



IMPACT OF MODERN EDUCATION ON NAGA SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Education in Nagaland was introduced in the later part of the nineteenth century through the effort of the Christian missionaries who took herculean task to reach the semi-civilized Nagas at the cost of their life. The missionaries left no stone unturned to spread the good news and to impart modern education to the Naga people. They set up churches, schools and introduced English script to teach the Nagas. The close association of the Naga people with the British rulers and Christian missionaries has brought tremendous change in the mental attitude of the Nagas. Spread of modern education broadened their minds. Further, their commitment to their customary laws and social traditions began to decline and their animistic tradition which was based on superstitious practices got transformed and further gives way to an orderly society.

A significant feature of the role of Christian missionaries in the Naga Hills was that it made education available to all sections of the Naga tribes unlike other regions of British India where the fruits of modern education were enjoyed generally by affluent sections of the society. As a result, the educated group of Nagas which emerged was representative of a cross-section of Naga tribes. It was this section of educated middle class which tried to set up a platform which would represent all the tribes and which would work towards the realization of the goal of a unified Naga society and homeland.

Before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, there were no records of teaching and learning of script among the Nagas. Hence, no formal education system was followed by the Nagas. Morung was the only institution where young men and boys learn manners, discipline, art, stories, songs, war tactics, religion, customary rites and ceremonies from their elders. These Morungs are traditional institutions and dormitories where young boys are taught virtues, culture and traditions of the tribe and clan by the elders of the village. Though, without formal schooling of the west, the Nagas regarded education as operative at all stages of human life and is very much in the interest of every village community.

The present paper offers an evaluation and understanding of traditional education system in Nagaland. It also attempts to trace the origin and development of modern education system. An attempt has also been made to assess the impact of modern education on Naga society.



Introduction

The British colonization of India in the eighteenth century and the eventual British control over the northeast region in the nineteenth century served to open doors to the region for the missionaries. The pioneer missionaries who came to the northeast India in the nineteenth century belonged to the American Baptist Mission and Welsh Presbyterian Mission. It was a known fact that there was a working relation between the British colonial powers and Christian Mission in northeast India. Although the British government maintained the existence of their policy of neutrality, this policy did not stop some of the individual government officers from indulging in religious activities by way of either helping Christian missionaries or the native people.

One of the primary tasks of the missionaries was to open schools for the native people. Ministry through education became the most effective means of evangelizing among the people. In most places in the northeast India, the missionaries were the first to introduce modern education system among the native people. By inculcating modern education in schools, missionaries worked towards changing the habits and lifestyles of the Naga people. The close association of the Naga people with the Christian missionaries has brought tremendous change in the mental attitude of the Nagas. Spread of modern education broadened their minds. Further, their commitment to their customary laws and social traditions began to decline and their animistic tradition which was based on superstitious practices got transformed and further gives way to an orderly society.

The National Human Development Report regards education as the single most important means for individuals to improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome constraints and in the process, enlarge their available set of opportunities and choices for a sustained improvement. It is not only a means to enhance human capital, productivity and hence the compensation to labour. But it is equally important for enabling the process of acquisition, assimilation and communication of information and knowledge, all of which augments a person's quality of life. The type of education a society has reflects the needs and aspirations of the particular society and has a great bearing on its social order. This reciprocal relationship between education and the needs and aspiration of society provide focus and perspective to the people and they, in turn, shape society for harmonious and progressive living.

Land and the People: A Brief History

Nagaland is situated in the northeastern part of the Indian sub-continent. It is mostly covered with dense forests. It is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the North, Assam in the West, Manipur in the South and Myanmar in the East. It has a total geographical area of 116,527 square km. In the words of Bareh, "its rolling mountains, enchanting valleys, swift flowing streams and evergreen forests speak of the scenic of the land, and the land forms an irregular plateau with the elevated ridges and peaks."



The Nagas are comprised of a number of tribes, which are again divided into sub-tribes and clans. The Naga people have a long chequered history of their origin, migration and permanent settlement. Their culture, social behavior, religious faith and life based on customary laws have given them a separate identity. Despite innumerable challenges from outsiders and other forces, the Naga people have maintained their identity which has been possessing since time immemorial. They had experienced and faced aggressions but succeeded in maintaining an identity of their own.

For centuries, the Nagas had lived secluded in their villages on hill tops. They were left untouched by the outside world. They valued their isolation and they clung to it. In their remoteness and isolation, the villages developed their own code of behavior and standard of administration. They were a closely knitted society based on human equality and belief in Supreme Being. They maintained good physique and remained to be carefree and happy. Today, modernization with its inclination towards westernization has brought about a basic change in their outlook and social behavior.

Traditional Education System

The system of formal education, as we know it today, was entirely unknown to the Nagas prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Yet, as Margaret Mead asserts that, “apart from formal education, there were certain other processes too by which tribal societies transmit their standardized habit patterns to their children.” However, such account is constrained by lack of documentary evidence such as written records. In this sense, the children received informal training in those tasks that were to become their adult roles in later life. Young girls were inducted into the fold of household chores from the early age of seven, helping their mothers to fetch water in bamboo, to winnow cotton and to cook food for the entire family. They also carry their younger siblings on their backs. The young boys were expected to assist their fathers in cutting the jhums.

The mode of education prevalent in Naga society before the coming of the Christian missionaries was centred on the morung. This institution served Naga society for centuries and incorporated in its functioning tribal values, life-centered learning and exposure to customary practices and experiences. In this institution, young men and women grew up under the supervision of the community elders. For the young men, the Morung is khel or clan-based while the young girls meet in informal groups usually in the home of a respected senior women. The youth, through community living and working together also get to know each other in a natural way and forged relationships that extended from the personal to the social domain. This innovative approach to education, leadership building and societal training contributed much to Naga life, history and functioning.



Progressive Results

With the advent of Christianity, English and formal education were introduced. This led to far-reaching changes in the educational and social framework of Nagaland. With the coming of the Christian missionaries into the Naga Hills, Naga society began to change. The spread of Christianity and modern ideas not only helped to put an end to inter-tribe warfare, but also introduced concepts of hygiene and health care. Due credit should be given to missionaries for weaning the Nagas away from headhunting. Finally, headhunting disappeared fully from the areas where Christianity had taken its root. It is maintained by some scholars that the church apart from introducing radical changes in the social practices of the people also helped in the emergence of some sort of political platform with a common Naga identity based on Christianity. This is one of the reasons why the foreign Christian missionaries were suspected by the Indian government by cooking secessionist ideas in the Naga Hills. In 1953, the then Home Minister Dr. K. N. Katju made a strong statement in the Parliament to the effect that missionary activities should be restricted in Naga Hills, as their work in politics was not clear. Thus the Indian government issued an order for all Christian missionaries to leave Nagaland. However, it is unfair to conclude that the foreign missionaries have instigated the Naga national movement. The contribution of the missionaries was confined in providing religion and modern education which might in the process have created awareness of their ethnic identity and the universal rights shared by all human beings.

The new schools were first sponsored by the American missionaries and later by the British government. The first English primary school was established in the Naga Hills by Mary Mead Clark in Molungyimsen, Mokokchung district in 1878. The progress of education in tribal areas of independent India can be best described in the words of Haimendorf who had visited Naga Hills both during the British regime and also in 1970 in independent India: "In this field (education) enormous progress has been made and Nagaland with literacy rate of 27 percent has nearly reached the All India average of 29 percent. While at the end of British rule there was only one high school, within Naga Hills, there are now 3 colleges, 31 high schools, 144 middle schools and 800 primary schools."

The early missionaries worked in the face of various odds and difficulties, encountering vigorous opposition, as the local people were apathetic to education as well as to Christian doctrines. With the passage of time, the people perceived the constructive results of education and came forward to assist the mission by donating land and rendering free labor and materials for school buildings. The parents wished that their children acquired the right knowledge and that their character was moulded on sound lines.

Communitisation of Education

Qualitative improvement of education has been one of the main priorities of the state government. The state sees the participation of the community as a major



source in making this vision possible. Therefore, the government has introduced the communitisation initiative, under the Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002 in the field of education. Under this act, certain responsibilities such as management of academic, administrative and financial resources of the communitised schools have been transferred to the village communities through the Village Education Committees (VECs). The objective is to help create a sense of ownership of public institutions and better management of resources. The main goal of this initiative is to develop institutions of excellence with the active participation of the community, the teachers and the support of the government. Former President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on his maiden visit to Nagaland in 2003 says, "Once the whole state is brought under the communitisation programme, it would be a model for the whole country to follow."

Building up of a synergistic relationship between the government and the community to spur growth and development of institutions is one of the anticipated outcomes. The Village Education Committee is empowered to control teachers in a variety of ways, including the operation of the principle of 'no work, no pay.' This system ensures investment of community's social capital for betterment of the schools and improvement of education through better management of government's resources and its personnel with community participation and empowerment.

Conclusion

Education in Nagaland was introduced in the later part of the nineteenth century through the effort of the Christian missionaries who took herculean task to reach the semi-civilized Nagas at the cost of their life. The Christian missionaries left no stone unturned to spread the good news and to impart modern education to the Naga people. It is important to note that the early missionaries irrespective of the difficult circumstances to which they are placed, carried out their educational projects, with great zeal and sacrifice. Today, the literacy rate has reached 79.55 percent in the state.

The communitisation initiative has created the policy framework for bringing about substantial improvement in the quality of education. It has also raised the expectations of the people. Sustaining this framework of collaboration over time will be a key to its success. Meanwhile, the government has formulated an elaborate training and capacity building exercise for the Village Education Committee members. The focus should centre on providing education to all children in the state. It must also ensure, through innovative ideas and experiments, education must not only remain a tool of learning but also contributes to the growth and development of the students as individuals and prepare them to contribute towards prosperity of the state and society.



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