

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.

They appropriated, in specific ways, what they encountered and experienced to construct their 'modern' self.

