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A STUDY ON THE INDIGENOUS AND MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM AMONG THE PHOM TRIBE IN NAGALAND

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Abstract: The Phom Naga Morung was a self-governing institution aiming to protect the village identity and train male to conduit fertility into their community. Under the parasol of the village authority, this institution had its own leaders and rules. The Bang was grand buildings, constructed at the village entrance or in a spot to be effectively guarded or in a spot to be effectively guarded. In Phom Bang (Morung) is a man's club or dormitory for young unmarried men, serving as an agency for all round development and to make him to become a worthy citizen of the village state. Village elders conveyed the Phom culture, customs, and tradition, transmitted from generation to generation through folk music, dance, folk tales, oral tradition, wood carvings and weaving, to the young while they live in the Bang. The Bang was the institution where the dignity of labour is taught, refine culture, rectified the personal short comings, and together they build strong society. Morung system was a set of learning; it was also the very foundation to modern education. Since adopting some modern practices, the Phom Naga has abandoned the use of time in Bang for their youth.

Keywords: Bang, Yow and Morung.

Introduction

One of the most significant features of the social organization of the Nagas is the institution of the Morungs. Different names have been given by different writers to this institution such as 'man's hall', 'bachelor's dormitory' and so on (Mills, 1926). However various tribes have their own names for their Morungs. The Angami tribe call it Thehou and attached with it Kichuki. The Ao tribe calls it as Arijju, the Sumi tribe calls it Apuki, the Phom call it Bang, the Chang tribe call it Hakuh, the Chakhesang tribe call it ThepumiChiethichie and so on. The members of the Morung reside in their homes, perform economic activities and only after the evening meal, members slowly come in for the evening singing, telling and listening to stories, merry making and finally to sleep. The institution of the Morung was common to all the Nagas but its operational differs from tribe to tribe (Haimendorf, 1938). Though it differs from tribe to tribe yet its main general aims and objectives was education in all forms. They are taught and disciplined by the elder members of the Morung. Most of the social activities of the village were revolved around this male dormitory. It was in this Morung that proper habits and manners and how to maintain discipline were taught, proper moulding of the personality of the young takes place and where all-round education of the younger ones in social, tradition, religious, educational and cultural activities take place. It has been rightly called as a 'practical school'. It is also an institution for the young boys to learn about their tradition, legends and the heroic deeds of their forefathers. Also, they learn to perform the civic duties to their community and society. They are also taught to make baskets of various patterns, indigenous, musical instruments, wooden utensils and the like. They learn the art of using spears, daos and shields. In this way a boy picks up his culture of do's and don'ts from an early age. Indeed, the Morung of the Nagas was a real educational institution. In the present stage of the Nagas, Morung does not hold the same position as in the past. One important reason is the influence of outside culture which has brought about a new concept of belief and living from that of their traditional belief and lifestyle. Nevertheless, the absence of Morung in modern day seems to have created both positive and negative impact. Till the recent past the Morung institution had been the most powerful influence in the Naga society. With the decline of this institution and in the absence of any other institution in its place the discipline and orderliness particularly among the young people became deteriorated and a vacuum was thus created in the village social organization (Horam, 1977). A similar institution like the Morung exists for girls. The Aos called it Tsuki, the Angami tribe Kichuki, the Sema tribe Iiki, the Phom call Yow, the Chakhesang tribe ThenomiChiethichie, the Rengma tribe Katsen and on. The girls sleep together according to their respective age groups in a huge room which is generally attached to a prominent lady in the village. After a whole day's work, the girls get together at the dormitory right after the evening meal. Here they stay till late at night and do various kinds of handicraft work. During earlier days in the Naga society, the responsibilities of the entire household clothing rests upon the girls so they would bring their weaving material, raw cotton, spinning wheel and threads and weave to the dormitories at night. The elder ones will teach the younger ones to learn the skills. The main function of the girl's dormitory is molding the girl's future, building up their character and facilitating selection of partner and finally shaping them to shoulder motherly responsibilities and become an effective citizen. Hence it is found that the Morungs and girls' dormitories have been the best and most effective means of transmitting events of the past to the present. These setups of both male and female dorm functioned as the institutions where the youngsters were taught of both social and individual way of life in the villages. It is found that the only institution in the Naga society where all the young people were taught and trained. Thus, we find that education was very much a part of their lives even prior to the advent of the Westerners (Shimray, 1985; Kumar, 2006).



Indigenous Bang and Yow system of education among the Phom tribe

Bang is a man's club or dormitory for young unmarried men, serving as an agency for all round development and to make him to become a worthy citizen of the village state. The etymological meaning of this word 'Bang' is to "listen or obey." Phoms have different terms for Morung according to different dialects such as, Bang, Leng, Jan, Mangshum, Aliju. Of these, the term, Bang which is used by majority of the people. In indigenous Bang system of education, there were no curriculum and syllabus as such, but it was a sort of training war tactics, training how to use gun, learning how to sharpen daos and spears, training and developing skills of making crafts etc. It was more of work experience kinds of education and community centred education that helped them to develop community feelings and selfless attitudes for their community. And adolescent age was the right time to involve at Bang activities (Henshet, 2003). During times immemorial, when there was no government or any other formal institution in the strict sense of the term, the Bang was the one and only platform for social engagements. However, there was not a village without the Bang. It was the central platform for all public references and affairs. Here young boys were taught all the norms of social and political life, history, folk songs, folk tales, folkdance, legends, war technique, manners, social etiquettes, sportsman etc. The Bang system of education was free and compulsory. All the boys after they attained a certain age were recruited to become a bona fide member of it. In fact, the education they got from Bang was enough to help them throughout their whole life. Bang was also regarded as a guard house, recreational club, a place of learning various kinds of arts like wood carving and all kinds of handicrafts. Young people received valuable lessons in leadership, folk tales, folksongs, legends, folkdance and discipline. In olden days, while no established institution was ever conceived among the primal people, the emergence of Bang concept was an immense discovery at that time. Apart from Bang system, there was no any other institution. So, it served the best interest of people in those days.

Yow was exclusively meant for female. In a Yow only the girls from same clan were allowed to sleep. Yow is a girl's dormitory. A Yow was kept under the control of proprietress usually an older woman, who played the role of a teacher. Yow was a learning centre for girls where they learnt the art of weaving, spinning of thread, folksongs and folk tales etc. They developed their social etiquettes, social norms and social living in the Yow system of education. They learned how to address each other not by name, but by common terms such as 'Anung' means friend and 'Lamei' means sister etc. All adult and unmarried women sleep in the Yow. Experienced and elderly women guided and educate the newly recruited young women about the social, religious, culture and custom of the village. Yow was little bit of convent type of school in modern sense. It was totally a girl's school where man-made customs, cultures and practices of for women were taught. Women were taught nothing beyond cooking, weaving, home-making, childbirth and their menstrual cycle etc. It was constructed according to the clan so that the young men from other clans can come to visit them because in Phom custom and culture, it is taboos for men and women of same clan to get married. During their stay in the Yow the girls were trained to become effective members of the village. Since the life and belief system in the village were simple, the education in the Yow was enough to live their live their whole life. The singing they were also told histories and folktales. Enrolment of young women in the Yow was one of the criteria to recommend marriage.

Establishment of modern education system: A brief review

The people of Longleng are late comers in the field of modern education. In Nagaland modern education came along with Christianity. Interestingly, in Phom area the first school was established by the British Gorkha troops in 1884 at Tamlu where alphabet and numbers were in Assamese medium but the school was closed down just after a year. It was in 1931 a lower primary school was opened for the second time with the help of native teacher Longtok. Later the school was upgraded to upper primary level having classes up to IV with the help of another native teacher of the village. In the subsequent years two more schools were opened, one at Kangching in 1937 and another at Tangha in 1947. Although, the schools were opened at opened at Tamlu and Kangching before Independence, the attempt to popularize modern education did not succeed due to number of reasons such as poor response of the people, indifferent attitude of the colonial government and lack of a congenial atmosphere in the area. As stated above, when Christianity and modern education came to the Nagaland as early as 1872, but until 1952, the Phom Naga villagers were practicing head hunting, one of the most threaded practices of the ancient Nagas. The practice was put to an end only on 6th June 1952 with the effort of the government and the elders of the tribe; in commemoration of which the day is observed as Phom Day every year. Thus, whoever accepted Christianity simultaneously received modern education as religious texts became socially significant (PhomLaivanghPangthai, 2010).

Until 1950s the response of the people towards modern education was not at all encouraging as most of the parents regarded the school going children as lazy people who do not want to work in the field. However, the establishment of a Lower Primary School in Longleng in 1950-51 brought about a change to school education. The school was upgraded to a middle school in 1957 and again to a high school in 1971. The management of the school was taken over by the Government of Nagaland in 1972 and subsequently, the school was upgraded to a Bautung Higher Secondary School in 2014 by the Government of Nagaland. To meet the growing demand of collegiate education, the Association of Phom Graduates and Officers in collaboration with the Phom People's Council, established an Arts College named as Yingli College at Longleng in September 1992, the first and only college in the Longleng district. Initially, the college stated with the Pre-University class but it was upgraded to degree in 1995 (Rahman, 2015).



Role of various agencies and their contributions to education

The role played by various agencies and their contribution to education in Longleng district was also studied. The following findings related to the role played by the missionaries, church, government and NGOs in shaping education and its development in Longleng.

Missionaries: As far as Phom community was concerned, the missionaries may not have been directly involved in the development of education in Longleng district, but it can be said that the message of love and forgiveness they brought to the hostile and barbaric head-hunting land of the Nagas, paved the way for people to get exposed to education. The Christian missionaries played a very important role in changing the Phom society in particular and Nagas in general. They brought great changes in eradicating many social evils like head hunting, tattooing and superstitions etc. Due to British policy and Naga Nationalist movement, development of education in Phom area was badly hampered. However, early missionaries played an immense role in improving formal and informal education in Phom area along with the teaching of gospel (Horam, 1975; Aier, 2006; Alemchiba, 1970).

Role of religious institutions: The religious institutions was instrumental in opening schools in Phom area and today there are church-run schools in towns and some village. Some notable church run schools in the district which guided and shaped many young Phoms into leaders and officers of today are PhomLempong English School, St. Joseph School Longleng, Christian School Tamlu and St. Thomas Tamlu. As far as education in Longleng district is concerned, PBCA has played a more significant role than the Government. If the church and missionaries had not taken active role in the field of education, Longleng district would not have developed as of today. The Phom Baptist Christian Association took the lead in opening the first private school in 1970 by the name PhomLempong English School. The Association of Phom Graduates and Officers Organization initiative led to the birth of first college i.e., Yingli College in 1992.

Government: In all the villages the government has established one or more schools, some of which later on, were upgraded to upper Primary schools' High schools and a Higher Secondary school. Initially, Government sent teachers but the villagers built the school building, provided benches and desks. Later the government also provided stationeries etc. But the church-run schools were solely borne by church's resources. In many cases, the village authority took the care.

Non-Governmental Organizations: Various NGOs in the district such as association of Phom Graduates and officers (APGO), Phom Students Conference (PSC) and Women organizations in the district and village levels have made their remarkable contributions towards the development in the field of education. The APGO initiated the establishment of Yingli College and mobilized resources for the same. APGO also conducted educational campaign and seminars and encouraged students by awarding HSLC and HSSLC toppers. Besides other activities for the development of education, the PSC, at some point of time, even went to the extent of maintaining study hours for students in the villages. Phom Baptist Christian Association (PBCA) took the lead in opening the first private school in 1970 by the name PhomLempong English School. The Association of Phom Graduates and Officers Organization initiative led to the birth of first college i.e., Yingli College on 09.09.1992. Besides Catholic organization has contributed in the development of education by opening up of school such as St. Joseph School in Longleng and St. Thomas School in Tamlu, However, private/Government/NGOs or other organization's role emphasized more on academic and secular education. Strictly speaking, no foreign missionary had ever landed in Phom area forgetting about educational uplift. Mostly educational development was taken up by the govt. and the village authority. Subsequently, the church also took responsibility in promoting educational growth in Phom area (Islam, 2014).

Conclusion

The above discussion makes it clear that lot of development has been taken in the field of education in Longleng. The roles of missionaries /NGOs/government in development in the field of education have done a commendable work in Longleng. It also aimed at all round development in a person's life physically, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and socially. The contribution about the missionaries in Longleng is so profound and vast. It was only after statehood of Nagaland that proper curriculum and higher education was introduced. There is wide growth in general education and higher education since the attainment of district (Jamir, 2020). Wide range of efforts has been made to spread education among all regions of the district. According to 93rd Amendment, education for all has been made compulsory. The elementary education is a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years has made a direct impact on education system. Today modern education has completely conquered our traditional way of learning bringing in identity crisis, loss of many valuable cultures and tradition. It is high time for us to seriously rethink and revitalise our culture, philosophy and worldview through incorporating our traditional educational system into modern education system.



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