

ABSTRACT

Modernity in Assam (as elsewhere in India) came piggybacking on colonialism. The advent of modernity brought changes in the field of administration, education and other social factors that fundamentally altered Assamese society and culture. One of the most important markers of this change was clothing. Clothing holds such an important position in our everyday life that irrespective of whether we like it or not, it grabs our attention and reflects our ideological standpoint when we choose to dress for a particular event. Other than covering one's body, dress is studied and is analysed in relation to class, status, caste, religion, marital status, profession, gender, and so on. The quality of 'superior' (classy, elegant, progressive) and 'inferior' ('old-fashioned', 'inelegant', 'traditional') is very much related with dress. This thesis was an attempt to examine the change of Assamese women's dress through photographs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emphasizing the role of major socio-cultural and political events that contributed to the emergence of new elements of dress and style for women during different historical periods in Assam. The colonial project of photography in Assam created and rigidified new categories of ethnic self and 'other'(s). With this procedure, it was possible to reveal the binary concepts of 'modernity' and 'tradition,' 'progressive' and 'outdated,' etc., as well as the role of agency, power, coercion, and social institutions in people's clothing choices, which have a significant impact and influence on people's sartorial choices.

Keywords: Modernity, Dress, Gender, Nationalism, Identity, Social Movement