

Narrativising the creativity of Nagas and their relationship with the Sea

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The Nagas are quintessentially a hill people for whom identity and social status is as important in life as after death and their origin is in obscure. The Nagas are spread throughout the Indian states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, and parts of Myanmar. They were never subjugated by any external political power except for occasional encounters with the Ahom kings from the 13th century CE onwards, until the annexation of their territory by the British and the mission works of the American mission in the mid-19th century. Up to just a couple of centuries ago, the Nagas remained untouched by the civilizations of even the neighbouring districts/states in India and Myanmar. They lived in isolation practising their distinctive customs, and the only trade route nearest to them on the Indian side had been to Assam. Albeit the nearest ocean is 2500 km from their habitat, a good number of materials used by the Nagas as an integral part of their culture and identity, are either brought from Ocean or traded through it. Besides, several of their cultural traits including, but not limited to practices of annual ancestor veneration, community fishing, rain- making ritual, are Oceanic in origin. This presentation will attempt to evaluate the Oceanic elements among the Nagas through field, museum and archival data.