic and cultural context as well as their bodily constitution. Their diet consisted mostly of ingredients that were locally available, in their fields and forest. The rich knowledge they possessed pertaining to consumption of animal products, vegetables, edible roots, herbs and leaves as well as the ways in which they may be preserved and used was acquired from the natural environment that they inhabited and felt deeply connected to.[158] Some of this began to change, especially with the intervention of missionaries and colonial personnel, and the growing links with places, people and economies outside the hills. The meanings behind how and what kind of food was to be produced, consumed, introduced or abstained also changed over a period of time.

I

The Naga diet was unsophisticated yet appropriate for their living conditions and environment. Rice was the major agricultural crop and the staple food. Besides rice, Job's tears, millets, maize, beans, bitter gourds, chilies, sweet potato and varieties of yam and green vegetables were also generally grown.[159] In colder and higher altitudes, millet and Job's tears used to be the staple food

[158] Anamika Singh, Ranjay K. Singh and Amish K Sureja, "Cultural significance and diversities of ethnic foods of Northeast India," *Indian J. Tradit. Knowledge*, 6(1), (January 2007), 79–94.

[159] Dr. Hotokhu Chishi, Member, *Sumi Literature Board*, interview on 15th June, 2021, Dimapur.

prior to the introduction of rice cultivation. There were two types of cultivation methods, which were widely followed - terraced wet rice and dry shifting cultivation depending on the location and topography of the area to be cultivated. Terraced rice fields were common among the southern Naga groups and the Konyak Nagas. The Sumi Nagas followed slash and burn or swidden cultivation,[160] which was locally referred to as *jhum*. It was where the vegetation on the ground selected for cultivation was cleared and burned. The cleared area was later prepared for cultivation.

Most Naga tribes followed this method of cultivation. It was the most convenient and sustainable form of cultivation. Unlike terraced fields which only allowed for wet rice cultivation, in *jhum* cultivation, multiple crops could be grown along with other subsidiary crops and vegetables. In most cases, the paddy fields would lie in close proximity to the villages. Unlike terraced cultivation, *jhum* cultivation could utilize a particular plot of land for two successive seasons only. After two seasons, the land was made to lie fallow for more than ten years which was considered an ideal time for reuse, although fifteen to twenty years was considered the most desirable fallow period.[161] However, those villages which had scarce cultivable area could not follow the ideal pattern of land use and as a result, could keep the land fallow only for roughly three to five years before their next cultivation. This meant that the land would not get sufficient time to recover from the intense process of farming and the nutrients and moisture retention properties that had diminished over the farming period would not reach the optimum levels required for the next farming cycle. This would lead to diminished quality in the crops produced, therefore it was

[160] J. H. Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1921), p-59.

[161] Hutton, *Sema.*

considered ideal to leave the land untouched for the maximum recommended years to produce the desired result.

The agricultural year usually began by November when groups of men and women would start clearing the forest for *jhum*. The paddy was then sown by April, while millet sowing took place during March/April. Sowing seasons varied according to the locality. In the low-lying and warmer places, sowing was further advanced.[162] The harvest was reaped mostly in September/October while in the colder regions, it extended to November as well. Terraced wet rice cultivation was done in terraces, locally called *panikhets*, which were cut into the hill slopes and provided with sufficient dykes and irrigation channels to retain abundant water during planting season. In both methods, cultivation was carried out only once a year since agriculture in the Naga Hills was dependent on monsoon rain alone.

Generally, cooked rice along with meat of domesticated fowls, pigs, cows, mithun, or hunted wild games formed the staple diet of the local people. Among the wild animals, deer, serow, wild boars, to name a few, along with varieties of fish or other aquatic animals were consumed. Cows, pigs, and chicken were domesticated for consumption as well as for trade.[163] Mithun, or Gayal, is considered to be the domesticated form of the wild gaur which is indigenous to the eastern Himalayas. It was often referred to as the 'sacrificial ox' due to its significance in the traditions and rituals of various hill tribes in the region.[164] While mithun meat was a major part of the Naga diet, it was not domesticated by every household for regular self-consumption. Mithuns mostly

[162] Hutton, *Sema,* 63.

[163] The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union. *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference*, Nowgong, December 1886. Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1887, p-84.

[164] https://nrcmithun.icar.gov.in/

lived in the thick forests and were made to graze on their own. They were fed large amounts of salt by the owner so that they would not wander about but remain in that particular forest area. During feasts and rituals, villagers would march in groups to the forest, befriend the mithun by feeding it salt. They would then pull the mithun back to their village, all the while vocalizing and singing songs.[165] It was mostly during the feasts of merit or when the chief organizers a feast for his people or during the occasion of ritual importance like during *Ahuna* or *Tuluni*, that the mithun was killed for food. Even today, mithun is slaughtered during festivals as a sign of prosperity and blessings from God. Owning a mithun was a matter of pride and honor and not every commoner could afford such a luxury. Some tribes such as the Angamis occasionally reared mithun, primarily with the purpose of trading since it would fetch a good sum of money. It was also reared by Nagas seeking social prominence as mithun meat was indispensable during ritual feasts of merit. Rearing of mithun was therefore often a means of gaining and exhibiting wealth.[166]

Pre-colonial Naga Hills was largely self-sufficient in its food requirements. Some amount of rice was obtained through barter of local products with the plains. Salt was another item that was procured through trade with the plains, although alternative sources of salt were available locally in limited amounts. One important source of salt was the brine springs that were located mostly in Eastern Naga regions and parts of Manipur. Salt produced in the current Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh, mostly controlled by the Nocte Nagas, was an important item of trade with the plains. In fact, salt production was such an important part of the political economy of this area that conflicts over the control over these salt springs shaped the pre-colonial and colonial politics in this region. Konyaks also carried the salt produced form brine springs located in their area for trade with the

[165] Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village February 12, 2019.

[166] J. H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1921), 79.

plains. This salt was then brought back into the hills through barter with traders of the plains by the Aos, who would then trade it with other Naga tribes.[167] Some amount of direct trade in salt between Aos and Konyaks too. Thus, Ao Nagas from Wakching would obtain salt sticks from Konyak villages through trade which were then used for consumption as well as political exchange.[168] Salt functioned as a currency among Naga tribes and possession of salt in the household would be considered a sign of wealth and prestige and salt sticks or discs would often be hung for display in the kitchen.

Unlike many other Naga tribes, spring salts were not readily available to the Sumi Nagas. However, for the Sumi Nagas under Kiphire district, there was a small stream in a village called *Lumutami* that produced a particular foam. The corner of the stream that produced the foam had a salty taste and villagers would often collect water from that part of the stream. Subsequently, this would be boiled and converted to *Shomutsa,* local name for salt. *Shomutsa* was made into a large circular mass and was used as salt for food. *Shomutsa* was also bartered in exchange for other food items or things of necessity. Even today, this is produced by the villagers and is considered to be a very good health supplement.[169] However, this salt production was sufficient just for the Sumis near that stream, and did not meet the needs of those located in other regions.

According to some other informants, before their introduction to salt, they used *Athumu.*[170] *Athumu*, a type of Sumac bobs found in the hills of Northeast India, is a sour seed often used for cooking as well as medicinal purposes by the hill tribes in Nagaland, Mizoram and parts of

[167] Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas: Hill Peoples of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (Norton, 2012) 22.

[168] Julian, *Nagas,* 24.

[169] Kivito Swu, interview, Pukhato Village, Dimapur on 4th August, 2022.

[170] *Athumu* is translated into English as Sumac bobs.

Arunachal Pradesh. The *Athumu* seeds were dried and ground into fine powder which was then slightly roasted and used for seasoning the food as an alternative to salt.[171] Another interesting method known to have been employed by the Sumi Nagas to indigenously produce salt was by collecting the dried bark of the banana tree trunk, which was later roasted in the pan, ground into a fine powder and was used as a salt for cooking meat.[172] Another seasoning substance was prepared by collecting the embers from the burning hearth which was then transferred to a jar containing water and kept aside for a couple of days. As the ember and the water got settled, the water on top was decanted and this clear liquid was used as flavouring while cooking.[173] *Ami-Kite* was also an interesting substitute for salt. During jhum cultivation, when the forests were burned and cleared, the fires produced fly ash which was known to have a salt-like taste. This fly ash, called *Ami-Kite* was first collected and ground, and then used as an alternative to salt[174].

These different items were not commonly used by the entire Sumi community. Rather, depending on the location of the village and the resources available around them, through a process of trial and error, people used them. Some local men would travel to the neighboring tribes for days together to barter salt in the present day Wokha district which was pre-dominantly a Lotha Naga settlement. Sumis would also obtain salt through trade with Ao, Sangtam and other neighboring tribes[175]. They also travelled on foot to Assam to buy salt from the plains.[176] Sumi Nagas still use the phrase *paye amiti puwuva*, literally meaning 'went away to collect salt from the plains' to

[171] Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, Dimapur, 3rd August, 2022.

[172] Shetoli Achumi, interview, Member, *Sumi Baptist Akukuhou Kughakulu SBAK* on 3rd August, 2022.

[173] Suumi, Interview.

[174] Suumi, Interview.

[175] Hutton, *Sema Nagas*, 58

[176] Pukhato Sumi, interview, Sutemi Village on 27rd Dec, 2021.

metaphorically refer to the passing away of a person, due to the long, unknown journey one had to undertake as part of salt collecting expeditions. Over time, however, processed common salt became a replacement for the other salt substitutes.

Besides farming and agriculture, foraging formed an important aspect of Naga food culture. Foraging practices indicate the deep connection that the local people had with their land and habitat. Food foraged from the wild included mushrooms, honey, wild shoots, yams, ferns, various roots and tubers, various greens and fruits, medicinal herbs along with game animals, birds, fish, other aquatic creatures, silkworms, bee larvae, rodents and insects. Besides being incorporated into their regular meals, foraged food products also served as alternative nutritional sources during periods of scarcity. Wild edibles also form an intrinsic part of the social, spiritual and cultural life of the Naga tribes as well as their livelihood. The various traditions and beliefs around these forest resources and how they were used indicate the presence of a sustainable system based on a reciprocal relationship between humans and these products. Among the Angamis for example, *genna*s, folklores and spiritual beliefs associated with forest products tended to establish codes for sustainable use and conservation of forest resources.[177] Moreover, the wide indigenous knowledge of various elements of forest life acted as a valuable resource in enhancing ecological management practices.[178]

Hunting was an important part of procuring food, especially for collective consumption. The common game animals included barking deer, serow, elephant, wild boar, tiger and birds. Hunting

[177] Akoijam Basanta Singh and Robindra Teron, ‘’Diversity of Wild Edible Plants used by the Angami-Nagas in Kohima District of Nagaland, India,’’ (*Pleione* 9(2): 2015), 311- 324.

[178] Queenbala Marak ‘Food’ in *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India,* ed. Jelle P. Wouters and T.B. Subba, (London and New York: Routledge, 2023). 169-173.

was undertaken for food and also for sport, although tiger hunting was done for protection against predation.[179] Fishing was also an important part of Naga foraging practices. Traditionally, fish was usually obtained from streams and rivers using poison lined fish traps.[180] Dried fish was a favorite food item which was previously obtained through trade with the plains.

Hunting and fishing activities were scheduled being mindful of the cycles of animal procreation and migration. Numerous *genna* restrictions were followed to conserve and protect animal species. For example, tiger hunting involved strict *genna*s as the animal was revered and believed to share a bond of kinship with the tribespeople. According to Naga origin myths, spirit, man and the tiger are believed to have been off-springs of the same woman. Lycanthropic beliefs also ensure a special place for the tiger in the Naga lifeworld.[181] The *genna* period for the killing of a tiger was the same as in the case of a man. It was the Konyak and Sumi tribes in particular who had several strong beliefs associated with were-tigers or were-leopards. The mithun was also believed to have a close ritual relationship to man. In the Ao Naga belief system, every man has an alter-ego called *tiya*, both man and his *tiya* have three souls, one of which was a mithun in the case of both.[182] Some clans are named after animals or plants that carry a totemic significance for the clan which becomes taboo as food for them. The Konyak *angh* shares a special relationship with the hornbill which is believed to be the *angh* of the birds.[183] Among the Sumi tribe too, even touching the flesh

[179] Julian, *The Nagas*,12.

[180] Julian, *The Nagas.*

[181] Rebekka Sutter, 'Shadows and Tigers: Concepts of soul and Tiger-Men' in *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India* ed, Oppitz et al. (Gent: Snoeck, 2008).

[182] Julian, *The Nagas,* 48-49.

[183] Julian, *The Nagas,* 31.

of the hornbill was considered taboo.[184] Most Naga tribes had a special reverence for the hornbill, which is rarely hunted or hurt. Other beliefs and rules also determined Naga game choices. Thus, each Naga tribe avoided partaking of the meat of creatures with undesirable natural characteristics as they believed that a person who consumes a certain creature acquires its nature as well. Most Naga tribes avoided eating birds with screaming and scratching or idle habits, lest they should develop these traits in their personality. Women were forbidden from eating the flesh of monkeys, for the fear that they would turn wasteful and disorderly like the monkey.[185]

As agriculturalists, inhabiting the hills where the weather remained cold throughout the year, meat products and produce from their fields and forest were essential components of the diet. Whether it was raw ingredients or cooked food, the process of preparation was suited to their habitat and the kind of work that they engaged in. Naga culinary processes were simple and minimalist. Food was either boiled or steamed, with raw greens and herbs as accompaniments. Dried and roasted food was also part of the cuisine. Seasoning and flavoring were usually done by making use of locally sourced items such as chillies, herbs, fermented bamboo shoots, varieties of pepper, and fermented soyabean. Oil and other spices commonly used in other parts of India, came to be introduced only recently.

Though meat was staple, consumption of it was abstained during a certain period of *genna* or prohibition. If meat was difficult to obtain, one would confine the meal to chilies, salt, and some green leaves.[186] Spicier food was preferred, and Naga chilli, one of the spiciest peppers in the

[184] Gabriella Eichinger and Ferro-Luzzi, ''Food Avoidances of Indian Tribes,'' (*Anthropos*, Bd. 70, H. 3/4 .1975), 385-427.

[185] Eichinger, "*Food Avoidance",* 397.

[186] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 142.

world was indigenous to the Naga Hills and consumed in great amounts. Distinct food preservation and processing techniques such as drying, smoking and fermenting were followed. Meat and vegetables were sun-dried or smoked over the fireplace and used during periods of unavailability or simply as delicacy. Fermented food was commonly used, particularly fermented bamboo shoot and fermented soyabean or *axone* and fermented river fish are indispensable condiments for meat, fish or plant-based dishes. Chewing of fermented betel nut, taken in combination with betel leaf, tobacco and slaked lime as a mild stimulant was a common practice, a practice probably influenced by their contact with the plains. Lime was either locally produced using the shell of eggs or freshwater snails or obtained from the plains. Some tribes practiced pipe smoking using home grown tobacco. Opium smoking was common among the Konyaks and some Ao villages bordering the plains. Use of dairy foods among the Nagas was mostly limited.

Naga food culture was closely related to local craft traditions. The tools and utensils used to prepare, serve and store food was made from locally available material. For example, large clay vessels were used to boil water, cook rice, and meat. These vessels were also used to brew liquor.[187] They were locally produced using pottery-making techniques that was indigenous to the Naga Hills and adjoining regions. Pottery work among Nagas mostly fell in the domain of women. They did not use the pottery wheel. They were moulded through modeling or coiling. The style was quite plain, without varnishing, handles or ornamentation. Basketry was another significant traditional craft. Functional wicker or bamboo baskets were used for storage and transport of grains, seeds, clothes, valuables and forest produce. Various kinds of ornaments, fish traps, mats, cooking pots and plates, caging material for poultry, piglets or birds, house construction material and burial mats were other items produced through basketry. Tightly woven wicker cups were

[187] Hutton, *Sema and* Hutton, *Angami.*

even used as drinking vessels. [188] Food was usually served on wooden plates and dishes, with an attached stand. These dishes would be carved out of a single block of wood and produced by local Naga craftsmen. All forms of craft productions are subject to ritual *genna*s and restrictions.

Agricultural labour was tedious and required sufficient physical exertion. Normally, an average person consumed three rice meals a day, with rice beer, which was often treated as a substitute for water.[189] Rice beer is a fermented alcoholic drink that was consumed regularly. During any feast or ritual, rice beer was served to all the people. Local beer was also prepared from millet. As Heimendorff had remarked, "What wine is to the Italian and whiskey to the Scotchman, rice beer to the Nagas".[190] There were three variants of rice beer in the case of the Sumis namely, *Akuputsu*, *Akeza* and *Azhichoh*. But the most sought-after variant is *Akuputsu*. Rice beer was commonly brewed by women, even though men knew the art of brewing it as well. According to Mrs. R. Rame, a respondent from Kohima Village, P. Khel, men were mostly expected to look after the field and would have little or no time to brew. On the other hand, women, who were expected to take care of household chores had to brew rice beer for the household or the community at large.[191] For preparing *Akuputsu*, the grain was first dried, then husked by pounding. This pounded cereal was put into a pot of boiling water and left to cook. The cooked rice was broken into small pieces and then left to dry on the mat under the sun for a few hours until sufficiently dry. Organically procured yeast was then added to aid the fermentation process. One of the varieties of yeast used by Sumi Nagas to make rice beer was obtained by grinding dried leaves from *Akakhu-ni*, a wild variety of eggplant. This was then mixed with the rice mixture for it to ferment. The yeast used for

[188] Julian. *The Nagas*, 25-28.

[189] Julian, *The Nagas.*

[190] Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas* (London: Methuen & Co.), 57.

[191] Rudietuonuo Rame, interview, Kohima Village, February 3, 2019.

fermenting rice beer varied from tribe to tribe. After adding yeast, the mixture would be covered with plantain leaves and left alone for three days after which it was transferred to jars or wooden vats. Before consumption, the liquid is filtered out.

The deliberations and practices around food production, preparation and consumption among Nagas was mediated not merely by the question of sustenance, however essential that may be; but also by notions of what is considered to be sacred, moral and worthy in their worldview. The importance attributed to dietary practices followed the same degree of reverence and seriousness as the ritual and ceremonial practices. For instance, they were ethically bound to finish the food that was served on their platter. It was considered a sign of disrespect to the food as well as the host if one wastes a certain portion of the food that was served. Stepping on food or making fun of it was also considered a bad sign as they believed that the food would cry and disappear and they would eventually become poor.[192] Shiheli, a 72-year-old Sumi woman laments the sight of her grandchildren wasting and throwing food away without any sign of remorse today. She says, when she was a young girl, food was considered sacred and special to everyone, both young and old.[193] Such an attitude, which was functional in the past, was borne as much out of scarcity as the close relations they shared with the ecosystem surrounding them.

II

After the harvest was done, villagers would carry their grains back to their villages. Most of them had granaries to store their food grains and other food products. However, it was only the rich or

[192] N. Atungbou, "Food practice for physical and spiritual well-being of the Zeme, the tribe in Northeast India, Journal of Ethnic Foods," (2020) 7:41, https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-020-00074-0.

[193] Shiheli Aye, interview, Sutemi Village on 23rd Nov, 2021.

the village chief who produced grains sufficient enough to last for many seasons, since they usually possessed more land and their position of authority ensured that they could command more labour from the villagers. Wealthy chiefs would build multiple granaries in which they stored their paddy in large quantities. Land distribution and ownership patterns varied from tribe to tribe and even at the level of clans or villages within the same tribe. Variations also occurred over time within the same unit. Among the Aos of Waromung in 1961, most of the land was owned by families or lineages, while most households owned two or more plots in the village and could also work on others' land on lease. Some land was owned by religious heads of the village. The *morung* would also own small patches of log and bamboo forest. Among the Lotha Naga tribe, the *morung* may also own rice fields.[194] Among the Sumis, almost every bit of land was under the control of the chief. It was mandatory for every male under his rule to provide labour on the chief's field for some days every year. He would also allot the land and fields to his people at his discretion. When time came to labour on these lands, be it during sowing or harvest season, the chief or *Ato Kukau*[195] was privileged free labor from his people up to six times as and when he required their service. His second in command or *Akukau*[196] could also avail the same privilege, but only thrice.

A common practice then, which continues in some villages till this day, was the practice of *Aphu-Aina-Sa* or mandatory labour. During times of sowing or harvest, the chief through his *cho-choü*[197] would inform his subject villagers or *mughemi* that he would need them to help out in his fields, which were too vast for him and his family to handle without help. The villagers on their part felt

[194] Julian, *The Nagas*, 20.

[195] *Ato Kukau*- a reference to the founder of the village.

[196] *Akukau*- He is the second in command of the chief.

[197] Cho-choü: advisor to the chief. Appointed to oversee the more minor responsibilities of the chief, for instance announcing and organizing meetings, etc.

a strong sense of responsibility to lend a hand in the farming process. On the appointed day, if not entire families, then at least one representative from each family in the village would go up to the chief's land and help in the sowing or reaping process. In exchange, the chief provided the workers with a sumptuous feast.

Another interesting custom among the Sumis was that of the *Anu-Kishimi*. Among the villagers, there would be those who were extremely poor and had no land to till. They would come up to the chief and request for use of his land, and in return, they would offer themselves as labour to work under the chief.[198] They were known as *Anu-Kishimi*. With the permission of the chief, they could also collect wood, hunt for game in the land owned by their chiefs. In many cases, they ended up serving their chiefs as *cho-choü*,[199] supervising his lands, working as a representative for the chief in his absence. They generally remained loyal to the chief throughout their lives, for disloyalty would be punished by confiscation of the land.[200] Any time they went out on a hunt, the prized parts of the game they caught, namely the head and the hind legs were always reserved for the chief.[201]

Land distribution patterns were also closely related to the distribution of power within the tribe, clan or village. For example, the Angamis, who have often been cited as one of the most egalitarian of all Naga tribes,[202] had individual land holdings which were common. An interesting relationship

[198] Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village Council, February 12, 2019.

[199] Kakuto N Chishi, Secretary, Sumi Hoho, 5th July, 2022.

[200] Julian *The Nagas,* 20.

[201] Kivito Swu, retired teacher, aged 80 years of Pukhato Village, Dimapur on 4th August, 2022.

[202] Dalton had made observation in the *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* that the Naga tribes to the east of the Dhansiri river traditionally had powerful chiefs while the Naga tribes to the west of the Dhansiri were generally more democratic.

has also been noticed between the political structure and the cultivation method preferred by a certain group. Thus, terraced wet rice cultivation was more prevalent in the Angami area. It was less labour intensive and could be worked by an individual family without having to employ or be employed by another. Moreover, each individual family could produce surplus, which could be shared, stored and even become a means of acquiring higher status within the village. On the other hand, *jhum*ming was more labour intensive. It required large number of labourers, especially during the burning and clearing stage. It was preferred by those who operated under an autocratic chief, for whom the use of this method ensured the reliance of his villagers upon his command and authority, thereby fetching him power and control.[203]

In the case of the Sumi tribe, the chief exercised much control. He had plenty even in times of famine because of his access to fertile land and free labor from his people. On many occasions, the chief would share his food grains with the poor who would offer their services to him or by sharing a part of what they would obtain from their own fields. In most cases, the chief would pardon them of their debts but continue to receive their services in the form of labor or through other such means. According to one informant, prior to the introduction of Christianity, food grains, cattle and fowl or even *Axone* was exchanged with properties or even served their entire life to the rich or the village heads.[204] This was considered a very regressive practice and they were looked down by others or even mocked at. Their entire lives or even their children's lives were owned by the rich and the chief who could dictate and impose their will upon them.[205] Similarly, villages of the Thendu group of the Konyaks was headed by powerful *angh*s or chiefs, who even

[203] Julian, *The Nagas*, 20.

[204] Suumi, interview.

[205] Suumi, interview.

possessed sexual rights over the women of commoner clans.[206] In the Thenkoh group of Konyak villages, which have a relatively egalitarian system of political organization, the clan of the angh would still not eat together with commoner clans.[207]

It must be noted that the position and power of the chief and thereby principles of social and economic organization were not always secure or static. For example, crop failure could be blamed on the chief and it would also entail inability on his part to perform the feasts which determined his status and power. Inability to expand the land under his domain, quarrel between rival chiefly clans or sons over the question of succession, could diminish the power of a chief. Such weakening of the chief's position might often lead to adoption of a more egalitarian political and economic structure.[208]

In any case, agriculture was aligned with socialization and kinship forming customs in Naga society. Agricultural work in the villages always involved community level collaboration to a greater or lesser extent, for example those parts of the cultivation work which required extra hands were completed with the help of neighbouring families or kin, which would subsequently be reciprocated. Nagas were a society which practiced the custom of bride service, a certain period of agricultural aid had to be provided by a suitor to a girl's family as an essential part of his courtship, based on which his suitability as a prospective son-in-law would be determined.

Agricultural jobs also involved strict division along gender lines. For example, clearing jungles, tilling and threshing would be performed by men, while sowing/transplanting, sapling pulling,

[206] Julian, *The Nagas*, 39.

[207] Julian, *The Nagas*, 40.

[208] Julian, *The Nagas*, 40-41.

weeding and winnowing were activities reserved for women. While there might be some minor variations, the division was mostly done along these lines. It might be noticed that usually the more tedious jobs fell in the domain of women. Division of household work also followed a similar principle. The food is prepared by the women of the household and young girls learned to cook from an early age. Additionally, washing and cleaning, tending kitchen garden, pounding and husking, food preserving, collection of water etc. were jobs that fell in the domain of Naga women and generally continue to do so even in the present times.[209] In case of meat, hunting, slaughtering, chopping and dressing would be done by men, while the preserving, cooking or serving would be done by women. Women were responsible for cooking and feeding the entire household as well as the poultry and pigs early in the morning and also packing the afternoon lunch for the field. After their return from the field, women would once again cook and serve her household before retiring to bed. According to Pukhato Sumi,[210] an informant, even in the paddy field, the womenfolk would cook for the entire group that worked in the field. This was in addition to fetching water from distant and steep slopes, carrying the paddy to their field huts after harvesting, and later to their villages.[211] Women also played the very vital role of being seed-keepers, not only by preserving food for longer use, but also in saving seeds for later cycles of cultivation.[212]

While the added burden of cooking for the household obviously fell on the women, according to informants, Shiheli Aye and Pukhato Sumi, the work of women was not considered to be inferior or of lesser value than that of men. While 'the kind of labour involved was different yet no work

[209] Shimray, U. A. "Women's Work in Naga Society: Household Work, Workforce Participation and Division of Labour," (*Economic and Political Weekly* 39.17, 2004),1 698-1711.

[210] Pukhato Sumi, retired forest officer at Sutemi Village on 27rd Dec, 2021.

[211] Sumi, interview.

[212] Marak, "Food", 170.

was lesser than the other'. Besides protecting the household and the village from enemy raids, cutting woods and engaging in artisanal and craft work, men in the household were expected to sow, protect and harvest the crops; and labour as such was explained in terms of sharing of 'responsibilities' and 'duties'. Yet, inarguably, at the end of the day, it was the women who cooked, brewed and pounded rice; carried wood and water, and kept the home and attended to every need of the family.[213] Their lives carried the greater burden of 'responsibility'.

III

As discussed before, for the Nagas, food and its consumption were not merely a question of sustenance. It had a social, sacred and aesthetic element that brought meaning and purpose to their lived contexts. Their dietary practices were regulated by fasting and feasting. Fasting and feasting were integral to various rituals and ceremonies associated with pre-Christian beliefs. Each Naga tribe or village unit had its own set of spring and harvest festivals, besides a number of other rituals and celebrations connected with the worship of various deities. Most of these occasions included community feasting. Before commencing on a cycle of paddy cultivation, the blessing of the gods was invoked by offering animal sacrifices and performing various rituals. It was here that the entire village community performed *genna* to appease the spirits. *Genna* was the collective or individual abstention from all work on a particular day or period. It was forbidden to travel, to have sexual intercourse or to eat certain type of food. A *genna* period could last several days and depending on

[213] Bower, Ursula Graham, *Naga Path* (London: John Murray, 1950), 85.

the occasion, could either be observed by the whole village or by some individuals.[214] It was a way to not act against the divine message or social customs.

Social customs relating to the rites of passage like birth and death ceremonies, marriages, festivals or religious ceremonies could not be violated. If any individual went against such practices, he or she was punished by strictures passed by the village or considered likely to face the wrath of the gods. The *genna* period was observed for self-purification and introspection. It was a way of propitiating gods either for favor or forgiveness. Once the *genna* period was over, the daily life activities could recommence, from sowing and harvesting, to festivals and rituals of birth and death, or conferring titles to the village heads and warriors etc. This was often followed by feasting as per the occasion that was being celebrated.[215]

It is therefore understood that food played a vital role in the socio-cultural lives of the people. Their life activities as well as the reckoning of time and cosmography were regulated according to the agriculture cycle and life activities. They followed a series of rituals to seek blessings and to appreciate their food as believed to be from the good spirit whom they had pleased before sowing of the seeds. It also acted as a powerful tool equivalent to their lives as they would even barter their lives over food. Agriculture was the only lifeline and therefore, it was closely associated with their cultural and ritual ceremonies and festivities. Before sowing and after harvest, there were offerings made to gods for good and plentiful harvest. For the Sumis, *Tuluni* was an important festival celebrated to mark the season of bountiful crops while offering thanks to their gods. It was here that the betrothed exchange gifts and the in-laws invited their groom for feasting and merry-

[214] Shimreichon Luithui, *Naga- A People Struggling for Self-Determination*, (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2010), 14.

[215] Sumi, interview.

making. *Ahuna* is the post-harvest festival celebrated among the Sumis for giving thanks to their gods for a good harvest. During this festival, the first rice drawn from the field was cooked in bamboo sections and shared among the communities. It is here that the forecasting ritual was performed by the village priest (*Achine-u*).[216] A forecasting ritual was performed by Sumis as an appeal to their god of harvest for a fruitful next season. It was a method in which the priest would split the bamboo where the rice was cooked and after chanting a few words, he would throw the split bamboo into the air and if both the halves landed faced up or down, it was a bad sign. However, if one is face-down and the other split side up, it was regarded as a sign of good fortune. Similar kinds of practice are found among other Naga tribes as well.

Harvesting was the most important time of the year. If the village community produced a good harvest that year, it would sustain them till the next harvest season. If their crops failed, they would need to depend on the chief or the neighboring villages for their survival, which in turn would come with a lot of obligations or services that they must render to the chief or that village. Therefore, there were certain *genna* or prohibitions for both men and women before they harvested their fields. For instance, it was forbidden for men to eat any meat other than pork, fish or crabs, while for the women, they could consume only fowls domesticated at home. One could not touch the remains of a tiger, leopard or human corpse during such times. It was believed that restraining oneself from such food during harvest would produce plentiful grains until the next season. The prohibited meat of cattle, goats or dogs were considered to produce a strong smell which could irate the spirit of harvest, causing them to go away. For the Assumi clan of the Sumi Nagas, it was forbidden to eat or drink from the house of another clan for the entirety of the two months before

[216] *Achine-u-* A Sumi religious priest who performs rituals before any activity.

harvest.[217] Such a belief system was closely attached to the rituals associated with the spirits, who inhabited every space and was part of every activity. They could be good spirits or bad spirits. It was at the disposal of the living to please the spirits, be it a good or a bad one.

Besides the feasts associated with sowing and harvesting, a special type of feast was common to almost all Naga tribes with slight variations. This feast, known by different names among different Naga groups, have been generally referred to as 'feast of merit' by the anthropologists. Recent scholarship, however, has criticized such nomenclature as being reductionist and essentializing.[218] Among Nagas, the wealthy and the prominent households would organize feasts for all the people of their community every once in a while, which involved lavish community feasting and consumption of rice beer. These feasts had to be observed in a sequence by a particular household, the number and nature of which varied from tribe to tribe. Each feast lasted several days. The various rituals followed during the feasts also included *genna* periods, in which fasting or abstention from certain foods and daily activities was required. Arranging for the feasts required the sacrifice and slaughter of a large number of mithun, bulls, buffaloes and boar, the skulls of which were mounted on the host's walls as souvenirs. Besides, a large quantity of rice beer or millet beer was consumed by an entire village community, sometimes along with guests from neighbouring villages for several days on end. Naturally, these elaborate feasts could only be arranged by a household which possessed enough wealth to brew the rice/millet beer and purchase the animals required for sacrifice and slaughter. On the successful completion of each such feast, the host acquired an elevated status in the community and earned the privilege to adorn material

[217] Hutton, *Sema Nagas*, 65.

[218] Mayirnao, Shaokhai and Sinalei Khayi, "Decolonising Feasts of Merit: Reasoning *Marān Kasā* from a Tangkhul Naga Perspective", (*Asian Ethnicity* 24:2 2023), 258-277.

insignia indicating his membership in the elite group of feast performers in his community in the form of certain adornments on his house and the right to put on garments and ornaments reserved only for the feast givers. The nature of these privileges varied across tribes, but in all cases, they were associated with much coveted social status and power. Among the Chakesang tribe, the feast of merit is known as *zhothi*, *zatho* or *trayo* and involves a series of three elaborate feasts. It was after the completion of the second level in the series, known as *Lekhü* that the feast giver earned the right to adorn his house with skulls of mithun/buffalo, wood carvings of mithun/buffalo—an abstract version of the animal—besides the carvings of birds, lizards, flying squirrels, etc., and the right to put up "horn" beams at the top of the house front. Such "Feast of Merit" house is variously known as *kecükie*, *ceka*, and *kike* (kecü/ce/ke meaning "horn" and ki/kie/ka meaning "house"). The feast-givers who offered feasts to two or more villages at the same time acquired the right to put up two horns at the top—one at the front and another at the back. The feast giver of Lekhü also acquired the right to wear the esteemed "Feast of Merit" shawl.[219] Thereafter, if the person concerned is successful in arranging the third feast of the series called *zothi*, a large stone was erected by the men of the village as part of the rituals along the village path or on the path leading to paddy fields and the host would now acquire the title of *zothimi* – one who has performed the *zothi*. He would now have acquired more honour and higher social rank, of which, the erected stone would function as a material symbol, which also symbolized and declared to the outsider the prestige and prosperity of the entire village in general.[220]

[219] Yekha-ü and Queenbala Marak, "Elicüra: The "Feasts of Merit" Shawl of the Chakhesang Naga of Northeast India,", (*The Oriental Anthropologist* 21(1) 138–157, 2021) 144.

[220] Marak and Yekha-ü, "Feast of Merit," 45.

Among the Tangkhuls, the feasts were known as *Marān kasā*, the consecutive performance of which enabled the feast giver to construct the *lengchengshim* (prestigious Tangkhul Naga house) and/or *wonrā*, (an elevated resting dais made of stone slabs) and/or erection of *tarung* (tree monolith commonly referred to as Y-post, *genna* post, etc.) and/or menhir.[221] Among the Northern Sangtam Nagas, a series of five feasts was observed by a person at the completion of each of which, the feast giver acquired a set of material symbols that indicated his raised rank and status in the community. These insignias varied from village to village but in general, the feast giver acquired the right to adorn his house and person with the hornbill feather, a symbol of rank and prosperity across the Naga Hills. The women of the house put on special ornaments and in some cases, a man who gave such feasts would also gain the right to smoke a metal pipe.[222] The Northern Sangtams were not known to erect stone menhirs, but they erected a Y-shaped forked post which is used for tethering the sacrificial mithan before slaughter and the post is retained as a memorial of the slaughter and feast. Similar erections of forked wooden posts are found among tribes such as Sumis, southern Sangtams, Rengmas, Tangkhuls and sometimes among Lothas. The erection of stones as monoliths is common among the Lothas, Angamis, Chakhesangs and Rengmas among others.

The practice of organizing such feasts affirm the close relationship between the political economy of food and social organization in Naga society, for the organization of these feasts determined the position of a person and his family in the social and economic hierarchy of the village. In the Naga economy, wealth was measured in terms of the extent of agricultural fields and number of livestock

[221] Mayirnao and Khayi, "Decolonizing," 258.

[222] Stonor, C. R. "The Feasts of Merit among the Northern Sangtam Tribe of Assam", (*Anthropos*, Bd. 45, H. 1/3 1950), 12.

that one possessed. As cash was not yet the medium of exchange, they acknowledged one another with the services and goods that they procured from their paddy and livestock that they domesticated. A feast of this kind has been understood as a means of working around the value of being 'benevolent' and 'generous', of redistributing what the wealthy may come to possess, yet reinforcing the socio-economic gradation within the village. The idea of accumulating excesses beyond their everyday needs was rather quelled with the sense of obligation to share and feast with the entire village population, which was often not that large in number.[223] The Naga feast of merit custom has been admired as the indicators of a moral economy which effected the breaking of a cycle of accumulation by culturally enforcing redistribution through community feasting as a contrast to the culture of unrestrained individual accumulation in the capitalist economy.[224] It has also been read in terms of Malinowsky's concept of 'gift economy' whereby tribal societies engaged in gift exchange practices with political, religious, kinship and economic implications.[225] Others have tried to understand Naga feasts of merit as a mechanism of converting material wealth, i.e. cattle and cereal in the form of beer, into social rank.[226] The symbolism of fertility and interconnection of fertility, human sexuality and agricultural prosperity have been identified in its rituals, in which the wealth of a man, signifying fertility, is spread among fellow villagers through the distribution of food and beer and transmitted into the common land of the village through the erection of stones and wooden posts, which have been considered phallic symbols.[227]

[223] Chishi, interview.

[224] Wouters, Jelle P. "From Sharing to Accumulation" (*The Statesman* 21 December 2020).

[225] Marak and Yekha-ü, "Feast of Merit," 139.

[226] Julian, *The Nagas*, 42-43.

[227] Julian, *The Nagas*, 42-43; Hutton, J.H. "The Meaning and Method of the Erection of Monoliths by the Naga Tribes", (*The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 52 1922), 242-249; Hutton,

Interestingly, the elaborateness and the frequency of these feasts declined over time, especially in the light of the displeasure expressed by the missionaries over the fact that such occasions often involved excessive consumption of rice beer and a massive expenditure that was incurred by the community due to the lavishness of celebration. This had an impact on whatever that had existed of community life so far and on the one hand, paved the way for further individual accumulation of wealth and on the other, a reorganization of village feasts into 'love-feasts' exclusively among those who had embraced Christianity. Among the Chakhesang Nagas, feasts are still organized but with modifications suited to an altered Christian set of principles. The feast is organized on Christmas day, in which the host provides rice and cooked meat of any kind to the entire village. Animal sacrifice, use of rice beer and other rituals associated with the feasts in the pre-Christian practices came to be discontinued. The feast giver acquired the right to wear the 'Feast of Merit' shawl which could not be worn by just anyone. However, the altered understanding of wealth and rank in the contemporary context is signified by the fact that the Chakhesang feast of merit shawl came to be subsequently presented to important leaders of the community.[228]

Thus, food in Naga culture was more than a mere means of sustenance. It was part of intricate systems of socio-cultural habitus that gave structure and meaning to Naga life. Food functioned as a measure of wealth in the Naga society and a currency that determined socialisation and kinship habits. For example, marriages involved exchange of food in the form of rice beer, grains or livestock between the families of the bride and groom. After the marriage is solemnized, kinship relationships between both families would be formally established through the partaking of a meal

J.H. "Carved Monoliths at Dimapur and an Angami Naga Ceremony", (*The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 52 1922), 55-70.

[228] Marak and Yekha-ü, "Feast of Merit," 147.

together. Thereafter too, sharing of food was an important way in which kinship relationships was maintained. Food sharing also determined clan hierarchy and power structures in Naga society. E.g. The best portion of meat from a slaughter or hunt would always be reserved for the clan. Powerful *angh*s would also not share a platter of food with commoners, but only with those who rank within a certain elite social and political circle.

Communal village feasts and fasting came to be undermined to a large extent with the spread of Christianity. The missionaries dissuaded the converts from observing *genna*, especially those that required every villager to abstain from work and other activities. The success of a *genna* often depended on the collective participation of all villagers. But, with converts staying away from observing it, the success of the *genna* had become doubtful and ineffective. The insistence of the converts to fast during Sabbath also created much discord in the villages. During that time, the converts stayed away from work and other activities, and this once again, adversely rendered collective life ineffective.[229]

The missionaries also dissuaded the converts from participating in village festivities and feasts, which were often portrayed as occasions of 'drunkenness' and various 'illicit' activities. The excessive consumption of rice beer during such feasts was a matter of concern for the missionaries and was one of the principle reasons for discouraging converts from socializing too much with the unconverted. More about the missionary attitude towards consumption of rice beer and the strictures they put on the converts will be discussed later in this chapter. The rituals and ceremonial practices that accompanied these feasts were also a matter of concern for the missionaries. They were considered 'unchristian' and 'heathen', and therefore, against the tenets of being 'Christian'.

[229] Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation*, 52-53.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the sum effect of all this was the growing alienation of the converts from other villagers and their failure to fulfill their collective obligations and responsibilities towards the larger village community. In other words, a breakdown of the existing community structure.

IV

One particular area where missionaries and colonial observers were more vocal and strove to intervene was in relation to the conditions or environment in which food was prepared and consumed. This was primarily a result of certain notions that missionaries and colonial administrators had inherited from their own culture and was considered to be of a higher order, namely, notions of cleanliness and hygiene.

In general, the colonial outlook on local food habits was one marked by aversion. In 1875, Captain Butler wrote:

> "I believe there is really scarcely any single thing that walks, crawls, flies or swims that comes amiss to their voracious stomachs, and I have often been astounded to see the filthy carrion they can devour, not only with impunity, but with evident relish."[230]

The American Baptist missionaries, who came to the Naga Hills, were alarmed and taken aback by the various practices related to the production, preparation and consumption of food. Driven by an urge to 'improve' and 'civilize' the local people, they desired to intervene in their everyday dietary lives, at least that of the Christian converts.

[230] Smith, William Carlson, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam: A Study in Ethnology and* Sociology (London: Macmillan, 1925), 32.

Informed by a particular notion of hygiene and cleanliness, they found the kitchen space within a Naga home to be one that abounded in 'dirt and filth'. Within an existing home, livestock and poultry were reared and domesticated within their house premises. They did not specifically construct a chicken coop or a pig-sty, unlike today. It was not unusual to witness in the Naga kitchen a pig or a chicken alongside its owner. Even today, some villagers who rear fowl, let them out at sunrise and gather them back by sunset, and provide space in their kitchen for them to rest. It is natural occurrence to observe the fowls retiring back to the kitchen as their shelter during the dusk.[231] The American Baptists as well as colonial observers found the kitchen to be unkempt, disorganized and easily prone to various diseases. In a rather paternalistic way, Hutton made the following comparison between Sema and Angami homes:

> Pigs, dogs, and chickens are kept there, but they have not the freedom of the house, being more or less confined to the front room, while the house is frequently swept out, an event that never seems to happen to an Angami house at all.[232]

A similar comparison appears again: 'Though there is no lack of fleas and kindred vermin in the Sema house, it is far cleaner than that of the Angami.'[233] Thus, the kind of relationship and affinity that the local people shared with their domesticated fowls and livestock, who often retired to the kitchen at night, without any fear of diseases was alarming to colonial observers and missionaries. For the latter, observing the local people sharing their living rooms with domesticated fowls, pigs, and dogs did not align with their idea of decency, hygiene, and well-being. The kind of food and drinks consumed by Nagas were also perceived as unhygienic mostly because they were made and

[231] Chishi, interview.

[232] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 40.

[233] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 39.

kept within unkempt surroundings. Hutton records his disapproval of the practices prevalent among Angamis which were wanting in hygiene:

> Before a meal a man frequently rinses his hands in water, but this is by no means invariably done. Wooden dishes are washed out more or less after use, but the earthen cooking-pots are only rinsed with a little water poured into the bottom. It is thought that too much washing is apt to cause too breakages.[234]

It was here that the missionaries instructed the converts to adopt clean and unclean dietary practices that were integral to a healthy and clean Christian lifestyle.[235] As the Nagas lived in small compact dark rooms with no windows, accompanied by cattle and fowls, the missionaries insisted on having ventilated living spaces with separate habitation for livestock. Whereas, to the Nagas, it was necessary to live in a dark room for fear of raids and attacks, and to appease the 'house spirit who preferred darker settings'.[236] Also, it was never a custom up until then to build a separate habitation for fowls, pigs, and dogs. For both humans and animals saw each other as sharing a reciprocal relationship, wherein the there was an implicit understanding that the latter would be taken care of and fed, and would eventually give themselves to be consumed by humans. The spirits that resided among them were considered arbitrators ensuring this balance and reciprocity between the two entities are maintained.[237] Human-animal relationship was not one that was informed by an anthropocentric outlook, but one where through principles of reciprocity, life was shared within a given space. This understanding of the Nagas did not coincide with that of the missionaries.

[234] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 96.

[235] Minutes of the Conference of the Assam Missionaries of the American Baptist Missionary Union. February 11th to 19th 1899, 43.

[236] Hotokhu Chishi, interview.

[237] Chishi, interview.

According to them, existing ways needed to be reformed and it was advised that missionaries who came to work in the Naga Hills were knowledgeable in correcting unsanitary and unhygienic conditions that could produce potential diseases.[238] As that would enable them to take proper remedial measures for themselves as well as the Nagas.

Inculcating ideas of hygiene and well-being received special attention in the missionary work that was carried out among the Nagas. The wives of missionaries were expected to play an important role in this endeavor, especially given the assumption that they were best suited to engage with the women of the household and nurture them to become good wives, who would be instrumental in imparting cultural and religious values among other members of the household. As prospective homemakers, the importance of leading a hygienic lifestyle comprised, alongside lessons from the Bible and the art of sewing and knitting, a significant part of mission school education among girls.[239] Christian converts were instructed to keep all the domestic animals out of their homes, maintain clean and ventilated surroundings, and prepare a healthy diet. They enforced the idea that a good Christian ought to adopt a clean and hygienic lifestyle, and distinguish themselves from the heathen who was steeped in old habits and tradition, lived literally and symbolically in 'filth and dirt'. Removing the physical filth and dirt from their lives came to be declared as essential towards shedding the 'darker shades of heathenism' and adopting a Christian way of life – a healthier and better way of life.

Colonial administrators and missionaries also assumed a correlation between the prevalence of various ailments and the perceived lack of hygiene in the Naga society. It was on the basis of such

[238] Clark, Rev E.W. Amguri, The Baptist Missionary Magazine- Published by the American Baptist Missionary Union. Vol.LXVIII. No.11, Aug 8,1888, 145.

[239] Minutes of the Assam Baptist Missionary Conference. Sadiya, Assam, Impur Field, (December 8-13, 1937) 47-48.

an assumption that the missionaries undertook medical interventions. It was an aspect that was emphasized upon during their itinerary tours. Missionary C S Gunning talks of encountering a woman who was scantily dressed and full of scabies during an itinerant tour. She was provided with ointments, soaps, and clothes, and put into the girls' room where she was taught the art of hygiene and wellbeing. It is said that, she became a reformed woman in three months.[240]

Traditionally, people would appease the spirits whenever sickness or diseases befell them. But, increasingly, the missionary was becoming the new medicine men, who would treat the sick and care for the wounded using medicines and ointments. News spread about how the new religion could help them recover from various diseases which they believed was from the evil spirit, making conversion even more pronounced. According to Longri Ao, an Ao missionary, medicines played an important role in winning the hearts of the converts. When he helped a sick person of Wakching recover from his illness, people were astonished and were eager to follow him and his religion.[241] Of course, joining the new religion required them to adopt a more 'hygienic' and 'clean' lifestyle as well as surroundings, where food was prepared and consumed towards ensuring a healthy constitution.

What becomes evident in all this is that preparation and consumption of food came to be implicated in the relation that missionaries and colonial observers outlined between cleanliness, hygiene and good health. As the local people increasingly took to Christianity, the need for the converts to adopt these colonial notions became all the more important and widespread, a pre-requisite towards becoming modern subjects.

[240] C. S. Gunning, *Memoirs: A Lepers Cry and God's Answer*, Commissioner of Assam.

[241] Rao, O.M. *Longri Ao- A Biography*, (Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati 1986), 35.

V

As mentioned earlier, feasting and fasting were indispensable to the everyday life of the local people. It was deeply connected to every ceremonial practice that was conducted within a village community. They were also occasions where the community ties, and the human relations with the natural world as well as the spirit world, were affirmed and strengthened. They were occasions to share surplus, and also demonstrate expressions of generosity. However, such feasting and fasting came to be looked down upon, with contempt, by the missionaries. One of the primary reasons for this, as cited by the missionaries themselves, was the 'drunkenness' that accompanied community feasts. In fact, rice beer, which was brewed by every household and an integral part of Naga diet, and which caused such 'drunkenness', itself was considered 'evil' and to be discontinued from the everyday diet of the people.

Rice beer was staple. It was consumed by both young and the old as part of the everyday diet as well as for ritual and religious purposes. Beyond just an 'intoxicant', it was considered a healthy substitute for water, which provided strength to perform everyday chores, especially in the fields. It also acted as a convenient source of nourishment and refreshment that could be carried during fieldwork or other activities. Hutton described rice beer as 'more than a drink, it is almost the staple article of consumption, the staff (sic) of life, and might be more appropriately reckoned as food rather than drink, only if it were so classified there would scarcely be anything left that could be called drink, as the Angami only drinks water in the last resort'.[242] A similar fondness for rice

[242] Hutton, J. H. *The Angami Nagas with Some Notes on the Neighboughring Tribes*, (London: Macmillan, 1921), 97.

beer was noted regarding the other tribes as well.[243] During rituals and festive occasions, it acted as a means of leisure as well as socialization. Festivals like the 'Feast of Merit', or agrarian celebrations were occasions when it was indispensable. In his description of the feasting tradition among Northern Sangtam Nagas, C. R. Stonor noted the sacramental value associated with the food and beer offered during feasts and festivals.[244] Like all other elements of Naga life before the advent of Christianity, the preparation and consumption of rice beer was inextricably bound to their spiritual ontology. It was this ritualistic value of rice beer that made it particularly unacceptable to the American Baptist missionaries who were looking to replace the Naga spiritual system with a rigorous Christian life purified of all remnants of its pre-Christian spiritual system.[245] The banning of feasts and other ritual worships of deities and spirits for converts entailed a strict imperative on the brewing or consumption of rice beer which was a necessary part of all such rituals. They were persuaded to not indulge in drinking as it would be 'sinful' to do so.[246]

When the missionaries first arrived in the Ao-Naga region, they tried to forbid them from drinking rice beer. They were taught that abstinence from drinking of rice beer was an important outward sign of Christian life. Although, an everyday fare to the Nagas, it was regarded as contrary to the teachings of the new religion, and therefore, the converts had to abstain from consuming rice beer. The missionaries persistently preached that a drinker of rice beer would be thrown into hell-fire.[247]

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[243] Mills, J.P. *The Lhota Nagas*, (London: Macmillan, 1922), 78, Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*,97, Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 146. J.P.Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, (London: Macmillan, 1937), 112, William Carlson Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam: A Study in Ethnology and Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1925),34, Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 48.

[244] Stonor, ''The Feasts of Merit,"10.

[245] Arkothong Longkumer, ''Rice-Beer, Purification and Debates over Religion and Culture in Northeast India,'' (*South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39:2, 2016), 444-461.

[246] Rev. Bengt I Anderson, *We lived in Nagaland*: *The Experiences of a Missionary Family*, 19.

[247] Anderson, Nagaland.

From their observation, the missionaries believed that the excessive use of rice beer rendered the Nagas lazier or disinclined to work and Naga men in particular created problems in the family after they got drunk.[248]

However, it was not easy for the Nagas to let go of this essential dietary habit. The missionaries began to observe that both the converts and the non-converts were finding it difficult to forgo this tradition. According to Assu Kikhevi Chishi, an early convert, 'those who were converted could not also give up drinking rice-beer. Although the missionaries intervened in their lifestyles, they would find a way to consume rice beer'.[249] W. C. Smith records an incident where a missionary asked some Ao villagers if they wanted a teacher to instruct them and the villagers replied, 'We know that the "new custom" is better than the old, but we want our rice beer rather than this new teaching'.[250] The converts' inability to give up their habit of drinking rice beer tells us how indispensable it was for them. Although they were converted, they had to till their lands and farms. This arduous task required strength which they derived from the rice beer. Missionaries often complained of early converts not understanding the ways of the new religion introduced to them, hence, they would falter on most occasions and turned back to old habits of rice beer consumption.[251]

The missionary interpretation of rice beer and its consumption was shaped by the prohibitionist sentiments prevalent in the United States, especially among the evangelicals, at the time. Furthermore, temperance had become an important point of popular mobilization in Britain as well

[248] Mar Pongner, *Morung Speaks*, (CTC, Mokokchung, 2011), 63.

[249] Kikhevi Chishi, interview, Littami Village, 23rd June 2021.

[250] Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe*, 8.

[251] Kikhevi Chishi, Interview.

as in the United States. This, of course, had an effect on the missionaries and certain colonial officials who came and worked in India.[252] Among the missionaries who worked in the Naga Hills, there was difference of opinion regarding the consumption of rice beer. Edward Clark, who worked among the Ao Nagas, suggested that rice beer was a product that the Nagas brewed for themselves as part of their daily diet. Hence, while its consumption needs to be regulated, it would not be prudent to take an aggressive stance against it.[253] Meanwhile, Perrine and Haggard, who joined Clark in the Impur Mission subsequently, were appalled by the consumption of rice beer by the Nagas and called for its immediate and absolute prohibition among the Christian converts.[254] However, in spite of these differences, the home board of the mission insisted that 'certainly in all particulars where good morals and purity of the church are concerned… the grounds gained should be persistently held.'[255] Hence, its consumption should be restricted. In fact, subsequently, even Clark came around to agreeing with the home board and feel the need to put an end to the consumption of rice beer. In one of his reports, he writes appreciatively about how a young woman who had converted and was working as a schoolteacher was surprised to see the extent to which the old festivity marked by riotousness and drunkenness were growing less, and little by little the old heathen rites and ceremonies were being abandoned by her village community.[256]

As the missionaries began to dissuade converts from drinking rice beer, feasting and socializing with the rest of the villagers, it created an atmosphere of discord and division within the village

[252] Longkumer, "Rice-beer".

[253] Letter from E.W. Clark, April 30, 1900.

[254] Dr. Narola Ao McFayden, *Travelling in Time with Pioneers of our Faith:* Edward Winter Clark and Mary Mead Clark, (Knowledge Foundation, 2016), 57.

[255] Letter from Duncan to Perrine, November 27, 1896.

[256] E.W. Clark, The Baptist Missionary Magazine- *Published by the American Baptist Missionary Union.* Vol. LXVIII. No.6, Feb 28, 1888, 161.

community. They increasingly became hostile towards and alienated from each other. The converts would not partake in communal gatherings and this broke the sense of community and feeling of obligation towards each other. The Christian idea of individual salvation, which was taught to the early converts, was also a factor contributing towards nurturing a sense of individualism over communal obligations and responsibilities.

One of the replacements that missionaries introduced for rice beer was tea. There was already a flourishing tea industry in the Brahmaputra Valley and generating a new market for tea among the hill tribes was considered good for the plantations in the plains. Through the politics of abstention and introduction of tea, missionaries had enabled the growing profitability of the plantations. The economic effect of this on the Nagas was noticeable and as Fürer-Haimendorf commented, while rice beer could be brewed from rice or other locally grown grains, which was abundantly available, now the Nagas had to become dependent on the plains for tea and sugar.[257]

VI

Much of the existing ways of food preparation continued in spite of the interventions of missionaries and colonial observers. However, as a result of the increasing influence of the plains and other parts of the world via those who increasingly became exposed to a world beyond Naga Hills, new ingredients such as oil and other spices as well as new food items, especially those that involved baking, came to be gradually introduced and added on to everyday diet. The Ao Nagas had started purchasing small quantities of flour and tinned foods from missionaries, army personnel as well as the Marwari traders who had also begun to enter the hills. Missionaries and

[257] Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 57.

British personnel also introduced various new fruits and vegetables that could be easily grown in the garden.[258]

Local missionaries were also instrumental in initiating far reaching changes in the existing dietary practices of certain tribes, especially in the excluded areas beyond British control. For instance, the staple food of the Yimchunger tribe was primarily millet and Job's tears. But, under the influence of Sema and Ao missionaries who worked among them from the 1950s onwards, rice began to be cultivated and soon enough, rice and long beans had replaced millet and Job's tears.[259] In general, there was a perception that rice cultivation was a marker of a more 'civilized' or 'advanced' society. This was a perception that was held by ethnic communities in the north-eastern region in general as well as various Naga tribes in particular. Hence, missionaries from more 'advanced' Naga tribes, who worked among other Naga tribes, introducing rice cultivation was understood to be a means of 'civilizing' and 'improving' the life of the latter.

The Second World War had a major impact on the subsistence economy of Naga Hills. The movement of refugees from Burma following the invasion of Japan put a lot of strain on the village granaries. The local people received the refugees kindly and fed them from whatever surplus they had in their granaries. The village granaries soon became empty. It also became difficult to acquire food and other commodities from the plains because of the sudden inflation following the bombardment of Imphal in February 1942. Cases of famine were reported in various parts of the hill tracts inhabited by Naga tribes in Manipur and the Naga Hills. The bad productivity of crop in

[258] Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe,* 181.

[259] Debojyoti Das, ''From Millet to Rice: The Politics of the New Faith and Time Discipline among Borderland Communities in Eastern Nagaland,'' (*Asian Ethnology* 79. 2 2020), 377–394.

the previous year also worsened the famine. There was very little help forthcoming from the colonial government and the state of famine made the people vulnerable to various diseases.[260]

The situation was made even more worse with the Japanese invasion and the theatre of war shifting to the Naga Hills. The large size of the Japanese and INA forces combined added further misery to the already famished villages. Grains, livestock and other food were taken from villages to feed the armies. The subsequent war and the aerial bombardment of various Naga villages occupied by the Japanese led to various granaries and crops being destroyed. Scarcity of food and starvation, caused by the war, was a moment of reckoning for the Nagas. It was the first time that they felt a state of famine as brutal as it can be. It marked a breaking point.[261]

The relief and reconstruction work that began following the war encouraged the villagers to return to their villages and fields on the grounds that food ration and other materials to restart life would be provided at their respective villages. There were supply depots to provide rice and paddy until the next harvest could be reaped. Kitchen utensils and agricultural equipment, which were often taken away or destroyed by Japanese forces, were compensated with new ones. Livestock such as pigs, chickens and cattle were provided to each household. All this was a temporary relief for the people of the hills. However, it also replaced the earlier self-sufficiency with a state of dependency on the colonial government as well as outside suppliers.[262]

[260] Thomas, *Evangelising*, 96-97.

[261] Thomas, 97-98.

[262] Thomas, 100-101.

VII

To conclude, besides a few non-essential items that were obtained from neighbouring culture areas through trade contact, pre-colonial society was largely a self-sufficient and self-contained unit as far as its food needs and usage was concerned. As a subsistence economy, there was not much prospect for surplus production. Whatever was accumulated in the form of food and livestock was usually converted into rank through the celebration of elaborate community feasts, which were also methods of practicing generosity in providing for the less fortunate members of the society. Extensive foraging habits and a rich knowledge base of the use of forest material provided alternative sources of nutrition and survival during periods of famine, scarcity or crop failure.

However, colonial intervention led to the reshaping of borders between the hills and the plains, altering age-old routes of communication and trade, through which food items were procured and exchanged between regions. The coming of Second World War in the 1940s brought about unprecedented forms of scarcity and famine into the Naga Hills, also unsettling the economic self-sufficiency of the hills. The state of dependence on other regions and markets, even for staple food items, became more of a reality thereon.

Erosion of existing social and economic structures led to changes in land use and distribution patterns. Communal participation in farming activities was gradually replaced with private and individualized participation. This led to loss of the existing communitarian culture of food sharing and co-operation. Discouragement of communal feasting affected the existing system of expending accumulated farm surplus. Spread of Christianity also led to the gradual loss of sacred significance attached to food and related activities, which were based on a worldview of synergistic connection

and continuity with all other life forms. Over time, food was reduced to an ordinary commodity shorn of the deeper embedded meanings that it had earlier possessed.

As an afterword, in the subsequent decades, the spread of Christianity and modern education gradually led to changes in farming habits. New crops and modern farming practices came to be introduced. In the pretext of modernizing agricultural practices, there was a consistent push on the part of the new Indian nation-state as well as other non-governmental organizations to discourage *jhum* cultivation. Moreover, policies aimed at increasing farm yield were usually formulated without taking into account its environmental, climatic, and cultural impacts. There was also an encouragement of monocropping exercises, leading to loss of crop diversity and soil fertility, while replacing of *jhum* fields with sedentary farm lands had also led to species loss and unavailability of food items previously foraged from *jhum* lands.

Shift to genetically engineered crop varieties have also led to loss of indigenous species as well as depriving farmers of the right to preserve and develop local seeds. Most importantly, they have altered the cultural life of the Naga tribes, for whom agricultural and gathering practices were deeply connected to their identity and way of being.

Transitions in food practices have also initiated changes in the contemporary Naga lifestyle. Market liberalization and the introduction of new ingredients that were initially not locally produced, such as sugar, oil, processed flour, and food items like bread, fast food items like instant noodles, chips, and Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) has had a deep impact. Urbanization and influence of mass media has generated attraction for packaged and processed food items. Exposure to other food cultures through mass media or through travel and migration has also introduced Nagas to new cuisines which have influenced their contemporary eating habits. Mushrooming of

various food joints and restaurants serving a variety of non-indigenous food items are particularly attractive to a new generation of Nagas.

These changes in the food habits can also be attributed to the economic changes and growth of a moneyed class among the Nagas. Change of lifestyle and migration to urban areas within or outside the hills has also changed food procuring patterns. In the case of the Sumis, the knowledge of the method of farming crops like paddy is slowly dying, with the newer generations no longer engaging in the farming activities. Those who venture into a livelihood of farming prefer using modern tools and machinery, forgoing the age-old methods of cultivation of their ancestors.[263] Over the years, changes in the socio-economic structures of the Naga tribes have resulted in a gradual shift in the food consumption patterns as well as in the level of physical activity. A major source of physical exertion for the Nagas was manually engaging in their fields, in every step in the rigorous process of farming. Today, most of the manual work is replaced by the machines, however the dietary intake has remained unchanged, which has brought about imbalance in the nutritional levels, affecting bodily constitution and health. This, for instance, could be a contributing factor to the rising cases of obesity and cardiovascular diseases among the local people.[264]

Another example is the case of the preparation of *axone* or fermented soybean, an ingredient which is a fixture in every Sumi kitchen. Part of its preparation process involves the presence of a working hearth, something which is not commonly found in households in the urban areas. Today, fewer

[263] Swu, interview.

[264] N. K.Mungreiphy, Satwanti Kapoor, and Rashmi Sinha, "Association between BMI, Blood Pressure, and Age: Study among Tangkhul Naga Tribal Males of Northeast India*," (Hindawi Publishing Corporation, Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 2011, Dec, 2011), Article ID 748147, 6 pages doi:10.1155/2011/748147.

people make *axone* in their homes due to this reason, and prefer buying it from the market. These are just a few instances of how earlier ideas of farming and food practices slowly getting replaced by newer techniques and food items that are now commercially available.[265] These changes imply not simply a loss to the variety in food practices, but a loss of the indigenous knowledge system related to harvesting as well as preparation of various traditional food items.[266]

However, such changes in Naga food habits does not imply that Nagas have completely abandoned their earlier food habits and replaced it with alien products and cuisines. People continue to practice earlier food habits, especially since it has become an important marker of their identity as well. Changes have occurred in the production, procurement and consumption patterns of the Naga people, but these are largely the result of acclimatization to altered socio-economic conditions of their lived realities. Although new food items from the industrialized global market have been added to the contemporary Naga food basket, there is a thriving market for indigenous food items within the hills and even in towns and cities all over the country wherever there is a significant Naga migrant population. Naga villagers continue to grow, forage and process food items which are highly sought after in urban spaces and form a major part of the staple diet. Every mid -sized town in the Naga Hills would have a market for locally sourced products that sell food items unique to the Naga diet ranging from wild herbs, vegetables, shoots, roots and mushrooms to insects, rabbits, toads, rats, larvae etc. While these markets provide a source of livelihood for a section of

[265] Shiheli Aye, interview, Sutemi Village on 23rd Nov, 2021.

[266] Harriet V. Kuhnlein and Olivier Receveur, "Dietary Change and Traditional Food System of Indigenous Peoples," (*Centre for Nutrition and the Environment of Indigenous Peoples, and School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, Macdonald Campus of McGill University*), 21,111, Lakeshore Road, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, Canada H9X 3V9.

villagers, in this urbanized context however, a growing distance has developed between the producer and consumer of food products.

Migration and the resulting interaction with groups outside the hills as well as promotion of Naga traditional food through 'ethnic' food festivals has created knowledge and interest regarding Naga traditional food among non-Naga populations, giving rise to the growth and popularity of ethnic Naga food joints in towns and many major cities across the country. The attachment for traditional food items among migrant Naga populations living in various urban locations across the country has created a market for food packaging industry with online as well as offline presence, which mostly deal with dried, fermented, and pickled items that are unique to the Naga cuisine. Migration has also given rise to a small-scale export market for fresh food items and ingredients from the hills to various cities of the country. However, as Naga food has begun to travel to various parts of the country along with Naga migrants, it has also led to food-related conflicts with mainland Indian cultural groups, mainly owing to the racialized labelling of fermented delicacies of the Nagas as 'stinky' and 'dirty'.[267] Ban on the trade and consumption of dog meat by the government of Nagaland in 2020 sparked a nationwide debate on the distinctive dietary aspects of the Naga people.[268] Within the highly sensitive general discourse of food politics in contemporary India,

[267] Dolly Kikon, ''Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the Nation's Table in India,'' (*South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies* 38(2) 2015), 20-35; Dolly Kikon, ''Bamboo Shoot in Our Blood: Fermenting Flavors and Identities in Northeast India,'' (*Current Anthropolog* 62. 24, 2021), 376-387; Dolly Kikon, ''Dirty Food: Racism and Casteism in India,'' (*Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45:2 2022), 278-297.

[268] Roderick Wijunamai, ''With dog meat ban, India is stilltrying to 'civilise' the Nagas,''. *The Scroll* July 8, 2020. https://scroll.in/article/966757/with-dog-meat-ban-india-is-still-trying-to-civilise-the-nagas; Borah, Jahnabee, ''Whose dog meat is it anyway?'' (*Mintlounge*. July 8 2020); Dolly Kikon, ''The Politics of Dog Meat Ban in Nagaland,'' (*Frontline*. July 14, 2020); Dolly Kikon, ''Debating Dog Meat in Dimapur,''. (*Raiot* September 1, 2017).

these conflicts surrounding Naga food habits are a further corollary to the cultural and political marginalization that the Naga populations face within the postcolonial Indian nation.

Chapter 4

Habitation, Architecture and Spatial Practices

Transitions in what constitutes spaces of dwelling, and the related changes in architectural as well as spatial practices during the first half of twentieth century was crucial in terms of inaugurating the modern times in the Naga Hills. Like most aspects of Naga material culture, they underwent substantial changes under the impact of Christianization as well as the politico-military struggles related to the colonial policies, the second world war, and the subsequent Indo-Naga conflict. The objective of this chapter is to track this transition.

I

The pre-modern village was an independent socio-political unit.[269] It was built aloof from each other, ensuring its political, social and economic independence and sovereignty. The land for a village settlement was not chosen arbitrarily. Among the Sumis, a rooster was brought along as the men set forth in search of a suitable land where they could settle to build their new village. If the rooster crowed while wandering about the jungle, it was indicative that they ought to choose that location as their new habitat. Then, they went back to their people and brought them to their new settlement, along with their families, cattle and fowl, and other worldly belongings. Once they reached their new settlement, another ritual followed, to seek blessings of the spirits for prosperity

[269] E. W. Clark, *Ao Naga Grammer with Illustrative Phrases and Vocabulary* (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Printing Ofiice, 1893), 5.

and fertility to their new settlement.[270] Following which, various ceremonial practices were performed, often seeking permission and offering sacrifices to the existing dwellers of the land, the plants, animals and the spirits residing in the various natural elements residing in the land. While these practices varied from village to village, the act of sacrificing a pig, dog or rooster, and making an offering of it along with rice and rice beer, especially to the spirits, was commonly practiced across villages.[271]

Generally, villages were constructed on top of a hill so that it could be strategically guarded, thwarting any surprise attack from potential enemies.[272] Mary Mead Clark remarks that "sentinels kept watch by turns as here was an all too inviting prey for wild beasts and human enemies as well. For additional security, the space around was made to bristle with pongees [sic] stuck in the ground."[273] The ideal location for the construction of a village was also considered on the basis of its suitability for cultivation – the availability of fertile soil and its proximity to water sources. The latter generally meant possibilities of damming a stream nearby. Bigger villages, at times, had more than one water source; while it was not uncommon for certain smaller villages having to fetch water from distant water sources.

Sumi villages were built on the summit or spur of a hill depending upon the climatic conditions of the locality: in the warm area around the Doyang valley, villages are situated on the summit while in the colder and higher regions, a shoulder below the ridge was preferred.[274] Angami villages

[270] N. Vixeshe Chishi, Interview, 2019.

[271] A. Nshoga, *Traditional Naga Village System and its transformation*, Anshah Publishing House, 2009, 56.

[272] Dr. Narola Ao McFayden, *Travelling in Time with Pioneers of our Faith:* Edward Winter Clark and Mary Mead Clark, (Knowledge Foundation), 2016, 20.

[273] Mary Mead Clark, A Corner in India, Philadelphia, American Publication Society, 1907, 5-14.

[274] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 33.

were situated on the summit of a hill or on a ridge.[275] Lotha villages were always built on the summit of a ridge except that they were situated on the spurs of the Wokha hill.[276] The Rengma people preferred a flat topped spur with steep sides, which they considered favourable for their defence needs.[277] The other important criteria in the selection of the Rengma village site was the availability of a large tree that would be used for hanging trophies of war.[278]

A Naga village was divided into two or more wards, which colonial accounts denote as *khel*, depending on its size and internal composition. An exogamous unit, the *khel* would be usually composed of members of a particular clan or phratry, although unrelated clans might also be residents and members of a *khel* at times. During colonial times, in Angami villages, the *tepfu/tino* ie. *khel* housing areas were often separated by deep lanes and stone walls.[279] Sometimes such walls could be quite high and solid, serving as a defence during inter *khel* feuds.[280] The wall surrounding the Thekronoma clan in Jotsoma village is reported to have been more than twelve feet in its thickness.[281] The Assam Census Report of 1891 records the division of Khonoma village into seven *khel*s. In fact, it is the *khel* and not the village which has been stated to be the primary social unit among the Angamis, and bitter blood feuds were common among the *khel*s of the same village.[282] In some Lotha villages, the housing quarters of each *yangkho* (Lotha term for *khel*)

[275] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 43.

[276] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 21.

[277] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 47.

[278] Mills, *Rengma Nagas*, 45.

[279] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 45.

[280] Hutton, *Angami Nagas*.

[281] J.H. Hutton, 'The Use of Stone in the Naga Hills'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 56(1926), 73.

[282] Godden, Gertrude M. 'Naga and Other Frontier Tribes of North-East India' (continued) *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 27(1898), 23.

would be separated from the others by a strip of open ground.[283] Among Rengmas too, the village population was always divided into several *khel* groups. While the smallest village would have two or three of them, some villages are believed to have had up to nine *khel* groups. Mills records four *khel*s in the Rengma village of Meluri, five in Tseminyu, and nine in Tesophenyu.[284] Ao villages have also been recorded to have geographical divisions of their housing colonies into *muphu*, residents of which sometimes have different customs or *genna* rules. At times, a particular *muphu* or *khel* might have a separate organization of its own and function as a separate village altogether.[285] *Khel* divisions have also been noted to have existed among the Nagas of Manipur.[286] More tangible boundary demarcation among *khel* areas was common only among some large villages in the west, while in the cases of the rest, boundaries were rather provisionally marked and generally known to the inhabitants and rarely disrespected.

Attention to the question of defence was an important preoccupation underpinning the characteristics of the Naga built spaces. Naga villages were highly fortified enclosed units for they required securing in the face of ubiquitous warfare which formed an intrinsic part of the pre-modern Naga lifeworld. Defences were also necessary for keeping out wild animals. Fortification mechanisms have been recorded to be particularly robust in Angami villages prior to colonial annexation. John Butler had witnessed massive stone walls, stockades of thorny bushes and deep ditches surrounding Angami villages. The fence was often provided with loopholes for positioning

[283] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 24.

[284] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 56.

[285] Mills, *The Ao* Nagas, 82.

[286] Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipu*r, 43.

muskets.[287] Besides, the surrounding hillsides and approaches to the village were laid with concealed *panji*s, and pitfalls. The path approaching the village would be quite treacherous for a stranger; the path would lie through narrow, treacherous lanes, with high banks and overhung with tangled prickly creepers. At times the approach might lie along a steep ravine or an old riverbed. All these measures ensured that the path is traversed only in single file.[288] Most southern Naga groups lived within similar stockade or walled in villages.[289] Lotha villages did not make use of stone walls, they were usually surrounded by a sturdy fence made of sticks and bamboo, studded with *panji*s, which would be skirted by a deep ditch with a *panji*ed bottom. Rough planks served as a kind of drawbridge across, which would be removed after dark. The approach to Lotha villages were flanked by huge trees which contained small houses as lookout posts upon the branches.[290] Ao villages were also similarly skirted round by a fence and one or more *panji*ed ditches. The fence was often built of a double line of posts supporting a wall of woven bamboo. Like the Lotha practice, Ao villages also arranged for lookout posts in the branches of tall trees around the village boundary. An avenue of trees could be found along the main entrance which are usually ficus trees planted near the village gate for this purpose with long branches allowed to form a canopy over the entrance for stationing sentries more strategically.[291] Rengma villages too had a similar practice of posting sentries in small lookout houses built on the branches of trees approaching the village. Western Rengma villages built stone walls around the village perimeter, while eastern villages mostly used bamboo palisades and stockades. A *panji*ed moat provided a secure perimeter around

[287] R.G. Woodthorpe, 'Notes on the Wild Tribes inhabiting the so-called Naga Hills, on our North-east Frontier of India. Part I'. *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol. 11 (1882), 63.

[288] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 44.

[289] Hodson, *The Naga Tribes*, 41.

[290] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 22.

[291] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*,73; Woodthorpe, 'Notes on the Wild Tribes', 56-73.

the village boundary.[292] The Konyak and other eastern Naga villages sometimes grew a thick hedge of cane to act as the village fence.[293] Sumi villages were similarly secured with a double briar fence and a moat around the village boundary, both studded with *panji*s.[294] In some villages, the fence was made of wooden stakes lashed together and bristling with *panjis.* The Lotha and Ao villages, in colonial accounts, lack the intensive fortification typical of southern Naga groups because being located among a group of friendly villages reduced the threat of enemy attacks to some extent. Sumi villages, on the other hand, did not generally depend so much on physical defence infrastructure, as they did on the reputation of their warriors, which acted as a deterrent to frequent attacks anyway.

The village gate was another important part of the defence set up of all Naga villages. Captain Butler has mentioned the thick, heavy wooden gates of Angami villages, the *kharu*, carved out of a single piece of solid wood and securely fastened from the inside. Besides the main entrance of the village, the *khel* areas were separated from each other by stone walls or stockades of thorny bushes and *panji*ed ditches. Entry into each *khel* ward was guarded by similar solid doors of wood called *kharu*. The main village gateway was further supplied with raised look out posts. About 15-20 feet high notched poles acted as the approach to these look out posts.[295] Following a practice commonly found among other Naga villages, the traditional Angami *kharu* was ceremoniously and elaborately carved with symbolic motifs.

[292] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 47-48.

[293] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 21.

[294] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas,* 34.

[295] Woodthorpe, 'Notes on the Wild Tribes', 63.

The construction of the *kharu* began by identifying a tree auspicious enough for the purpose, which is then dragged to the outskirts of the village, close to the main gate where it is carved and painted. The dragging is carried out by the young men of the *khel* in a ceremonial procession, with women preparing and serving food and drinks. The relief carving and painting is entrusted to selected artists, who must observe appropriate *genna* rituals throughout the process. The adornments on a typical Angami *kharu* included a man in ceremonial costume holding a spear and a severed human head in either hand enclosed by a set of buffalo or mithun heads. This central carving was surrounded by painted symbols for the sun and the moon, paddy and millet, and of dao, and occasionally guns. The top of the door had a row of human heads while a row of women's breast was carved at the bottom.[296] The *kharu* was installed after due ritual performance by the village priest at the Sekrenyi festival. Such a door usually lasted for about a decade before it was replaced.

In the pre-Christian days, the *kharu* was more than just a door for the Angamis. It had the status of a protective spirit that received equivalent veneration and inspired a strict code of conduct. Thus, for instance, it was taboo to touch the *kharu* casually, or to touch either the *kharu* or the trees that were grown adjacent to it with a dao. Throwing stones at the *kharu* was thought to result in the death of the oldest man of the *khel*.[297] Ao villages too were closed with a similar wooden door ceremoniously carved out of a single auspicious piece of wood. Ao village gates were provided with lychgate like gable roof over them. They were also provided with lookout posts.[298] The village gate of a typical Sumi Naga village was similarly an important structure. To construct this gate, a huge tree was selected from the forest through a customary ritual process. This chosen tree was

[296] Joshi, Vibha. 'Angami Village Gates *Kharu*' in Kunz, Richard and Joshi, Vibha (Eds.) *Naga: A Forgotten Mountain Region Rediscovered*. Museum der Kulturen Basel, Christoph Merian Verlag, 2009, 61.

[297] Vibha, *Village Gates*, 61-62.

[298] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 72.

then chopped and fashioned into a huge frame, with carvings of various motifs. These motifs symbolized prosperity and fertility, with the hope that the entire village would be blessed abundantly by the same. The village gate also acted as a protective barrier against external raids.

Granaries were built away from the main dwelling area, at the edge of the village boundary. They were built at a distance primarily to reduce the risk of granaries catching fire. Among the Aos, they were constructed lower down the slopes and provided with stilts that raised them a few feet above the ground.[299] Lothas also constructed thatched granaries called *osung* outside the village which were supplied with raised posts.[300] Similarly, among the Sumis, they were built a cluster away from the homes and were raised above the ground with the help of posts. Sumi villages had thick clumps of bamboo surrounding most of these granaries. The intention of building granaries on a raised platform was to keep grains away from moisture or wild animals.

Villages, granaries and fields were connected through constructed paths. Beyond the immediate limits of the village, Angamis maintained wide and well-made paths leading to their fields and neighbouring villages, although distant village clusters were connected only by narrow tracks. They built bridges wherever necessary: narrow streams were crossed using a single tree or two as required which is felled across. Sometimes the surface of the log was embossed with buffalo horn patterns. Wider streams were forded with the help of cane suspension bridges.[301] The Rengmas liked to plant shady oak trees along the paths connecting the village to their fields. Besides, a belt

[299] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 81.

[300] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 22-23.

[301] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 46.

of forests was maintained all around the village, from which firewood and timber were obtained.[302] Woodthorpe had appreciated the road engineering skills of the Aos, which were built across easy gradients and steep parts provided with steps. He has made a similar observation about the road making skills of the Angamis. However, he had found the streets in Lotha areas too narrow, uneven and clogged with rain water.[303] As recorded by Mills, Lotha villages were connected by narrow paths, which had to be traversed in single file only. Some points in the track are provided with toe holds and notched poles. The means of building bridges were similar to that of the Angamis, i.e. big trees placed across narrow streams and cane suspension bridges across wider ones. Bridges found in the Sumi areas during colonial times were functional in style and was also similar to that of the Lothas. It was also common for rest houses to be built along the paths. Among the Angamis, paths leading to their terraced fields were sometimes provided with rest houses.

In the fields, most Naga groups had the practice of constructing field houses which were usually temporary thatch huts used for resting during the day or even for halting overnight during cultivation season. Among Sumis, such huts are called *aleha-ki*. Sumi Naga houses were also provided with sitting-out areas,[304] which were usually made of bamboo and planks. They were of two most commonly found types - *Aqobo* and *Akhacha*.[305] The *aqobo* were seating areas built on a raised platform with steps leading up to the bench-like structure. The *akhacha* was closer to the ground and not as elevated as the *aqobo*. They functioned as living rooms where guests or

[302] J.H. Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 95.1 (1965), 29.

[303] Woodthorpe, 'Notes on the Wild Tribes', 56-73, 203-204.

[304] Woodthorpe, *Notes on Wild Tribes.*

[305] Khehoto K Assumi, Interview, 20th December, 2021.

neighbours spent their time together. In most cases, villagers sat and discussed matters regarding their everyday fieldwork, family issues and relations, and even marriages at these platforms.

In most of these constructions, stones were extensively used. The Angamis and some other southern Naga tribes were particularly skilled in the use of stones for various construction purposes. Besides the ingenious stone dry stack masonry walls, Angami terraced fields were provided with retaining walls made of strong wooden planks or stone slabs. A similar practice also existed among the Sumis of the Lazami area who practiced terraced cultivation.[306]

Angami villages were also provided with raised public dancing places called *tehuba* with paved stone sides. Another feature of Angami villages were the sitting-out platforms – the *daho* and *bãzé*, made of stone slabs or solid wooden logs and provided with seats. They vary in height, from three to twenty feet or even more, and served as lookout posts or as communal meeting places.[307] Stone sitting out places are also found among some groups of the Konyak Nagas.[308] Sitting places of Konyak chiefs were often made of stone. Konyak tribesmen also used stones to pave village causeways.[309].

II

Prior to the coming of Christianity, community life was cemented and sustained by a web of relationship that was based on reciprocity. The various beliefs and ceremonial practices that accompanied the construction of a structure in the village, especially a house, affirmed and

[306] J.H. Hutton, 'The Use of Stone in the Naga Hills'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 56(1926), 72-73.

[307] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 47.

[308] Hutton, 'The Use of Stone in the Naga Hills', 74.

[309] Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes', 29.

acknowledged this ontological reality. To become habitable, a house had to be sanctified, cleansed of evil spirits and accepted by the beings around that house. Various prohibitions and formalities were observed prior to the construction or rebuilding of a house.[310] Of course, the pomp and sophistication of these formalities varied according to whether the house would be that of a chief or an ordinary villager.

The builder of a new house was expected to prevent any person from other villages crossing or passing by the thatch, post, or materials kept for construction of the new house. It was designated as a sacred ground. In case of rebuilding or repairing an old house, the owner observed three days of *genna*. In the case of a Sumi chief, the rituals were more extravagant. On the first day, a chicken was killed in the hole where the main post was to be erected for the construction of his house. On the evening of the first day, two village elders would be invited for a ceremony called *awupishekuchu* where they picked out the best red rooster and killed it by knocking its head upon the post while chanting prayers for blessing and prosperity. Thereafter, construction work began; a pig was killed and the laying of thatch was done first. The best warriors performed this first task, for which they received the hind leg of the slaughtered pig, considered to be one of the choicest parts of the pig; receiving it was indeed an honour. This was then followed by the other warriors, who also got a share of the meat from around the hind leg, after which, rest of the participants also received their share of meat. During the first two days, it was prohibited for a new person entering the village to come near the construction site.[311] These prohibitions or *genna* were means of acknowledging the spirits and nurturing favourable relations with them.

[310] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas,* 44.

[311] Hutton, *Sema Nagas.*

The construction materials used for building houses were simple and rough. People usually used *daos* and other tools made out of rock until they were exposed to more sophisticated tools and machinery in colonial times. Construction work among the Nagas, like most of their day to day activities, was an exercise in communal existence and social co-operation. Construction or repair was communal work, men would go in groups to collect wood for construction together and each step of the construction would be carried out by groups of men taking turns. The material used were mostly wooden planks and bamboo, while for roofing, either hay, palm leaves or stone slabs. No nails were used, instead, the parts were tied together in position with thongs of cane or bamboo.[312] To tie the joints and the roofing, bamboo, vine and the bark of a tree called *Thomusu*[313] (also called *Tughu Su*) was used by Sumi villagers. They followed a series of steps to prepare the ropes. Bamboos would be split into thin strips and crushed to make it soft and tensile. They would then be soaked in a spring for a couple of days after which they were smoke-dried on a hanging platform installed above the hearth. Two days prior to construction, the bamboo strings would again be taken to the spring and soaked in the water and then later used. This process made the bamboo (*Akiqii* in Sumi) strings highly tensile and durable.[314] The other material, which were used to tie, were also processed similarly.

J. H. Hutton outlined the method of house construction followed by Ao Nagas, which was completed in a single day. After performing the appropriate ceremonies, the builder, usually a newly married man, began construction with his friends. Once the position of the walls were marked out, posts were erected one by one. Among the Chongli group of Aos, after the first post

[312] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 58.

[313] *Thomusu* or *Tughusu* is a tree known by its scientific name Terminalia Orientalis.

[314] Zhevishe Aye, interview, Akuluto, 20th Dec, 2021; Kivito Swu, interview, Dimapur, 4th August, 2022; Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 2022.

was erected, an egg was cracked and with a prayer for protection against fire, the builder consumed the egg and the shell wrapped in *amchi* leaf was tied to the post. The man was to observe *genna* for six days from this point. Construction was then resumed and the posts and roof were fixed using bamboo and wood. Once the frame of the house was ready, a ceiling of bamboo matting was fixed and the side walls of interwoven split bamboo strips were attached. The thatching of the roof was then undertaken and the thatch was firmly held in position with split bamboo. Among the Mongsen group of Aos, the sitting out platform in the back that was made of bamboo matting and supported with solid bamboo posts was constructed simultaneously. However, the Chongli Aos constructed this part of the house only on the marriage day when final touches to the rest of the house were also put with the help of friends.[315]

Ritual ceremonies were performed before the new house was occupied. Lothas employed the oldest man who helped in the house construction as the *tsandhramo epang* (chaser of evil spirit). He would mix ginger and rice wine in a bamboo tube and sprinkle it inside the house with an injunction to the spirits to vacate the house. The bamboo tube was then discarded and a hearthstone was installed. The hearth was the centre of family life. The house owner would make a fire in the newly installed hearthstone and the first meal was cooked and consumed by the family along with the old man. Omens were read by the old man from the entrails of a chicken he has disembowelled. The house entering ceremony was then complete and the chicken was taken away by the old man as his fee.[316] The northern group of the Western Rengmas followed a similar ritual.[317]

[315] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 86-90.

[316] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 34.

[317] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 56.

The Naga family unit was a nuclear one. It consisted of a married couple and their children. The children above a certain age and young bachelors did not stay with the parents in the house. They were to stay in the dormitories or bachelor houses that were constructed in each village. However, they did come to their houses for meals. Thus, Naga houses were simple and had only three to four essential rooms. The ordinary Angami house was a one storey structure that varied in length from 30 to 60 feet and in width between 20 to 40 feet. They were usually built in the form of a sitting dog with a high front gable facing upwards and the rear gable tilting downwards. The interior was generally divided into three rooms. The largest of them was the front room or *kiloh* which was used for keeping the rice pounding bench or *pikeh* and storing paddy in large baskets as Angamis generally did not have the custom of constructing separate granaries. The second room was called the *mipu bu* and this room had the hearth with raised planks around it, which were used as beds. This room functioned as the living room, and was where guests were received and the family had their daily meals. The third room was narrow, the *kinutse*. It was behind this room that large liquor vats were kept. Sometimes it was provided with a small bamboo door which acted as a secondary point of entry and exit into the house. The main and front entrance of the house was fixed. The door was of solid wood, fastened using two crossed bars of bamboo or other wood. Except the houses of the chiefs and feast givers, this door was generally without much adornment. The front gable of the house had long and broad eves which project to form a porch. This area is used for storing wood, as animal enclosures and sometimes as a temporary room for a solitary person.[318]

A western Rengma house was about 24 feet long and 20 to 16 feet wide, the front part broader than the back. It has only one door, which is in the front, called *khamükhehü* or *azükam* although houses in the north were sometimes provided with a backdoor, chiefly intended for escape during

[318] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 53-54.

raids. A side door could be fixed by a household which had performed a particular feast in the feast of merit cycle. Eastern Rengma houses had a semi-circular back with a backdoor. The front room of the Rengma house was used for storing the pounding table and other agricultural equipment. The hearth room acted as the living room which contained functional pieces of simple furniture for sleeping and seating guests. The hearth had a hanging platform above it which was used for storing the cups and spoons and other cooking supply. This rack was also used for smoking meat and other food items. Northern Rengma houses had a small additional room at the back used as a storing space. Eastern Rengma homes had a low bamboo platform called *asakeye* outside the front door which acted as a sitting out place.[319]

Ao houses were partially provided with a bamboo platform floor, the front part of the house including a small front room was built on the ground, while the inner living room and a sitting out projection in the back were built on piles. The front of the house faces the top of the ridge while the floor of the posterior part being situated on the incline was supported by stilt posts.[320] The Maring Nagas also built their houses on similar stilts.[321] The floor was usually made of bamboo matting. The first room of Ao houses was used in the usual Naga manner for storing pounding devices. The inner room had a hearth in the middle made of beaten earth with three stones for supporting the cooking pot. The hearth had one or more bamboo trays hung over it from the ceiling which was used for smoke-drying and stocking cooking essentials along with pots and pans. Storage shelves were provided on the walls too. Beds made out of single blocks of wood were placed in the room, the father's bed usually nearest to the fire and a bed for the children closer to

[319] Mills, *The Rengma Nagas*, 58-61.

[320] Godden, Gertrude M. 'Naga and Other Frontier Tribes of North-East India (continued)'. *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 27(1898), 18-19.

[321] Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, 44.

the wall. A door led to the open platform in the back which was used for drying rice etc.[322] The façade of a traditional Lotha house was constructed with a false thatch roof which projects above the main roof, approximating a flying gable. The house was usually built on the ground and a bamboo sitting-out platform called *khantsung* was sometimes built in the back. A well to do Lotha sometimes had more than one wife and each wife was provided with a separate sleeping cubicle with a fireplace in the house. The front room or *mpongki* is used for keeping the pounding table and a store room was sometimes built between this room and the sleeping cubicles that followed. Servants or a bridegroom providing bride service would sleep on sleeping mats in the *mpongki*, guests would sleep in the cubicles or in the store room.[323]

The ordinary Sumi house measured twelve to fifteen paces by five to six paces, although chiefs had very large houses.[324] The eaves were made to almost touch the ground on either side. An apse like projection was sometimes added to the front or back of the house. Large houses had a backdoor as well as an additional side door provided to the hearth-room. The interior of the house was usually divided into four rooms – the *akishekhoh* or front room would contain the wooden pounding table, *aboshu*. Sumi houses had a separate room for unmarried daughters to sleep in. The main room was the hearth-room or *amiphokiboh* where the owner of the house sleeps. A bamboo platform either supported by four wooden posts fixed on the ground or hung down from the ceiling using posts called *aqhésü* was placed over the hearth, which was used for smoking meat and storing cooking utensils. The *azhiboh*, literally 'liquor room', was a narrow room at the back of the main room, where the liquor vats were kept. Sumis made beds hewn out of large blocks of wood with

[322] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 84-85.

[323] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 30-31.

[324] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 38.

wooden posts about two feet high. Wooden block beds used by Sumi chiefs were particularly well known for the enormous size, the top usually measuring about five feet by four and up to six inches thick. It was fixed with a wooden pillow at one end.[325]

Within the village, there were variations in the designs used while constructing houses. By the designs and insignia used on their doors or posts, one could identify the status, class or identity of the homeowner. The house of the chief was always elaborate. In the Angami and Mao villages, the houses of donors of ceremonial feasts were decorated with symbolic carvings in fairly high relief painted in white, black and brick red. These generally represented sacrificed animals and some round designs that symbolized the sun and the stars.[326] K. Keyho, during an interview, remarked that to obtain the structure of *'Cheka'* his grandfather organized a feast of merit and to this day, there stands a *cheka* in an old house at Phek village.[327] The *cheka* was an ornamental X-like structure made of wood which was mounted at the entrance of select houses of only those who succeeded in certain triumphs, for instance, organizing feasts of merit for the village, etc.

Unlike an ordinary house, a Sumi chief constructed a large house with many rooms but the front of the house was more furnished. The motifs and insignia representing warriors, tigers, women's breasts, daos and spears on the front of the house described the chief's house. The variations, however, were confined to the front of the house and the decoration of the roof, while the plan of the main structure always remained the same.[328] The motifs outside the houses of the Sumi village chief and men who had finished organizing the *aphi-sa* or the feast of merit. The houses of these

[325] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*,38-39.

[326] Milada, *Naga Art*, 28.

[327] *Cheka* is a wooden house horn decorated on the top front of the house.

[328] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 84.

distinguished and celebrated men were decked with the *ahuthsü* or *amala*. The names had variations depending upon the region of settlement for the Sumi Nagas. The *ahuthsü* or *amala* was a large single block of wood which had intricate carvings of the *asachi* (baldric or sword belt), *avi gibo* (horns of a mithun), women's breast - to symbolize prosperity, head of a tiger, piece of meat, etc.[329]

The right to install decorations and insignia had to be earned through an elaborate system of titles, display of warring skills or organizing feasts of merit. The size, designs and the motifs varied depending on the rank and profile of the individual, indicating whether they were the chief, a warrior, rich or poor. These events, which acted as landmarks around which the life of the community and the individual would be traditionally structured, also inscribed and determined the character of their dwelling spaces, thus acting as an organic extension of their cultural selfs.

The Naga houses had no latch or bar on their doors. If the door was shut, it signified that the owner of the house was away and to enter it would be taboo, bringing on the wrath of house spirits. In the case of Sumi homes for instance, a set of two bamboo poles called *akhadu* were used for barring the main door, *Awolakha* in a criss-cross shape which functioned as a latch or lock.[330] Although this was not practically impregnable enough as a lock, but placing the bars in the cross shape signified that the owners were away and attempting to enter the house would be considered a taboo. One story is recorded about a Sutemi village chief, by the name of Assu Vixeshe Chishi, who had a house spirit dwelling in his home. One day, while they were out in their field, a person, supposedly kin of the chief, entered his house to drink some rice beer. As the person tried to take

[329] Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 202; Zhevishe Aye, interview, Sutemi Village, 20th Dec, 2021.

[330] Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 2022.

the jar of the rice beer, he was caught by the spirit and he could not consume the rice beer and was held still until the arrival of the village chief who had to convince the house spirit that the so-called intruder was kin. It was only then that the person was released and let free.[331] Such beliefs are indication of a general rule regarding violation of the personal space of community members. In general, cases of thefts were generally rare in Naga societies. In rare cases where a theft might occur, the penalties bestowed were quite strict and severe. Apart from general ostracization, the thief, once caught, would be imposed a fine or even excommunicated from the village, which could also be a reason behind why such acts were uncommon. Acts of stealing could also be punished with full or compensated repayment to the owner, inability to do which would require the entire family of the culprit to toil as slaves for the family of the victim.[332] In more extreme cases, the thief could also be punished with minor mutilations.[333]

Naga houses were simply furnished with minimal pieces of furniture and functional household items, most of which were crafted using locally sourced material and methods and skills that have been passed on. Largely self-sufficient, they built their own houses, carved and painted them using local artisans using local methods, tools and raw material. The objects of daily use in a Naga household were simple and functional but also carried imprint of their lifeworld, beliefs and aesthetic sensibilities. Each house had, at least, one large pounding table, hewn out of a single large block of wood, which was essential to husk food grains for daily household consumption. Hutton records that a typical pounding table used by Ao villagers was about four feet long, two

[331] N. Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village, 18th April, 2021.

[332] Zhevishe Aye, interview, Sutemi Village, Akuluto, 20th Dec, 2021; Hoikhe Awomi, interview, Lotisami Village, 23rd December, 2021; Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 2022; Ghokheto Assumi, interview, Khrimtomi Village, 21st December, 2021.

[333] N. Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village, 18th April, 2021.

feet wide and about two feet high. This surface was hewn to form a shallow trough in the centre of which two holes were made, each about six inches in diameter and eight inches deep. The rice was poured into this hole and pounded with the help of long heavy wooden pestles.[334] Wealthy households had larger pounding tables with several holes. Especially among the Sumis, a chief's home possessed massive pounding tables. It pointed towards his class status that enabled him to pound large amounts of grain simultaneously and also procure the necessary labour required for such pounding sessions.

The Naga houses had no windows, just a doorway which directly lead into the rooms. Sumi houses had no constructed floors, no windows and no chimneys, and the roof came down to within three or four feet close to the ground.[335] This meant that the air was not too fresh and the light inside was not too bright. Nagas never constructed windows, and neither had any kind of ventilation system for their houses and as a result, their houses were usually dark throughout. Forged torches made of bamboo or pine twig were used for lighting.[336] Most houses would have two doors, one at the front and the other in the back. Darker interiors were preferred due to security reasons; as a community perpetually living under the threat of tribal raids, a dark home allowed the opportunity to easily confront or escape from sudden enemy raids as they had two doors, the one at the front (called *Ahu-kha*, literally 'teeth' in Sumi) and the other at the back of the houses (*Akusau* in Sumi). *Ahukikha*, *akusau* and *aleshe* respectively were the front, back and the side doors.[337] It must be noted that in the pre-modern agrarian life, villagers hardly had any reason to stay at home during the daytime. Usually the houses would be positioned in such a way that the front always faced the

[334] W.C. Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam: A Study in Sociology and Ethnology*. London, Macmillan, 1925, 30.

[335] Bengt I. Anderson, After the Sky Cleared in the Naga Hills, June, 1931.

[336] Nshoga, *Traditional Naga Village System*,108.

[337] Ghokheto Assumi, Khrimtomi Village, interview, Atoizu, 21st December, 2021.

sun. The idea was to allow access to early sunlight into their houses. The rest of the day would usually be spent outdoors, in fields or forests, which were located far away. The residence was thus a space for resting after dark, for which windows were hardly a requirement. Besides, compact houses were wind-proof which provided protection from the colder climate of the hills.

Another important reason that determined the peculiar ventilation mechanism or the lack of it in the Naga house plan was connected to their cultural-spiritual belief system. The Nagas believed in the power of house spirits who picked certain houses as their dwelling places and ensured the well-being of that household. Although, house spirits did not reside in every household, they mostly resided in the houses of the village headmen, some warriors, priests and individuals who possessed special powers of divination amongst the villagers.[338] The popular belief was that such house spirits preferred dark and smoky homes. They assumed that too many doors or windows would allow the house spirit to flee away, which could be a bad omen for the owner as the vacuum left by the house spirit may be filled by evil spirits. The dark smoke-filled rooms in the homes were a result of preserving and protecting the house-spirits who acted as guardians when its inhabitants were out and about, farming or involved in other community activities. As recounted in the interview with Vixese Chishi, Chairman of a Sumi village, the house spirit residing in the home of a particular Sumi chief abandoned his house when they converted to Christianity and fled to Mapulumi village.[339] Such incidents are recorded and so, in most Sumi Villages, the architecture and designs varied in sizes and standards following the pattern of that of the village chief. Taking

[338] Zhevishe Aye, interview, Sutemi Village, Akuluto, 20th Dec, 2021; Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 2022; Hoikhe Awomi, interview, Lotisami Village, Akuluto, 23rd December, 2021

[339] N. Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village, Akuluto, 18th April, 2021

note that the house of the village chief had a house spirit and that it preferred a dark setting, villagers usually built their houses without allowing too much light to enter.

For the Nagas, it was common for domestic animals like pigs, dogs, or fowl to be in the vicinity of the house, a practice which was later resented by the missionaries. Nagas believed that spirits inhabit every object, living and non-living. Even before they would slaughter a pig, a Mithun, or a fowl, they offered a prayer to the spirit inhabiting the animal to move to a different body as they wanted the meat for food.[340] Therefore, it was normal for domesticated animals or fowls to reside in and around houses or villages. For the Sumis however, cattle were kept outside the village premises, unlike the Angamis, who had the habit of keeping the cattle in their houses.[341] Nonetheless, for all Naga groups in general, the non-human was not viewed as vector or filthy pollutant. This easy co-existence with all creatures of the natural universe was a natural corollary of the tribal conception of man as a simple member of the great family of the universe and a module in the integrated whole of nature. A life guided by such a synergistic cognizance of the world and man's place in it, gave rise to notions of sanitation and healthful living that were very different from modern understandings of cleanliness and hygiene that later came along with the missionaries.

Houses were usually constructed close to each other, although in Sumi villages, houses were more spaciously distributed.[342] In Angami villages, each house had a small open space in front of it and irregular paths and steps that connected it to the other houses of the village.[343] According to Hutton,

[340] Dr. Hesheto Chishi, interview, Director, Indigenous Cultural Society Dimapur, Nagaland, February 5, 2019.

[341] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 38.

[342] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 36.

[343] Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, 47.

there was a preference among the Angamis to construct their houses facing the east, although the practice was not followed strictly.[344] A similar practice had existed among the Maram Nagas as well.[345] Mills observed that houses in the Ao villages were arranged in two parallel rows facing each other along a main street, with rows of other houses behind them. The houses were usually very close to each other with the front gables often touching each other across the intervening street. As in Naga villages of most groups, the houses of prominent Ao villagers would be located at favourable spots, usually on the top of the ridge, while poorer households would inhabit the slopes, with the poorest occupying the most outwardly fringes.[346] Lotha houses too were arranged along long streets in some villages, and in a more random layout in other villages.[347] Regarding the Nagas of Manipur, colonial accounts inform us of the irregular placing of houses in their villages, although according to T. C. Hodson, the Maram Nagas is said to have prohibited the construction of houses facing west as this, they believed, was the direction in which the spirit of a person travelled after death.[348] Among the Sumi, the chief usually built his house at a prominently high place, giving him a bird's eye view of the village. The houses of the prominent and the wealthy would also be large and conspicuous and located in favourable spots. It must also be noted that the land allocation in Sumi villages was mostly done under the supervision of the chief and his *cho-choü* or as mentioned in the previous chapter, his close aide, in which case, the leader of each clan accompanying the chief to a new settlement is often privileged to choose or plead the

[344] Hutton, *Angami Nagas,* 46.

[345] Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, 43.

[346] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 80.

[347] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 23, A.W. Davis, 'The Lhotas in 1891' in Elwin, V. *The Nagas in the Nineteenth* Century, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

[348] Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, 43.

portion of land they wished to settle in. The poorest of the poor, who were at the mercy of the chief, were allotted their share of land by the chief himself.

Boundaries separating one house from another was demarcated by either a huge tree, a piece of rock, or some bushes. The means of demarcation varied from village to village. In some cases, a tangible demarcation was not even considered necessary, except in fields and forest areas which would be marked more clearly with bamboo fences, stones, mounds or rivers, with exceptions in case of conflicts where boundaries had to be more clearly spelt out.[349] Among the Sumis, *Asu Loghi*[350] was a boundary demarcation which was made by the landowner within his field for one cultivable year, while *Atu loghi*[351] was a boundary demarcation between the lands of different landowners. These boundaries were generally observed and respected.[352] The organisation of a Sumi village was comparatively more fluid and the manner in which the houses were spread was conducive to greater cleanliness and decreased danger from fire, as compared to its neighbour, the Angami tribe.[353]

III

Beyond homes, the village landscape was marked by structures, which were collectively built and maintained by villagers, as well as the various constituents of the natural world that made up a particular village space. The built structures as well as natural constituents of a given space became

[349] Kivito Swu, interview, Pukhato Village, Dimapur, 4th August, 2022; N. Vixeshe Chishi, interview, Sutemi Village, 2019; Toishe Jimo Suumi, interview, 3rd August, 2022; Hoikhe Awomi, interview, Lotisami Village, Akuluto, 23rd December, 2021.

[350] *Asu Loghi* is a demarcation made with wood planks.

[351] *Atu Loghi* is a demarcation made with huge rocks.

[352] Assu Zhevishe Aye, interview, Sutemi Village, Akuluto, 20th Dec, 2021.

[353] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 36.

important sites for fostering collective initiative and community feeling. They were crucial towards nurturing the identity of a particular village and its people. They also bound the village community into a cohesive whole with its distinct history and destiny.

Of the built structures, the most prominent was the *Morung*. Across tribes, albeit with nominal variations, there existed an important institution, commonly found among various Tibeto-Burman tribes, called *morung*. Known by various names across tribes and groups, the institution is often described using the Assamese term *morung*, which is now a part of the Nagamese creole. Morungs were the center of the social and cultural life of the people and the *morung* house would the biggest and the most conspicuous buildings in Naga villages.[354] The number of *morung* varied from village to village depending upon its population size and clan structure. Usually a *morung* is composed of members of one exogamous clan, although membership may be drawn from two or more clans too. Haimendorf noted the presence of at least one to as many as eleven *morung*s (locally known as *dze*, *ba* or *bang*) in a single Konyak village. Wakching, a Konyak village with some hundred and fifty households had five *morung*s during Haimendorf's visit in the early mid twentieth century.[355] Usually the number of *morung*s in a village corresponds to the number of *khel*s, with each *khel* unit possessing a *morung* of its own, although this was not necessarily the case every time.

The *morung* served as the dormitory where the unmarried men and girls slept. It was the places where village guests were entertained and allowed to spend the night. It also acted as a sort of barracks that provided security to the village. The *morung* house was usually located close to the

[354] Ganguly, Milada, *Naga Art*. International Science Publisher, University of California,1993, p-3.
[355] Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 68 (1938), pp. 349-378, p-352.

village entrance and situated on a spot which commanded a good view of the village approach. In Konyak villages, each Morung was located at a high spot next to one of the entry points into the village, and fitted with a high bamboo platform in the back which allowed a clear view of the village approach. The platform also acted as a vantage point for launching a spear attack on the approaching enemy. The front side of the building always faced towards the interior of the village and was provided with a large open space which acted as a public square and a dancing floor. A small menhir was found at its centre which was attached with a bamboo pole to hoist a feshly taken head for a few days after a raid. While most houses were usually simple and plain within the Naga community, the *morung* house was usually the most remarkable feature in the built environment of the Nagas, with an imposing size and intricate designs and carvings. The Ao *morung – ariju* was about fifty feet long and twenty feet broad with a front gable up to thirty feet high.[356] Having a similar size, the Lotha *morung* – the *champo* was one of the largest structures and the architectural highlight of the village. The Konyak *morung* houses contained the best display of the superior carving skills of the Konyak people. The main posts in front of the building and horizonal boards running around it would be elaborately carved in high relief, some carvings are even life sized and carved out of a single solid block of wood[357]. *Morung* carvings among Konyaks and other eastern tribes such as the Phom, Wancho and Nocte, would normally represent men and women in various positions, warriors with guns, human heads, tigers, elephants, hornbills, gibbons and occasionally other wild animals, but hardly ever domesticated animals such as the mithun, buffaloes, cows, pigs, or chickens, although mithan/buffalo horns are frequently depicted in carvings. Similar carvings were found on Lotha and Ao *morung*s too. The chief's *morung* may

[356] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 84-85.

[357] Ganguly, *Naga Art*, 4.

additionally have carvings of the hornbill, which is not allowed in other *morung*s.[358] Konyak *morung*s often had erotic motifs carved on the *morung*; men and women, even dogs in sexual positions. Most designs were carved on the pillars and beams although human figures were sometimes carved out of wood separately and attached to the pillars. Haimendorf records having come across a painted carving at one *morung* in Wakching village, which was otherwise rare.[359] The Ao *ariju* is rebuilt once in every six years[360], while the Lotha *champo* is rebuilt after every nine years.[361] The rebuilding process is executed through a set of elaborate ceremonial steps. Among the Aos it was customary in pre-colonial times to organise a raid and bring a head for hanging up in the *morung* as soon as possible after it has been rebuilt.[362]

The Konyak *morung* house followed two designs – the *morung* building in most villages of the Thenkoh group are provided with an open porch over which the front gable roof protrudes, however a small number of villages of this group, along with most villages of the Thendu group it does not have a porch but the front is closed by a low roof.[363] The Lotha *champo* has a curved roof tree with a depression in the middle. The front gable is about a foot higher than the back gable. Each end of the roof tree is provided with a horn like projection of bamboos from which tassel like ornaments made of reed stems are hung. The roof is thatched using either grass or palm leaves and the eaves are almost allowed to touch the ground. One of the carved posts on the front porch is tied with a piece of skin called *humtse lama*, literally house warmer, which is obtained from the first

[358] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 352, Elwin, *The Art of the Northeast Frontier*, 138-139.

[359] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 351.

[360] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 75.

[361] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, 26.

[362] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 76.

[363] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 350-352.

head taken after the *champo* is rebuilt. The *champo* floor is sometimes fitted with a low bamboo platform. Doors are provided at both ends and a narrow passage runs through the middle from one door to the other, where the fires are made. Cubicles are built on either side of the passage, where the *champo* boys sleep on platforms made of bamboo or rough beds made of wooden planks.[364] The Ao *ariju* also had a similar projecting high front gable. The sleeping quarter is situated behind the front porch and the doorway between the porch and the sleeping space is through an oval shaped hole carved into an enormous plank of wood.[365] The *ariju* building displayed some similarities to the Konyak *morung* house, which also had to be entered beyond the open front porch through an oval opening in a solid wooden door. This door opened into a large central room which had big stamping boards covering the entire floor. This space was usually used only for dancing. The sleeping compartments are located along both sides of this central hall, which are usually dark and provided with mats and sleeping platforms.[366] The gable of the Konyak *morung* may sometimes be decorated with several pairs of wooden horn-shaped boards. The *morung* belonging to the *angh* clan would have the hornbill shape on top of the horn-boards. [367]

Upon reaching their adolescence, each child of a Naga village had to mandatorily attend the *morung* until their marriage. It was almost taboo for Naga children to sleep in their parents' home after reaching adolescence, and non-observance of this rule would lead to penalty[368]. In some *morung*s, an initiation process marked the entry of a child into the *morung*. At the Konyak village

[364] Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, p-24

[365] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p-75.

[366] The layout may vary among Konyak villages, in the Punkhung village eg. the communal hall is in the back. (Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 102.

[367] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 351.

[368] Exceptions to this rule were allowed in special circumstances, eg. among the Lothas, a boy may be allowed to sleep at his parental home to nurse an ailing or widowed mother. (Mills, J.P. *The Lotha Nagas*, 24)

of Wakching, entry into *morung* life for a child began at the age of around six to seven years with an initiation ceremony called the *shou-ban-bu*, which approximates initiation into the life of a warrior. In some villages like Oting and Wangla, the formal entry into *morung* begins only when the boys are around sixteen years old, until then they sleep in a special boys' *morung*, which is a small building in the centre of the village.[369] Such special dormitories are regularly visited by the members of the corresponding *morung* of the khel or group.[370] A similar practice is also found among some villages among the Liangmai Naga people: boys and girls around the age of six or seven start forming groups called *chungkhangna* or *khangtuaki* (the female equivalent for *chaungkhangna* is *chungkina*) and sleep in special dormitories till the age of thirteen or fourteen when they can finally join the *morung* known as the *khangchiu* (the *morung* for girls is called *liuchiu*). In some Liangmai villages, however, such a transitory period is not observed and boys and girls around the age of six/seven go to their respective *morung*s directly. [371]

Among the Aos, young boys were drafted into the *ariju* every three years. Immediately after his entry, even after marriage when *ariju* life has ended, the individual continues to be a part of this age grade shared by the other companions who were drafted together into the *ariju* for his lifetime. The age grade system is very crucial in Ao Naga society as it forms the basis for selection and composition of the village council of elders, which was a powerful institution among the Ao

[369] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 361.

[370] Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. 'Youth-Dormitories and Community Houses in India. A Restatement and a Review'. *Anthropos* 45, 1/3 (1950), pp. 119-144, 121.

[371] Daimai, K. 'Khangchiu: The Youth Dormitory of Liangmai Naga'. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology* 7.1 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-022-00080-x.

Nagas.[372] This political and economic significance of the age grade or age group system is also discussed by Mills; a man remains in his original age group until death and task allotment by the village council in any kind of communal work happens at the age group level.[373] The age group system is prevalent in a simpler form among Sumi and some other Naga tribes too, where boys and sometimes girls of the same age group form a gang to work together in the fields.[374] The age set organization of village labour groups among the Yimchungr Nagas was known as *thülen thülen*[375]and formed an important element in the functioning of village life.

Unlike most Naga tribes, *morung* buildings were not frequently visible in all the Sumi villages. As a general rule, the chief's house served all the purposes of a *morung*, both as a center for *genna* and as a bachelors' sleeping place.[376] It still needs further inquiry as to why Sumis followed such practices, unlike the other tribes. One reason, however, could be that as a Sumi chief commands all authority under him, and since *morung* was considered an important social institution of learning for young men, the chief wanted this proximity with his people. The Angami villages were also found to be without *morung*s by the nineteenth century. One possible explanation provided by Hutton is the development of wet rice cultivation among the Angamis, which may have led to the break-down of the age grade system, essential for slash and burn agriculture.[377]

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[372] Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 95. 1 (1965), pp. 16-43, p-24, Fürer-Haimendorf. 'Youth-Dormitories and Community Houses in India. A Restatement and a Review', 108.

[373] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 177-179.

[374] J.P. Mills. 'Certain Aspects of Naga Culture'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 56 (1926), pp. 27-35, p-29-30.

[375] Debojyoti Das. 'From Millet to Rice: The Politics of the New Faith and Time Discipline among Borderland Communities in Eastern Nagaland'. *Asian Ethnology* 79.2 (2020), pp.377–394, p-390.

[376] Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, 37.

[377] Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes', 24.

Others consider the more egalitarian character of the Angami polity to be a possible reason for the decay of the *morung* institution among this tribe.[378] However, Sumi and Angami villages could be erected on a rare occasion for ceremonial purposes. Among the Liangmai Nagas too, a separate *morung* building was not maintained. The Liangmai *khangchiu* was usually hosted by a wealthy household of the village which volunteers to take up the responsibility. The host household known as *aziki* builds a larger house which is divided into two parts. The front part known as *akhangki* literally means a bachelor's room. It is designed to accommodate forty or more young men depending upon the size of the *khangchiu* and the corresponding ward. The front outer wall of this *khangchiu*, called *kalian* is decorated with animal skulls, claws and bird plumage. The log beams and planks are carved with bird, animal and human images.[379]

While the total number of *khangchiu* in Liangmai villages might vary depending upon the strength and composition of the village population, for each *Khangchiu* in a village there would be an equivalent *liuchiu*, Liangmai the girls' dormitory. This pairing was of utmost importance as the *khangchiu* could not complete its duties as work force, defence force or in any other appointed task without the assistance and ritual support of the *liuchiu*. Like the *liuchiu* of the Liangmai, most Naga tribes had separate dormitories for young girls. Tribes like the Nocte, Tangsa, Zeme, Ao, Konyak, Tanghkul among others are known to have maintained dormitories for young girls. In a few rare cases, a village might provide a separate *morung* house for girls. Nocte villages are recorded to have maintained separate sleeping houses for unmarried girls called the *yanpo* or *janso*

[378] Julian Jacobs. *Hill Peoples of Northeast India: The Nagas; Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter*. Extended New Edition. London: Thames and Hudson, 2012.

[379] Daimai, 'Khangchiu: The Youth Dormitory of Liangmai Naga', 5-8.

pang.[380] Such young womens' dormitories, wherever available are smaller in size and much simpler in terms of architecture compared to the male equivalent. Generally, the girls' dormitory was not located in a separate house like the men, but it was usually attached to the house of a wealthy person or an old widow. Among the Zeme Nagas, the girls' dormitory *leoseuki/leosengki* is set up in an ordinary house belonging to an old couple selected for the purpose.[381] In the case of the *morung* of the *angh* or chief, the girls' sleeping house would be an annex at the residence of the chief. The girls' dormitories permitted visits by unmarried men of the corresponding male dormitory and courtship and sexual initiation usually happened here. However, although boys and girls have the freedom to meet each other at the dormitory, rules of exogamy and marital reciprocity must always be strictly adhered to. Many Naga *morung*s are exogamous, although it is not a rule without exceptions. At the Konyak village of Wakching, all the *morung*s are exogamous. Thus, a man looking for a wife will search among the women of all other *morung*s except his own. Even the construction of the girls' dormitory called *yo* is never carried out by boys of the same *morung* but only by those of one of the other *morung*s. Girls of the Nocte *yanpo*s may receive visits from their lovers and no objection is raised to their spending the night together. At times married women might continue to sleep at the *yanpo* and be visited by their husbands until they give birth, thus acting like a bridal house.[382]

[380] K Mann. 'Girls Dormitory and Status of Women in North-East India'. *Indian Anthropologist* 19, 1/2 (1989) pp. 65-75, p-67.

[381] Rene Kolkman and Staurt Blackburn. *Tribal Architecture in Northeast India*. Leiden: Brill, 2014, 57.

[382] Mann, 'Girls Dormitory and Status of Women in North-East India', 67-68.

Haimendorf, however, believes that girls' dormitories among Nagas exist only in association with men's houses and cannot be considered as counterparts or a women's club.[383] He claims that the girls' dormitory which acts as meeting place for unmarried men and women, has the character of a mixed youth club, while the *morung* remains a purely masculine institution.[384] The sexual freedom associated with the *morung* institution has been a matter of much ethnographic and moralistic examination. Most colonial ethnographers condemned the practice as 'institutional promiscuity'[385] Peal has tried to connect the taboo placed on women's presence in and near the *morung* to the conjectured prevalence of sexual communism among these tribes at some earlier period.[386] The segregation of the youth from their family and at times from the opposite sex, also has a very significant effect. The emphasis of certain ethnographers over the romantic-erotic aspect of tribal dormitories are highly questionable. Since, the sanctity of the tribal dormitory is given the highest priority, wherein the married or widowers and widows are not allowed.

The *morung* served as a heuristic educational centre where the young boys or girls received hands-on training for essential life skills, hereditary customs and lessons on community living. It was here that the culture, customs, and traditions were imparted to younger folks of the village through the passing on of folk tales, songs, and music. They also learned the art of carving and weaving in the *morung*. Separate *morung*s maintained for young boys and girls imparted training and skills based on the gender division of their future roles and functions. Thus, boys were trained in skills

[383] Christoph Von Fürer-Haimendorf, 'Youth-Dormitories and Community Houses in India. A Restatement and a Review', 140.

[384] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'Youth-Dormitories and Community Houses in India. A Restatement and a Review', 121.

[385] Jacobs, *Hill Peoples of Northeast India: The Nagas; Society, Culture and the Colonial* Encounter, 33.

[386] S.E. Peal. 'The Communal Barracks of Primitive Races' *Science* 20.507 (1892), pp. 228-229, Peal, S.E. 'On the 'Morong', as Possibly a Relic of Pre-Marriage Communism' *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 22(1893), pp. 244-261.

that included hunting and the art of warfare in the *morung*. They also learned carpentry, basket making etc. On the other hand, girls spun cotton and learned weaving etc. During the day, they would go to fields, however, by evening, they had to come back to the *morung*. There was a leader who would supervise their activities and discipline etc.[387] Among the Liangmai, the *khangting*, the oldest member of the *khiangchiu* was the leader, who commanded absolute authority over all other members. Dalton notes that the older Kabui *morung* members were in the habit of bullying the younger ones.[388] Songs were taught, stories were narrated about the villages and the chiefs etc. Important announcements about impending dangers, war, or death were also made at the *morung*. It, therefore, played a very important role in the social and cultural life of the Nagas as it was this institution that bred young men and women who would go on to protect and promote their identity and lifestyle from one generation to the next. *Morung* graduates were considered more self-reliant and better disciplined. Above all, their loyalty and sense of service to the corporate body were well developed.[389] *Morung* served as an educational center for the Nagas to govern their everyday lives and therefore, a strong upbringing in the *morung* helped them to remain closely attached to their people and community. The morung is the bachelor's sleeping hall, but it functioned as a community house and club for the married men too for the rest of their lives[390]. Among the Naga tribes of Manipur, the *morung* sleeping hall is used by both unmarried and married men.

Except for villages with a powerful chiefly structure, *morung* loyalty was more important that village loyalty. In Ao villages, a tribesman's identity did not spring primarily from belonging to a

[387] Assu Zhevishe Aye, aged 89, Retd. Commandant, NAP, Sutemi Village, Akuluto, 20th Dec, 2021.

[388] E.T. Dalton. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal.* Calcutta: Government Printing, 52.

[389] Ursula Graham Bower. *Naga Path*. London: John Murray, 1950, 83.

[390] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'Youth-Dormitories and Community Houses in India. A Restatement and a Review', 140.

particular *khel*, but from his *morung*, which may be several in number within the *khel*[391]. In villages of the Thenkoh group of the Konyak Nagas, where the position of the *angh* is not too powerful, village policies are determined through *morung*[392], which has been described as 'the real basis of polity' in the Naga Hills[393] and the 'nerve-centre of the body politic in tribal life'[394]. Among the Thenkoh Konyaks, the *morung* building is the largest in the village and the village is governed by a council of elders (*niengba*) of which the *angh* is just a member. This council has the authority to settle disputes and fine law breakers and taboo defaulter.[395] It is this council which decides the relationship of the *morung* with other *morung*s and villages.[396] For instance, the Oukheang *morung* of the Konyak village of Wakching collected tributes from eleven tributary villages in the 1930s.[397] Rivalry between Naga *morung*s within the village was a common phenomenon, which sometimes even led to bloodshed and eviction of a defeated *morung*. However, *morung* rivalry also serves to maintain a sense of competion within the village which eventually benefits the community.[398]

Naga *morungs* among the eastern and central Naga groups possess a large log drum, made from a single hollowed out tree trunk, beaten with the help of one or more strikers, which is one of the masterpieces of Naga woodcarving. In ethnographic literature, this instrument has been described variously as log drum, war drum, tubular drum, slit drum, wooden gong, hollow log gong, slit

[391] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 179.

[392] Mills, 'Certain Aspects of Naga Culture', 32.

[393] Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes', 23.

[394] Thankappan Nair. 'Youth dormitories of NEFA, India' *Ethnos*, 30:1 (1965) pp.57-78, p-59.

[395] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 355.

[396] Jacobs, *Hill Peoples of Northeast India: The Nagas; Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter*, 40.

[397] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 368.

[398] Fürer-Haimendorf, 'The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam', 376, Daimai, 'Khangchiu: The Youth Dormitory of Liangmai Naga', 8.

gong, xylophone or broadcasting percussion instrument,[399] based on its physiognomic, organological or functional characteristic. The drums are of mainly two types – drums with closed off ends found among Ao, Phom, Konyak, Wancho, Chang and Chagyik tribes and those of the open cylindrical type found among Nocte, Laju, Wancho, Rangpan, Heimi, Lainong, Gangvan, Yonkon, Ponyu, Khiamniungan, Chang, Yimchungr, southern Sangtam, Tikhir and Makuri tribes. A third type of drum which are open at either end is found among the Wancho and Konyak.[400] The closed off cylinder type drum has a slit on its top along its entire length. The second type with open ends has its upper section jutting out longer above the lower section and occasionally lack the slit at the top. On an average, these drums measure ten metres in length and four metres in girth.[401] The Nocte (*thum*), sometimes 20 ft. long and 4 ft. wide.[402] Haimendorf records that the drums in the Konyak villages were hardly ever less than 20 feet long. He has mentioned sighting a large specimen in a Khiamniungan village of more than 3 feet diameter which was large enough to hold a man and another at Pangsha which was more than 16 feet long.[403] These drums are aesthetically decorated with high relief carvings and occasional paintwork and adornments which are generally found in the head and tail parts of the instrument. The head part is carved with buffalo, mithun, tiger, stag or python, elephant or anthropomorphic motifs. The forked tail may be similarly carved with hornbill, lizard, tiger, snake or anthropomorphic design. Geometrical patterns may also be painted on the drums in some variants. The huge drum was usually stored in

[399] Michael Oppitz. 'The Log Drum' in Oppitz, Michael et. al. eds. *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*. Gent: Snoeck, 2008. Pp 169-198, 169.

[400] Oppitz, 'The Log Drum', 173.

[401] Oppitz, *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*, 200.

[402] Nair, 'Youth dormitories of NEFA, India', 68.

[403] Oppitz, 'The Log Drum', 177.

the *morung* house or in a separate shed/gong house close to the *morung* or beside the house of a respected elder or the founder of the *khel* and beaten on all important occasions.

With slight variation in the methods and rituals, the whole process of constructing, transporting and inaugurating the gong is an elaborate occasion which requires the participation of the entire village or village division. In fact, the construction, transport and installing of the log drum is remarked to have been among the most important events in the Naga village life, marked by much joy, festivity and a total community participation[404]. A large tree with a straight trunk would be identified by experienced men and priests and the delivering of the first blow would be handed over to a man of importance in the *morung*, such as a chief or a warrior, which would be closely observed for omens. Once its auspiciousness was established, a prayer would be offered to the tree seeking health, harvests and heads for the community and once checked for lurking evil spirits with the throwing of spears at the tree by the men present, it would be felled with axes and other tools, suitably consecrated for the purpose. The felling was accompanied by animal sacrifices and the meat would generally be consumed by the fellers. Once felling is complete, a group of men, possessing the necessary skills, would cut off the branches, remove the bark and hollow out the trunk. Carving out motifs and designs as well as painting the drum would follow. The trunk had to be hollowed to an exact level of thickness to produce the desired sound. The entire surface of the drum had to be rubbed for days with ficus leaves by boys and men to make it smooth and shiny.[405] The entire process could take up to a few weeks, and used to be a plucky affair, for the craftsmen would be highly exposed to enemy attacks.

[404] Oppitz, 'The Log Drum', 195-196.

[405] Ganguly, *Naga Art*, 10.

Once the construction of drum is complete and it has sufficiently dried, it would be dragged to the village on an appointed day in a ceremonial procession. Strong ropes made of aerial roots and creepers would be prepared in advance and the designated path cleared for the dragging with rollers made of bamboo or tree trunks laid in place. The task of pulling required the combined effort of a great number of people, at times the entire able-bodied population of the *khel*, including men, women and children. The total distance covered could as much as three or four kilometers and could take up a few days or even a month. Naturally the winter months which offered a break from agricultural work, were preferred for the log drum construction.[406] The pullers would adorn themselves in festive costumes and arrange in the order of age, sex, clan, phratry or marital status etc. The pulling would be encouraged and made lively by the shouts of elders and much singing and chanting, with an eye for any inauspicious omens the entire time. The entire journey was a merry occasion marked by feasting and drinking. However, the drum was believed to have a mind of its own, and might refuse to budge in spite of all arrangements and efforts.[407] Once the drum had crossed the village gate, triumphal rejoicing resembling the arrival of a king would begin and animal sacrifices be made as offering to the god whom the drum was believed to represent. The drum would then be taken to its designated place of installation. The offering of a freshly taken head was necessary to consecrate the drum before its ceremonial beating can commence. In the face of the immediate unavailability of a fresh human head, animal heads or effigy heads could be offered but the beating in any case could not take place until a fresh head had been brought in.

The log drum was beaten by a group of men and women using sticks or dumbbell shaped beaters varying in shape and size. In rare cases, the drum could also be beaten using stones. The drum

[406] Ganguly, *Naga Art*, 182.

[407] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 79.

produced a booming sound that could be heard over a large distance, sometimes till the next inhabited hill. The drum may be placed on a raised bed of wooden beams to achieve to make its sound more resonant.[408] The rhythms would vary according to the players and the occasion. The beating would generally be accompanied by shouts and chants. The occasions of sounding the drum could include the setting out or arrival of a group of warriors, an enemy attack, fire or epidemic disasters, solar or lunar eclipse, death of a chief or renowned warrior, festivals, hunting expeditions or beginning of the hunting season. Occasionally, it might also be beaten by a young man to communicate a message to his lover, who would recognize it from its distinctive rhythm.[409]

The log drum had great material significance in the life of the village. It held a position of central importance and great care was taken for its protection. All heads brought in by warriors of the *khel* had to be offered first to the drum. After presenting to the drum, it could be hung on a head tree for a certain amount of time to allow it to dry. However, it must finally be returned to the drum shed which thereby functioned also as the skull house.

All Naga tribes were head hunters and the *morung* usually served as the village repository of weapons and trophies of the chase and head-hunting raids. Valour in warfare was highly valued in Naga life and a head served as a tangible evidence of the same. Taking an enemy life and bringing back a head immediately elevated a man's position and prestige in the community, ensuring the right to wear ornaments and motifs reserved only for great warriors and increased his chances of marrying well. Securing the admiration and consent of potential Naga brides is remarked to have been a key motivation behind head taking missions by most colonial ethnographers, although the

[408] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 78.

[409] Hutton, 'The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes', 27.

reverence for human heads is the result of the belief among Nagas in the existence of a soul-force which is considered the source of fertility and is sought by Nagas for successful crops. This soul is believed to reside in the human head, thereby making it valuable for endowing fertility and prosperity to a Naga village. Hutton is of the opinion that the predilection among Naga girls for head taker grooms is also a result of the association of fertility with the head, and thereby the fertilizing soul-matter he has collected.[410] The offering of a fresh head to a new log drum has already been mentioned. Heads were also particularly required during times when lives of men or livestock have been lost to diseases or when successive crop failures have occurred, for the head was believed to replenish the fertility in the soil and vigour and resistance in human and non-human inhabitants of the village.

Naga villages had various methods of preserving and displaying the human heads collected by their men which formed an indispensable element in the Naga village landscape. Among Angamis the head was first placed on the *kipuchie* or sacred stone of the clan and then buried, face down outside the village. In southern Sangtam villages, heads would be stuck to the ends of bamboo poles. Sema, Lotha and Ao tribes had the custom of hanging the heads on a head-tree, which would be located at the entrance or in the centre of the village. In Sema custom usually the head is hung using cane strings from a bamboo pole, which is leaned against the skull tree. Lothas used a ficus tree for the head tree (*mingetung*) and the heads were similarly hung upon bamboo poles leaning against its branches. Aos first offered the heads to their community log drum around which the heads would be hung. Later the heads would be hung on bamboo poles leaning on the branches of the head tree, an erythrina tree in their case, in a fashion similar to Semas and Lothas. Tangkhul

[410] J.H. Hutton. 'The Significance of Head-Hunting in Assam'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 58 (1928), 399-408.

Nagas placed the heads on a pile of stones and Konyaks stick them to a bamboo tube tied to a menhir. The latter might also keep the skulls on a stone table, where a stone must invariably be kept for each head taken by the village. Later on, the heads are transferred to the *morung* house or to the residence of the chief.

The conjectured Naga belief in some soul-substance residing in the human head is further strengthened by funerary practices found among some Naga groups, where the head of the dead person receives particularly special attention. Burial places and related installations formed another essential component in the Naga lived space and were defined by the pre-Christian Naga worldview. Naga tribes such as the Angamis, Semas and Lothas buried their dead, either outside the village or close to the dead person's house. Aong the Aos, the corpse was laid on a bamboo platform kept in an outer room with a fire lit under it, where it was allowed to smoke-dry until the next harvest. Thereafter, the body was transferred to a spot near the main path leading to the village where bodies were left to expose on bamboo platforms. [411] Among Konyaks, the dead body was first exposed and in the case of members of the Angh clan, they were placed in coffins carved with hornbill heads and wings which were kept below or in the branches of the sacred ficus tree. Commoners place the body on a platform close to the tree. After a certain number of days, the head is removed from the cadaver, brought home, cleaned and sometimes tattooed. In some villages such as Kongan, the skull was then placed in a stone cist. Among the Thendu group of Konyaks, wooden effigies are craved if the deceased was a member of an Angh clan.[412] In the villages of Wakching and Wanching, the corpse is wrapped in thatching palm leaves and placed in the branches of the sacred tree that they call *nyie*, located close to the *morung* of the clan. Next

[411] Hutton, *The Ao Nagas*, 279.
[412] Jacobs, *The Nagas*, 70.

to the path leading to the village, a bamboo screen is erected and a wooden figure of a man is placed next to it, where the soul of the dead man is believed to temporarily inhabit. After nine days the head is detached form the corpse and placed in a phallic stone receptacle which is covered with Palmyra leaves and allowed to rest in a forest clearing reserved for the purpose close to the village. The heads of both men and women are treated in this manner, although the stone cist used for women's skulls varies in shape from that of men.[413] Again villages like Zak-ko have been recorded to have placed the body on a platform with a little house built next to it for putting a wooden figure of the dead man. The head was later deposited in a pot near the figure with a stone table in front for keeping offerings.[414]Again, in the villages of Yonghong and Angfang, the skull was placed between the horn-like protrusions attached to the head of an effigy, a practice often followed in the case of enemy skulls too in Konyak and Chang villages[415]. Installing effigies near burial sites, particularly those of noted warriors, was a practice found among Angamis too; in the eastern Angami village of Chizema, stone figures were erected on or near graves, indicating the number of heads taken or women seduced by the deceased.[416][417] In all such practices, the trace of a belief concerning the connection between death and fertility has been located by most observers[418]Besides burial sites, other erections determined by the eschatological beliefs of the particular community were also a conspicuous feature of the pre-Christian Naga habitat. Eg. the Lothas believed the abode of dead men to lie on Wokha Hills and therebey the path leading in the

[413] Hutto, 'The Disposal of the Dead at Wakching' *Man* 27 (1927), 61-64.

[414] Mills, 'Certain Aspects of Naga Culture', 33.

[415] Mills, 'Certain Aspects of Naga Culture', 35.

[416] R. Brown. 'Wooden Images' in *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Verrier Elwin, 532.

[417] Jacobs, *The Nagas*, 70.

[418] Jacobs, *The Nagas*, 70.

direction of Wokha Hills in a typical Lotha village (*etchilan*) would be lined by offerings to the dead and bamboo erections called *nritangpeng* commemorating recently deceased war heroes.[419]

The Naga belief system endowed miraculous powers not only in human heads but also in objects otherwise considered inanimate, particularly stones. In the pre-Christian Naga world, stones were believed to possess magical powers and formed magical sites of meaning in their living practices in their natural as well as built environment. Nagas perceived stones as being dead or alive, and even possessing gendered attributes, and humans and stones were believed to be capable of mutual communication. Thus, particular stones naturally found to lie in a particular spot would be considered influential in the success, wellbeing or even misfortunes faced by a village community, and thus any disturbance in their location was believed to carry powerful consequences. Stones also occupy huge significance in Naga origin myths; eg. the Ao Naga folklore claims that the first Ao ancestors emerged out of six stones at a place called Lungterok, located today near the Chungliyimti village in Tuensang district. According to another origin lore, several other Naga tribes trace their origin to the legendary stones of the village of Khezakenoma from which they are supposed to have dispersed in different directions. Certain stones were considered sacred to the village community and were an intrinsic part of rituals associated with warfare. The Lothas hung enemy skulls on the village *mingetung* at whose base the sacred *oha* stones were kept. Both the *mingetung* and the stones were believed to play a powerful role in maintaining the good luck of the village.[420] The Angamis also followed the practice of depositing enemy heads on their sacred stones called *kithuchie*. Sema villages also possessed stones which were considered influential in determining the fortune of Sema warriors. Besides, every Naga family would possess certain

[419] Mills, *The Lhota* Nagas, 22.

[420] Mills, *The Lhota* Nagas, 29.

baetylic stones which were believed to embody spirits that controlled the prosperity of the household.[421]

Besides being used for fortifications, sitting platforms, burial sites and occasional roofing etc. by the Angami and to some extent by Konyaks, stone had an important ceremonial use among Naga tribes. Among the Angamis, deceased villagers were commemorated not only through erecting cenotaphs (*kwěhū*), but also through the construction of stone platforms that functioned as sitting places *(bāzě)* or dancing places (*tehuba*) or even forts in the memory of a dead family member or relative. Resting places built along pathways leading to the fields were also often commemorative of a deceased near or notable one. The practice of raising stone memorials for rich or brave men were also sometimes found among Semas and some Naga groups from Manipur. Menhirs and Dolmen commemorating the dead were usually erecting in agricultural fields. Erection of monoliths was also an important part of the Naga practice of feasting; particularly among the western group of Nagas, the successful hosting of feasts of merit gave the host the coveted privilege of erecting monoliths, the number of which was determined by the stage in the sequence of feasts that he had fulfilled. Naga monolithic monuments are usually made up of uncarved sandstone blocks and slabs, although carvings of a minimal nature are occasionally found among various tribes. Hutton and others have stressed on the phallic significance of Naga megalithic erections, evidenced by the fact that they are usually always erected in gendered pairs, and the site of erection is in or close to agricultural fields, indicating a possible connection to a fertility cult of the dead, where the magical powers of the stone and the virility of the wealthy or brave figures they represent are believed to be infused into the soil, thus adding to the general prosperity of the entire village community. Megalithic monuments erected by their ancestors are a conspicuous

[421] Hutton, 'The Use of Stone in the Naga Hills', 78-79.

presence in villages in the western part of Nagaland today. Although no explicit confirmation of the fertility cult theory has been found in Naga folklore, these stone erections are definitely though a materialization of a collective and individual memory.[422]

Thus, the various constituents from the natural world that comprised a village landscape included boulders, plants, trees, rivers, creeks, hills, caves, etc. These entities did not exist outside of human affairs and transactions. But, in an in-depth relationship with them, consistently drawing meaning from them. Alongside institutions like the *morung*, they also became important sources of knowledge – of stories, wisdom and social memories. The sacred boulders that were scattered across the traditional habitats of various tribes, for instance, conveyed myths about the origin of the village and its inhabitants, of wars and other misfortunes, of those who became heroes and feast givers as well as those who came to be expelled and turned outcasts. These boulders were not considered as inanimate beings who were passive and lifeless in the face of human actions, but living beings who were to be honoured, respected and acknowledged.[423] The various constituents of the natural world provided a sense of place-ness for the human inhabitants, and much of their beliefs and ceremonial practices revolved around the desire to maintain a balance in the relationship between them and the natural world around them.[424]

The traditional belief system was rooted in this sense of place-ness. That is one reason why there was no one standard or singular religious belief that was identifiable across villages and tribes.[425]

[422] Maria Wunderlich. 'Celebrating Stones – Megalith Building Traditions among Angami-Naga, Northeast India'. in Anne Birgitte Gebauer, Lasse Sørensen, Anne Teather and António Carlos Valera eds. *Monumentalising Life in the Neolithic: Narratives of Change and Continuity*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2020, 149.

[423] John Thomas, "Boulders that speaks no more". Seminar 740- April 2021.

[424] Thomas, Boulders, 35-44.

[425] Thomas, Boulders, 35-44.

While there were similarities in the beliefs and practices across villages and tribes, the deities, the myths and the ceremonial practices varied from village to village. Their structure and form were drawn from the particular place of habitation and the various constituents within it. As John Thomas indicates: 'Religion became meaningful only so far as it was lived out in the concrete, in the here and now, among the particular trees, animals, boulders, hills, rivers and every other constituent of a particular place.'[426] As Christianity spread and replaced this system of beliefs and practices that was centred on a particular place, vast changes came about in the spatial organisation of lived spaces. This is something that will be further addressed in the next section.

IV

From the late 19th Century onwards, Christianity began to spread and make its presence felt in various villages. The British administration had already begun to link the villages to its administrative apparatus through its *gaonburas*, roads, permit systems, etc. There was a growing aspiration among the younger generation, especially those who were beneficiaries of the mission as well as government schools, to break out of the existing life world and the web of relations it demanded. They wanted to gain access to a world beyond the village, take to modern professions and participate in the growing money economy. This, of course, had enormous impact on the existing spatial and architectural organisation of villages and homes.

Unlike the existing belief system, Christianity, as promoted by the missionaries, did not encourage its followers to be rooted in place specific relations and requirements. The place of habitation and

[426] Thomas, Boulders, 35-44.

the various beings within that place did not matter as much as the personal quest for salvation within a larger history where God's reign would be finally realised. This also meant that more than the village community, the exclusive community of believers came to be prioritised. The latter community was not meant for the 'heathen' other, who was spiritually and morally 'degenerate', even if that other was from the same village. The exclusivity maintained by the new religionists became a cause of much tension within villages. They became indifferent to meeting the customary social and economic obligations to the village community. They refused to be part of ceremonial practices and festivities that were considered integral towards maintaining community feeling. The converts also openly ridiculed objects and ceremonies that were traditionally held sacred. Thus, villages came to be divided on religious lines.[427]

This conflict within villages was resolved either by gradually Christianity going on to become the religion of the village or by Christian converts relocating themselves from their original habitat and constructing a new village for themselves. The latter was also encouraged by the missionaries as they argued the converted were always in the danger of unconverted relatives and friends influencing them back to 'heathenism'.[428] This was the case in the first Ao village that came under the influence of Christianity. In Dekha Haimong village, the missionary and his small band of Christians, unable to reconcile with rest of the village, constructed a new village called Molung.[429]

The new villages conceived by missionaries and constructed by the Christian converts indeed became the model for how villages and the built environment within them came to be subsequently

[427] John Thomas, *Evangelising the Nation: Religion and the Formation of Naga Political Identity*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), 52-54.

[428] Thomas, Boulders, 38-39.

[429] Mary Mead Clark, 19-34.

organised. As the rate of conversions to Christianity increased immensely by the 1930s and 40s, the number of these new villages also increased rapidly. They were conceived and organised as per the standards and values put in place by the missionaries. They were to be villages where existing loyalties and ceremonial practices were to gradually give way for 'the standard of the cross' to be 'erected', where 'the gospel of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ alone was proclaimed', and where a 'civilised and Christianised' people would be made out of the Nagas.[430]

The new villages were 'determined to abandon aggressive warfare' and to be known as 'peaceable, Christian village(s)'.[431] Hence, *panjied* stockades and other defensive structures built along the village boundaries came to be lessened. Much of the vegetation leading up to the villages were cleared for the construction of clearly laid out paths (and subsequently, roads) leading up to the villages. As many of the existing built structures were considered not worthy of 'healthy' and 'moral' living, they were either ignored or invested with new religious meanings. For instance, village gates that earlier had themes drawn from existing myths carved on them increasingly came to be replaced by or modified with Christian themes carved on them.

Meanwhile, given the restrictions put on the converts and the general indifference of the converts towards structures and institutions that were considered 'heathen', various existing built structures within the village, such as the *morungs*, were allowed to deteriorate without any maintenance or repair. Earlier, it was the responsibility of the village youth to ensure its maintenance. But, now they were dissuaded from even living in and using a *morung* on the ground that it was a 'heathen' building where youth were often left unmonitored and allowed to engage in all sorts of 'licentious'

[430] Clark, 23.

[431] Mary Mead Clark, 24.

behaviour.[432] As an Ao pastor claimed: 'How could a boy sleep in these houses of the heathen? To use them would be against our rules'.[433] The *morungs* were gradually replaced by mission schools that initiated the youth into the values, standards and disciplines instilled by the missionaries and their religion. While *morungs* fell into disuse, new mission schools began to be erected in its place. The consequences of this was immense, by dissuading them from using a *morung*, the younger generation were denied the opportunity to access an important institution that initiated them into their own history, arts, customs, practices and values. Instead, they were to be now to be provided modern education that taught them to be modern subjects in a modern world, with new outlook and sensibilities.

Besides the mission school, a new structure that adorned these new villages was the village church. In the existing belief system, there was hardly any permanent built structure where villagers assembled to worship. Ceremonial practices and ritual were conducted in varied spaces, from homes to forests to fields. But the new religion required the construction of a fixed place of worship – a church. Churches were built in the most prominent and elevated portion of the village so that it's summit, where a cross was erected, could be seen by the entire village. Earlier, villages had a log drum, which would be beaten to invite/call the villagers together, to assemble. It was often beaten when a raid from a neighbouring village was to happen, or when a ceremony that required the presence of the entire village was to take place, or any other occasion that required the coming together of the entire village. In the newly conceived villages, the log drum was replaced by the church bells. These bells were rung not only to invite the villagers for church services, but also when there was a death in the village or when it was time for a village meeting. Sometimes, the

[432] Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 419; Haimendorf, *Naked Nagas*, 51-52.

[433] Haimendorf, *Naked Nagas*, 51.

church bell also came to be used as the school bell, indicating the time a mission school began its activities for the day.[434] The church/school bell became an important fixture of the village landscape, disciplining the local people into the new time of modernity.

Naga villages and homes, as such, were a source of much anxiety for the missionaries. In their eyes, the villages and homes lacked sanitation and hygiene. They were embodiments of 'dirt' and 'filth' that also seemed to represent their spiritual and moral status. Davis remarked, "After tea, we looked at the town, so unlike our own American towns. The houses were built close upon the roads, dirty, unkempt, and with equally dirty and unkempt children running about them."[435] Hence, it became an important part of the evangelisation efforts to inculcate notions of cleanliness and hygiene in how villages were maintained and organised. Sydney Rivenburg, missionary doctor among the Angamis, who was concerned about the links between the 'unhygienic' surroundings and the prevalence of diseases, pushed for sanitising the villages, draining all the swamps and pools, where mosquitoes bred.[436]

A clean and well organised village was considered and promoted as a marker of whether a village was Christian or not. When G. W. Supplee came to a Sumi village that had converted *en masse* to Christianity, he remarked: 'The village seems to be almost a miracle. I have never seen a cleaner Naga village. They are nearly totally illiterate. Their homes, their village paths, their village all bear testimony to their new-found faith in Christ Jesus.'[437]

[434] Haimendorf, *Naked Nagas*, 55.

[435] Clark, M.M. *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia, American Publication Society, 1907, 69.

[436] Rivenburg, 1941: 112.

[437] Rivenburg, 1941, 10.

For the missionaries, families/homes represented spaces where children were to be nurtured and disciplined to live a worthy life. This was one of the reasons why the sending children to *morungs* was opposed by the missionaries. Keeping them away from their homes, especially in their youth, was considered contrary to Christian principles surrounding family life. They had to live at home, and live as a family unit. Hence, homes needed to made conducive as spaces where the sanctity of family life was to be maintained. It was the basic unit where children would be initiated to Christian living.

Besides the scarce space within a home to accommodate the entire family, an important aspect that concerned them was the unsanitary and unhygienic conditions of Naga houses. Informed by the discourse of 'cleanliness' and 'hygiene' prevalent in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, missionaries found the Naga houses too congested, smoke-filled and with no proper ventilation, where pigs and chickens freely roamed about. W. E. Witter, missionary among the Lothas, after staying in a Naga household, commented that he had a sleepless night as he was disturbed by the frequent appearances of pigs and fowls that were kept inside the house.[438] Harriet and Howard Houston who also worked among the Lothas also commented that 'pigs and chickens are right at home around the open fire in the dark windowless kitchens' and how that, along with 'unhygienic' food, water and kitchen utensils became a cause for 'sicknesses' in the villages.[439] For the missionaries, such 'dirt and disorder' represented the moral and spiritual degeneracy of the local people.

[438] Rev W.E. Witter, The Baptist Missionary Magazine- Published by the American Baptist Missionary Union. Vol-LXVIII No.3 1888, Wokha, Assam.

[439] Harriet and Howard Houston, *Nagaland Adventure, 1947-53*, Lotha Baptist Church Association, Kohima, 1987, 15.

As part of their evangelization, the missionaries worked more closely with the women of households to address the lack of sanitation and hygiene in homes. Women, being identified as the home makers who engaged in various domestic chores, became the subjects of missionary instruction on the art of keeping their living spaces clean, hygienic and organised as per their standards. Women were also encouraged to keep the house compound clean. Alongside knitting, embroidery and other skills that were considered to be apt for feminine upbringing, gardening also came to be encouraged – not merely for sustenance but for making the surroundings around the homes inviting and liveable.[440]

In terms of architecture, missionaries encouraged more ventilation to their 'smoky, dirty and damp' houses. In Christian homes, the height of the eves from the ground came to be increased, with windows being introduced for light and ventilation.[441] The homes were made more spacious, with pigs and fowls being confined to their coops. The newly built schools were also spacious structures with wooden floors, reed walls plastered with mud on the outside, thatched roofs and American desks.[442] The size, nature and elaborateness of the houses varied from each other. If it was one's social status within a village community that determined the nature, size and elaborateness of the houses in pre-modern times, in the twentieth century, it was one's class status informed by access to modern education and professions that determined the nature, size and elaborateness of houses in the twentieth century.

[440] Minutes of the Assam Baptist Missionary Conference. Sadiya,Assam. December 8-13, 1937, 47-48.

[441] Chollamadathil, Matthew. "Traditional Naga Architecture: An Analysis of Traditional Naga Architecture through a critical appraisal of the literature supplemented by case studies of some tribes" unpublished Master of Architecture Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium.

[442] Missions in Assam, A Province of British India: American Baptist Missionary Union, Woman's Baptist Foreign Missionary Societies, Mission Studies, New Series, No.1, Frankwood, Printer, Boston, 11.

The second world war had brought immense destruction of houses, granaries and property in the Naga Hills and Manipur. According to government estimates, around 2780 houses in Naga Hills and 9103 houses in Manipur were totally destroyed.[443] The actual numbers may have been higher. The British efforts to provide relief and reconstruction sped up the transition to more pukka dwelling places, often made with materials brought into the hills from outside. As compensation for damages, the British authorities provided every affected household with bamboos, corrugated sheets, asbestos, and other materials for the construction of new houses.[444] The introduction of these materials and greater desire to build modern houses certainly increased the need to depend on outside market for house construction; not to mention, the growing connectedness to the emergent money economy.

Through the new houses, villages and other infrastructures that was built and used, the local people developed a new understanding of their self. Becoming modern came to be associated with the construction and use of these structures. While it is understood that all cultural artefacts are subject to perpetual change and evolution, the architectural and organizational practices of the Naga communities during the pre-Colonial period were an integral part of their cultural and material lives; they had been undergoing an organic process of gradual development, which was deeply connected to their geographical location, climatic conditions and a deep-rooted indigenous ontology. This internal dynamism of Naga culture received a rude shock when new sensibilities and forms of living, of dwelling, transported from outside the region, came to be promoted as that

[443] "Summary of Findings in the Naga Hills and Manipur State vy the chief medical officer, A report on the measure of rehabilitation and reconstruction undertaken by the government of India in the Naga Hills and Manipur State in 1944-45, in order to repay the ravages caused by the Japanese invasion of 1944, Sl. No. 497, Confidential, 1944, NSA, Kohima".

[444] Summary of Findings, Confidential, 1944, NSA, Kohima.

which is more righteous and moral. It set in motion a new kind of developmentalism that was indifferent to the local eco-system. The manifestation of which is most evident in the unplanned concrete jungles that Naga hill towns have become.

Conclusion

This study has looked at three key areas where the daily cultural changes of the Nagas in general and Sumi Nagas in particular have occurred. Examining the cultural shifts that took place in day-to-day life—which were mediated by American Baptist missionaries, British administrators, and the longer-term aspirations of the Nagas to become "modern"—through the tracking of changes in clothing and bodily practices, food and dietary practices, habitation, and spatial practices. From the late 19th to the mid-20th century, the study period covered the extent to which these transitions became important for the construction of the modern Naga self and traced the changes in them, particularly in light of incursions by missionaries and colonists, the growing influence and flow of the money economy, the unpredictability of political life, the increased integration with the global network of ideas and commodities, and a host of other factors. This thesis attempted to highlight the sequence of events that resulted in the modifications to the daily routines of the Nagas, and Sumis in particular, while bearing in mind that culture is dynamic and ever-changing. But rather than coming from "within", these cultural shifts were mediated by the American missionaries and British administrators in their attempts to either freeze a Naga or civilize them as the latter did.

The introduction of American missionaries and British authorities to the Naga Hills in the late 19th century marks the beginning of the thesis. The British administrators never intended to annex the Naga Hills because they believed it would be less profitable when they first arrived there. However, they discovered that they had to regulate and subjugate the warring tribesmen after noticing a threat-like situation brought on by the Naga tribes' incursions on their tea plantation locations. They then started their mission of consolidation and subjugated the Naga tribes. The Naga Hill regions did not experience a formal British presence until 1866.

Their encounters with the Nagas in the Naga Hills were not amicable, as they would often mutiny and resort to bloodshed and raids. And it was in the midst of this that the American missionaries entered the Naga Hills. Because the hill tribes were constantly posing a threat, the administrators desired that the missionaries subdue the Nagas in order to permit peaceful trade in the foothills. The missionaries believed it was their duty to bring the Naga people under control, educate them, and bring them into the "light". Conversion happened quickly starting in the early 20th century, despite the mission work making little headway in its early years.

It is in the light of such development that this thesis attempted to reason out how intervention in the private sphere of daily life affects the socio-cultural understanding of an individual in light of this growth. The ecosystem that defined their habitat and served as a means of self-identification for this close-knit community of people, came to be disrupted and changed. In contrast, the British authorities considered the Naga to be an "exotic" race that needed to be tamed or subjugated rather than completely losing their former selves in order to forward their own agenda. The authorities were fascinated by the daily routines and ways of life that the Naga people followed, and they wanted to maintain this viewpoint. In contrast, the missionaries looked a Naga with contempt and believed it was their duty to reform and bring the Nagas into the modern day. As one reads the thesis, it becomes clear that the administrators' and missionaries' attitudes and actions were dualistic and frequently at odds with one another, pushing the Nagas in two different paths.

Conversion to a new religion has played a significant role in the transition of the everyday culture that this thesis tried to explore. As a community of people who are closely tied to the socio-cultural and religious beliefs in tune with the nature surrounding them, the changes gradually replacing their lived experiences and belief system had been far-reaching in the course of their history. As the Nagas began converting to a new faith which was in total contrast to their old belief system,

they had to shed off their old customs and practices because they did not seem to fit in their new world order. Intervention made by the missionaries suggesting the converts the ideals of a true Christian home was well pronounced as they begun prohibiting the converts against indulgence and excessive feasts. All such feasts and drinks were intrinsically connected to their beliefs and practices that was held sacred and communal which gradually transformed into new ideas from communal feast to love-feast.

The thesis also explores how the Nagas were woven between two opposing entities- administrators and the missionaries with regards to what to wear and how to wear them. Once a semi-naked group of people who were proud of their attires and ornaments that had deeper meanings in their social strata were seen with displeasure by the missionaries. The missionaries insisted upon the converts and mission school going boys and girls to put on shorts and shirts, which characterized decency and civility, to become a true Christian. However, the British administrators-imposed fines and humiliated students who wore khakis, shorts or pants. They were encouraged to have a naga haircut and not model oneself as a white man. While caught in between the web of imposition and restrictions, over time, the Nagas began asserting themselves through the various kind of attires and clothes to reaffirm their position as a people seeking political autonomy and recognition.

Towards the end, the thesis elaborated how the living spaces, both tangible and intangible, underwent drastic changes and reorganization. As the old understanding of spaces and homes- which had its own essence and meanings, its sacredness and memories- were replaced with a more refined and newer tools and equipment, the old gradually died and lost its relevance or significance. One fine reference of this was when schools and church buildings started replacing morungs, an informal institution which enriched young boys and girls with the values and ethos of their ancestors and their community. When folktales and songs that glorified their community, villages,

rivers, trees and rocks were replaced with formal teaching through mission and government schools and bible lessons. The coming of new ideas and technologies generated new belief systems which begun to be seen as relevant while the old tradition and practices were gradually considered obsolete.

This thesis has tried to give a detailed historical backdrop of who a Naga is in its initial chapter and how the Nagas encountered the British administration and the American missionaries and thereby looked at three important markers of their everyday- namely dietary practices, sartorial and living spaces, and how such encounters had been instrumental in reshaping the Nagas worldview during the mid-twentieth century. There were two larger processes that became the basis on which the aspiration of Nagas to become modern came to be articulated – Christianization and political autonomy. In other words, the act of converting to a new religion and asserting their demands for political autonomy, free from the control of British as well as India, became the ground on which they came to press for and articulate their modern self.

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