The Influence Of Western Education And Proselytization On Traditional Socio-Economic Practices: The Tangkhul Naga Tribe Of Manipur – A Review

Dr. Awungashi Samshokwo Varekan
Post-Doctorate Scholar
Manipur International University

Prof. (Dr.) Harikumar Pallathadka
Mentor, Vice-Chancellor
Manipur International University

Dr. Yuhlung Cheithou Charles
Co-Mentor, Professor, MIU
Manipur International University

Abstract:

This is a review paper that examines the impact of the introduction of western education and the ultimate proselytization of the Tangkhuls on their social and economic traditional practices. There has been tectonic transition in the social, religious and economic activities and practices of the tribe. Many of their ancestral social traditions and practices has been completely abandoned and been replaced by some alien cultural practices. They were basically agriculturists but with higher education and change of religious beliefs and orientation leading to exposure to foreign cultural practices and employment opportunities to earn money have hugely impacted their way of life. Today agriculture is the least preferred employment sector, leading to mass migration of labor for earning money income. The focus of this paper is to examine various papers related to the traditional social and economic practices as a result of western education and proselytization.

Key Words:

Dormitory system, proselytization, western education, migration, Jhum, terrace

The Tangkhuls are one of the sub-tribes of the Naga tribe that inhabit the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Some Naga tribes are in Myanmar. This indigenous tribe have lived in the present territory since time immemorial. Presently they live in Ukhrul and Kamjong districts of Manipur and a few Tangkhul villages are in the Somra range of Myanmar.

They are agriculturists by profession and animist in their traditional religious beliefs. The Tangkhuls are well known for their skills in practicing Jhum cultivation and wet terrace farming. Their social practices revolve around the cycle of rice cultivation. Rice is the most important crop and along with it many other supplementary and complementary crops are cultivated. The social norms and values, and various arts and life skills necessary for the continuity of the tribe and meet the basic needs were taught practically in the boys and girls dormitory.

The Tangkhuls beliefs that the spirits live in every object in the nature. On that premises, they would strive to do all good and destroy evil to please the spirit. They refrain from doing evil for fear of displeasing the evil and its wrath. Thus, every social and economic practices were done with rituals.

All these saw a drastic change with the introduction of a foreign practice: Western education. Education was brought to the tribe in 1896 by Rev. William Pettigrew. The first school was established by the missionary with the objective of using that institution to proselytize the people to Christianity and it has proven to be highly successful. But with the

introduction of western education and eventual proselytization, some of the most important institutions that holds the social fabric of the tribe were destroyed or changed. Institutions such as the nerve center of the tribe; dormitory system, religion, etc. were completely replaced by foreign system which gave no or little importance to the ancestral practices.

Traditional education and Introduction of Western education

Shimrei Console Zamreinao (2015) writes in "The village community among the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur in the nineteenth century" that dormitory "Longshim" was an important admirable institution. It played the role of shaping the young people of the tribe into responsible men and women. It is said that "the dormitories are guard-houses, recreation clubs, centre's of education, art and discipline and have an important ceremonial purpose." The Longshim or the dormitory was truly the centre where all the necessary skills are taught and learned.

P.S. Luireiphy (2017) attempts to examine in her article "Revisiting Tangkhul Naga's Culture through Oral Tradition: Discussion Maitonphi and Shimreishang as a cultural heritage". The article emphasized on the significance of oral tradition among the Tangkhuls in passing on the social, economic, and political practices of the tribe. It is written that it was in Longshim that the youths live and are educated. The young people were taught history, culture, traditions, warfare, agriculture, weaving, etc. skills orally and practically while living in the dormitories. The dormitories were more of a social institution but to ensure the continuity of the tribe, the youth are taught in this institution from puberty till they get married.

Kashung Shangpam (2016) examines the "Changing Gender roles and stratification in social and economic dimensions of Tangkhul Naga society" and finds that the youth dormitory "Longshim" was a learning center of the young people of the village. But with the arrival of missionary and the introduction of western education, the very foundation of the social-economic fabric was at risk. Dormitory system and its practices were deemed evil and discourage and eventually died a natural death but at a heavy cost. The dormitory institution was replaced slowly and completely by the church, school and colleges where culture, traditions, and beliefs were completely discarded.

Prasad Gurrala Lakshmi (2015) evaluates the "Impact of modern education on Naga society" and writes that there was no formal education system among the Nagas before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. It was the dormitory or "Morung" where all the necessary arts and skills were taught and learned. The learning in the Morungs was regarded to be necessary and in the interest of the village. In the Morung, young people were monitored, supervised and taught by the elders.

C.J. Sonowal (2003) also wrote about the youth dormitory practices and the decline of this important institution among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. It is written that this institution was significant in the socio-cultural and economic life of the people. The elders in the dormitories teach the youngers one's various arts and skills. But it is sadly observed by the author that the dormitory system is not in practice anymore because of various factors.

Ksh. Rajesh Singh (2015) examined the transition of the Naga tribes to modern civilization as the result of the introduction of western education by the missionaries. Once a few were educated, they were used as a link to the society for the furtherance of the ultimate goal of proselytization.

Khaute Lamneithang Vaiphei et.al (2018) examined the introduction of education at elementary level with the arrival of Christianity. It was introduced to meet the objective of the missionary and not to give skills and knowledge for livelihood. The spread of education and Christianity were directly related and thereby laying the foundation of 'modern education' among the Vaiphei people having long lasting socio-economic impact.

Y. Hukheli Zhimomi (2019) writes of how the rich Sumi culture, customs, traditions and political are taught in the Morungs. The values, customary practices, leadership building skills were taught in this special institution. The traditional institution imparted knowledge orally and practically. The Morungs was the center of the folklores, folksongs, and folkdance.

The traditional institutions has been slowly replaced by the modern institutions at the cost of cultural indentity of the people.

Aveivey D (2019) studied the ancestral method of education and the impact of the introduction of western education among the Poumai Naga tribe of Manipur. It is said that the Poumai society had no formal education system but all necessary skills and information were taught and passed on in the youth dormitories. Learning took place practically in the form of folk songs, folk tales, dance, framing, hunting, fishing, agriculture, weaving, etc. The paper made a mention of the genesis of western education introduction to the hill people by Rev. William Pettigrew among the Tangkhuls.

Proselytization Among the Tangkhuls and the North East tribal communities

Rimai Joy (2014) in "Tradition to proselytization: An ethnographic account of Tangkhul Naga in North-East India" writes that the Tangkhuls really does not have a religion but they do belief in the existence of God and worship spirits. They belief that everything has a spirit and they are to be pleased. This belief in a supreme God in heaven and the land of the death governs all their social, political and economic life. The belief that every success or failure is on the spirits and therefore effort is made to please the spirit. Thus, every ritual and festivals of the tribe revolves around the spirit. But with the arrival of Christianity in 1896, Rev. William Pettigrew established a school in Ukhrul with the sole objective of proselytization of the tribe through western education. Using education, missionary was able to convinced that western education and Christianity is better than the traditional practices, beliefs, and traditions.

M. Thanmung (2015) discuss the social changes that has taken place among the Naga tribes of Manipur as the result of Christianity. Western education was introduced as a tool to Christianize the community. The arrival of missionaries and Christianity marks the beginning of new socio-economic life. Many of the ancestral rituals and practices were abandon as the tribal people, particularly the Tangkhuls embrace Christianity because it was supposedly taught to be evil to practice such rituals and festivals.

Ksh. Rajesh Singh (2015) examines examined in detail the arrival of the first missionary Rev. William Pettigrew in 1894. It is written of the various stages, process and struggles of the missionary in establishing a mission school at Ukhrul in 1896. The commitment of the missionary to proselytize the people and the ultimate support extended by the government to the mission of the missionary while using his knowledge of the hill people to survey and take census. The article also writes of the work of other missionaries among the Ao, Angami, Lotha, etc. And one common effective tool used by these missionaries in proselytization of the tribal people was education. The paper observes that spread of Christianity was faster after Independence as compared to the 19th century and early 20th century.

Khaute Lamneithang Vaiphei et.al (2018) in their article "Impact of Christianity among the Vaipheis in Northeast India" writes about the arrival of Watkin R. Roberts in 1910. They used education as a means or tool to Christianized the population. In the schools, much emphasize was laid on reading and understanding the Bible only and hardly any vocational training was imparted to the students.

Y. Hukheli Zhimomi (2019) attempted to look into the change in the culture of the Sumi Naga as the result of the arrival of Christianity. Ever since the arrival of the missionaries, the conversion of Sumi people to Christianity has been very rapid as compared to other tribes where missionaries arrived much earlier. Even before the arrival of the missionaries, the educated Sumis were sent out as missionaries to their respective villages.

Ilianeube and Manu Sharma (2018) studies the indigenous religion of Nagas in superstition, logic and animism. The paper studied the origin and practices of the the Heraka religion started by Jadonang. This new religion emphasized on moving away from the way of life of the ancestors. Jadonang also was against Christianity because it was destroying the culture and traditions while Heraka religion was to preserve the culture and traditions.

Crossthang Sanate (2013) studied the arrival of Christian missionaries to the Hmar community and brought about total change to the way of life of the people. It is said that the

introduction of Christianity was the greatest factor of the changes. The arrival of Watkin R Roberts in 1910 and the opening of a new primary school in Senvon village for their evangelical activities and this eventually increase significantly with the spread of Christianity among the community resulting in socio-economic transition.

Rimai Joy (2013) attempted to explain the proselytization of the hill people of North east India. The tribal beliefs of the spirits was completely changed after the arrival of the missionaries and proselytization of the people. The paper writes that missionary brought Western education system and Christianity to the hill people. Rev. William Pettigrew was the first missionary to the hill people of Manipur. He established the first school in Ukhrul as a medium to evangelize and proselytize. The first 12 boys were baptized in 1901 and in 1902, the first church was established known as "Phungyo Baptist Church. The Church began to grow in the midst of opposition and brought about drastic changes in all aspects of the way of life of the hill tribes.

Outcome of Western Education and Proselytization

The introduction of western education by the missionaries to evangelize and proselytize had a far reaching socio-economic, religious and political impact and outcome which the missionaries themselves might not have envisioned. All aspects of the way of life of the tribal communities including the Tangkhuls who received the first western education has change and is changing rapidly. As Shangpang Kashung (2016) said "Today the Tangkhuls have ceased depending only on agriculture for economy. The gift of education from Christing missionaries enabled them to take up various employments." As Esther Keishing (2021) also said that western education have made "the women become aware of the inadequacies of the traditional role that has been assigned to them…education has helped people to break through the traditional patterns of life". Shangpam Kashung (2015) also agree and state that "increase in number of educated women …The status of an educated woman is found higher than that of an uneducated woman."

Ranu Majumdar & Deb Prasad Sikdar (2017) states that "Education is the single most important means by which individuals and society can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well-being." That is why Somingam Mawon (2014) writes that "…the advent of Christianity, introduction of modern education, adoption of western culture, and their interaction with other communities …all these changes have made the to live more convenient and eaily accessible to the modern world…however it has also resulted in the vanishing of much of their material culture including their ornaments, folk arts and crafts, and their culture…".

C.J Sonowal states that with the disappearance of the youth dormitory system and the spread of education, Youth are exposed to the outside world which have influenced their employment preference over the traditional practices. It has also resulted in development, urbanization, and migration "A lot of people have migrated to the urban areas in search of good living condition, job and other opportunities…resulted in breakdown of kinship and lineage structure of the society and this ultimately resulted in disintegration to the traditional culture." As M. Thanmung (2015) also agrees that "the advent of Christianity marks the beginning of a new cultural, political, religious, economical, costume, health and hygiene, etc."

The introduction of western education and Christianity exposed the Naga to the modern civilization. It enlightens and revolutionized the culture ethos of the Nagas and led them to system of life, said Ksh. Rajesh Singh (2015). Y. Kukheli Zhimomi (2019) also agrees to the drastic changes brought about the western education and Christianity "The Sumi Nagas underwent tremendous changes in the traditional and cultural practices …The spread of Christianity has badly affected the traditional and cultural values as the indigenous people were compelled to do away with all their indigenous practices because all these were taken as an act against Christianity." Crossthang Sanate (2013) also states that "…being converted to Christianity, the various cultural activities were no long observed in the Hmar society…cultural practices have become items in cultural functions…cultural festivals have lost their importance and has fallen almost in complete disuse". As Rimai Joy (2014) writes there has been drastic

changes but there is continuity too "the coming of education and exposure to the outside world now dress up their speech and behaviour in the clothes of Christian life but underneath they are the same people …recognizable from within their traditional culture…the continuity in culture is strong and even getting stronger…what we see now is a conscious effort to revive and preserve their traditional culture".

Conclusion

Thus, we can see that the simple ancestral traditional practices of the hill tribals that have kept them alive and thriving have drastically changed in the last century after the arrival of the missionary and the introduction of western education and proselytization. The fact that education and Christianity have been a boon to the society but that does not change the fact that the ancestral culture and traditions have not been able to adapt to the dynamics of changes and have slowly been neglected and dying. This decline in the awareness and practice of traditions is a loss of cultural identity

There are many factors responsible for the loss of cultural identity but among them western education and Christianization are major factors. Western education has completely replaced the traditional dormitory system and along with it the practical teaching of the traditional values, norms and practices of the tribe have not been imparted to the younger generation through the school and college curriculum. In fact, only foreign history, culture, and way of life is taught to the younger generation that they have adopted foreign way of life. Pursue of higher education have resulted in mass migration.

Education was introduced as an effective tool to proselytization of the population and it has worked successfully. Missionaries taught the people that the traditional practices were evil an had to be discontinued. Thus, Christian way of life has completely replaced the traditional practices. Among all the spheres of life that had changed, Agriculture have taken a heavy toll. Agricultural skills are lost as students are not taught in the classroom and they have no time to learn it as they are in the school or college. Migration of population for higher education or employment to earn money has resulted in scarcity of labor in the agricultural sector. This has been complicated with the aging farmers who discourage their children not to prefer farming as an option. Thus, the impact of western education and Christianity has been massive in shaping the perspectives towards traditional social life, economic activities, religious inclinations, etc. The demise of the dormitory system is the final nail on the traditional way of life.

Can this slide in the loss of cultural identity be arrested, yes provided all the stakeholders commit to reviving and preserving, then make a concerted effort to revive and preserve. Even though dormitories system may be restored but the teachings of the cultural and traditional life and activities must be introduced in the school and college curriculum. Children should be encouraged to consider agriculture as an employment option rather than deride and discourage them. The younger generation needs to be educated of the significance of the traditional practices and way of life that ensures the continuity of the cultural identity of the tribe. It is important to adapt and change but equally important to protect and preserve rather than dilute and be lost. What had been lost cannot be reversed but there needs to be renaissance to revive and preserve using the education as a tool to research, record, and document. The realization through higher education and research that culture and traditions can co-exist alongside the new found religion. The initial blanket myopic lop-sided approach that all traditional practices were evil needs to change. This significant shift in the narrative is important in the survival and relevance of the tribe, especially in regard to traditional rituals and practices such as agriculture, costumes and festivals. Change is inevitable but continuity is a choice.

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