

# INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON NAGA IDENTITY: FROM WOMEN PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

There is a close link between processes of Education and the formation of identity in Naga society in modern times. This article investigates the influence the education in preserving and altering Naga identity from women perspective. The traditional Naga educational system passed on ethnic lifestyles and was particularly suited to their social environment. However, the advent of modern education, and colonialism ushered a new era to the Nagas leading to identity transition. With the establishments of the British colony, the American Baptist mission and subsequently introduction of modern education, the position women in the modern Naga society have seen much improved.

The ethnic identity sentiments remains attached with the Naga people in spite of all the historical process such as modernity, Christianity, civil state and nationalism. Naga customary education system was replace by the introduction of westernized formal education first by the Christian missionaries. The article affirms that education as agency for social change and identity formation enlightens the quest for Naga identity and strengthens their social environment. Though the Eurocentric approach to education threatens the ouster of Naga traditional education system and alter, traditional Naga identity, education has power to retain and assert Naga identity amidst intense conflict on identity question.

**Key Words:** Naga Identity, Colonial, Missionary, Influence, School, Education, Morung, Naga Hills.

## INTRODUCTION

During the pre-colonial era, the traditional system of education prevailed and was relevant to the needs of the people, based on the values of traditional customs and cultural norms. The traditional education system socialized children to build up strong tribal and clan identities. Nagas had oral traditions passing down their histories through transmissions of cultural material, vocal utterance tales, stories and song.<sup>i</sup> The oral tradition forms the Naga traditional education foundation, which is an oral knowledge based on history of the native people transmitting their cultures and identities from generation to generation. The ‘Morung’<sup>ii</sup> or communal dormitory, was the primary Naga learning institution for Naga boys. Whereas the *Tsuki* or girl dormitory was prevalent paralleled to Morung institution. The *Tsuki* was a centre of socialisation for young un-married women where they would gather under the guardianship of an elderly spinster or a widow called *Tsukibotsüla* at her residence normally belonging to a same clan. The *Tsuki* was as old as the morung, a feminist socio-cultural institution.

Both the institutions have been vital to the preservation and survival of socio-political and cultural institutions of the Naga society. The Morung was an official institution of learning and the head quarter for the village defence force. These institutions played a fundamental role in the various aspects of socialisation and social control, transcending from generation to generation.

However, the Morung and Tsuki institutions no longer exists in its original form but its culture persists today. The abandonment of the traditional institutions gradually weakened the creativity of traditional-based art and culture, such as wood carving, of folksongs, dances and handloom. Today, it is not possible to have Morung and Tsuki in its traditional fashion because the village boys and girls pursue their education mostly outside their respective villages, mostly residing in hostels or else with their parents until their marriage.

It was when Naga Hills was colonized in the second half of the nineteenth century that modern or western education was introduced and in the process traditional education was undermined and replaced by the modern education system. The indigenous people of Nagaland neither participated in the initial formation of the modern state. However, the colonial powers

were responsible in making Naga areas as the so-called Assam Naga Hills. The British India government administered the Naga Hills as a part of Assam province since 1886. Records show that Kohima and Wokha were established in 1878, Mokokchung in 1888 and Wakching in 1913 as administrative posts.

During the pre-colonial and colonial periods, Christian missionaries introduced Western schooling as a part of their evangelizing efforts. Colonial regimes supported the missionaries' endeavours and built their own schools for the indigenous Naga people. Thus, the objectives of the colonial regime and missionary groups propelled the expansion of a colonial educational system. The American missionaries who established the first Western-style schools in Naga Hills; it brought much transformation in the traditional Naga practices, worldview and lifestyle. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Missionaries' education purpose was to enable the Naga people to read, write, and staff offices. Their objective of opening schools was to enable the Nagas to know Christian religion through education. The influence of the Missionary school and its legacy is evident in the growth of modern education system in Nagaland.

## **INFLUENCE OF MODERN EDUCATION IN BUILDING NAGA IDENTITY**

The British colonial rule and missionary activity brought about far-reaching influence in Naga society since the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the colonial period the Nagas acquired education through three forms of education: the traditional education, missionary education, and state-sponsored nationalized education which contributed the formation of Naga Indian identities. Though all these types of education have influenced in shaping Naga society and identity, the state sponsored nationalized education system has now become the mainstream institution.

Even after the assumption of colonial administration in Naga Hills, the British had no intention to disturb the traditional religious beliefs, cultural practice and its socio-economic system. Fürer-Haimendorf, an anthropologist has stated that the "Government's policy had

been to avoid any sudden disruption of Naga culture, respect tribal custom wherever it did not prejudice the maintenance of law and order, and tamper as little as possible with the old village organisation.”<sup>iii</sup> The Government encouraged the people to continue with their traditional way of life with respect to daily life activity. The Nagas had been saved from the exploitation, which has caused the ruin of other aboriginal tribes in other parts of India. However, it did not mean a policy of complete freedom of choice or leaving them as they were. In matters where native cultural practices were found to be detrimental to social peace and harmony, the government took repressive measures against such practices regardless of any native cultural values that might have been attached to them.

Following the prohibition imposed on the culture of head-hunting, for example, a relative calm and peaceful state of affairs came into being in the Naga country in return for the surrender of its independence. This shattered some of the important local administrative judicial and regulatory powers and functions of the village council. Though the British authorities attempted to re-model the judicial and administrative within the spirit of the tribal custom, it largely disrupted the Naga way of life. With a view to maintain cultural status-quo, the British administration took adequate measures to preserve and protect the unique culture of the Nagas.<sup>iv</sup>

## **MISSIONARY INFLUENCE IN MODERN EDUCATION**

The American Baptist missionaries were the pioneers in the establishment of modern education in the Naga Hills. According to F.S. Down, there were three main approaches in imparting education to the natives in the northeast India. <sup>v</sup> They were- humanitarian service, literature and education.<sup>vi</sup> Edward Winter Clark, the American education missionary worked with the Nagas from 1871 to 1911. During his stay at Sibsagar before he went further into Naga territory Clark was informed that Nagas are ferocious people.

Despite many obstacles, Clark decided to station at the Molungkimong a Naga village to educate them. The Nagas assured all necessary protection to the missionary and were convinced to work with them.”<sup>vii</sup> The Nagas were eager to learn modern education and thus

extended invitation to the American missionaries to come and teach their children. Clark endeavoured hard to learn the Native Ao Naga language, worked on a grammar text, dictionary and wrote textbooks in the vernacular language. The trio- Dr. Clark, Godhula and Supongmeren introduced the first ever reading, writing and printing of the Ao-mother tongue. The 'Lord's Prayer'<sup>viii</sup> was the first translation work in Ao-Naga. Dr. Clark wrote one of the first ever Naga gospel song in Ao folk-tune<sup>ix</sup> using the Grammar and composition styles of the Ao chungli dialect. Dr. Clark decided to send Godhula an Assamese evangelist with Supongmeren a native Naga of Molungkimong<sup>x</sup> to his village, because of suspicion that he was an agent of the British tea company at Amguri, Godhula was kept under close security. Since April 1872, Godhula and his wife Lucy Brown stayed in the village and taught them villagers about the modern world and Christian principles.

The first learning place in the form of Christian chapel was first built near *Ariju or* Village Morung with the permission of the village council.<sup>xi</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1872, Dr. Clark baptized fifteen men at the Baptismal pool of Molungkimong village. The presence of the missionary and his teachings fostered suspicious spirit among the Naga people. The Nagas were opposed to anything that would promote alliance with the encroaching British power.<sup>xii</sup> On 24 October, 1876 Dr. Clark, along with 15 families formed a new village called Molungyimsen, about 3 miles away.<sup>xiii</sup>

Mrs. Mary Mead Clark, after her arrival from America organized a non-formal school at this Molungyimsen village in the year 1878. But this school was primarily meant for girls, but some boys also joined in her classes later on. Much of the lessons taught here consisted of preliminary information about the world outside their village, along with some basic knowledge about the new religion.

The American Baptist mission simultaneously opened schools wherever they founded a church with the object of imparting biblical knowledge and basic reading skills, writing and the singing the Christian hymns. In 1891, Mr. Clark reported that, "There have been in eight villages nine schools, which have been generously aided by the government of India; the average attendance about 130."<sup>xiv</sup> The education system adopted at the initial period neither

was exactly in the pattern of modern pedagogy nor was an attempt to provide thorough theological training.

## PRINTING LITERATURE FOR SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

Dr. Clark and his wife devoted themselves to writing and printing local literatures. The proliferation of the mechanised printing press revolutionised the oral Naga tradition and culture. The first printed work in Ao language was ‘the Lord’s Prayer’. The printing works were in Sibsagar till the printing press machine was installed in the Naga hills in 1883. Mrs. Clark recollected how the translation works progressed by adding one volume to another.

*“In 1885 the Gospel of Matthew and John were ready to put into the hands of those who could read. A new and enlarged collection of hymns, the history of Joseph, and more school books were added. Women in our congregation began intelligently to handle the scriptures and hymn books! What did it matter if sometimes the books were held upside down by the older ones who did not wish to be outdone; their honest pride spoke volumes. Of what account were any sacrifices for this people now glad to have us with them and eager for the printed page!”<sup>xv</sup>*

Dr. Clark printed the first Ao Naga primer in 1877, the Gospel of Matthew in 1883; the *Myzying Ashiba- First learner* by Mrs. E. W. Clark, in 1891 used as a textbook. In Chapter 5, of *the Ao Naga primary* included a poem. This is the first classic poem composed in Ao dialect by Dr. Clark.

*“Wa-ge te-nem oze lir,  
Pa anung-nung imza uang, uang ta asa imzur.  
Pa bang-sang akong ama nen-yar,  
Pa te-ben kanga azung,  
Pae scong-zang li-zang chia-dang ta-kum lir.  
Ta-nure joka-joka ya-rer-dage.  
Aeir-tume ita kentendage.*

*Im te-mange sen-tepa ki mak-dage.  
Ya-song rak-zuk rak-tum-ere pa ki mak-zuka ogo.*<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Translated Version**

*Yonder! the Hornbill dwells,  
He soars in sky fluttering uang uang.  
His beak yellow as shrimp,  
His tail fixed entwined,  
He survives eating fruits.  
Children leap and dance,  
The damsels are singing the moon's song  
All the villagers thronged singing folksongs,  
Last night, the burglar looted his house.*

Mrs. Mary Mead Clark's classic work on the 'Ao Naga Grammar with Illustrative Phrases and Vocabulary' having 185 pages was published in 1893, which became a primary source material. Through the efforts of the missionaries, more books were added such as a Catechism; "The Ao Naga primer No.2, (1893); A corner in India (1907) by Mary Mead Clark; and the first Ao Dictionary with 977 pages (1911).

There were three American women as earlier as 1895 when they established the Impur Mission School by Dr. & Mrs. E.W. Clark, Rev. & Mrs. S.A. Perrine and Dr. & Mrs. F.P. Haggard. It was the only school in the Naga Hills, which became a key institution for purposes of schooling, evangelization and in training the tribal youth of this region for being educated about what was in the Bible.<sup>xvii</sup> The school had class A "Mathew" to Mark Class (Class II).<sup>xviii</sup> The graduates of Mark class were sent out as pastors, evangelists, and schoolteachers to the Naga villages. During the first Christian Association Conference held at Molungyimsen from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1897, the Association resolved that there would be compulsory education for all the children in the clause (8) of the Resolution.<sup>xix</sup> In 1904, they used English in replacing Assamese and widely used as a medium of communication in the school.

The Baptist Mission Board in America sent more educationists to Impur School gradually, the enrolment of Impur students increased with other Naga tribes- Lothas, Semas, Sangtams, Konyaks and Changs joining the school. On 1 November 1905, 14 village schools under the Missionary at Impur were taken over by the British Government with all the teachers appointed among the trained at the mission schools Impur.<sup>xx</sup> An American woman who also took the pioneering role in education was Mrs. W.A. Smith, along with her husband they printed textbooks on *Tanur Medemer-* (Children's Friend) for the junior section in 1912, and enlarged the size of the Ao hymnal. This had awakened the spirit of learning and singing as Nagas realised their talent of singing and in later years.

In 1879, Rev. C.D. King opened a mission school at Samuguting (now Chumukedima in Dimapur District) with the help of Mr. Ponaram, an Assamese teacher.<sup>xxi</sup> Besides the Ao and the Angami tribes, the American Baptist Missionaries had opened other Mission centres, for the Lothas in Wokha and for the Sema Nagas in Aizuto before 1955.<sup>xxii</sup> Dr. Clark advised Dr. Witter to open a school in Lotha area and a small school was opened on 25 August 1886 with only 3 Naga boys. The beginning of education in Semas area was the initiative of Clark in 1885. Mr. Andersons came to Sema area mission centre Aizuto and established a mission school in 1937.<sup>xxiii</sup>

From 1871 to mid-1950 close to 60 American Baptist Missionaries, including the wives of Missionaries worked amongst the Nagas.<sup>xxiv</sup> Providing modern education and medical services, it became an integral part of the evangelizing activities of the missionary. While not on tours, the missionaries established and ran dispensaries in the places where they were stationed with some of better-trained medical missionaries like Sydney Rivenburg touring nearby villages to vaccinate a considerable section of villagers against malaria and small pox, especially during times of epidemic.<sup>xxv</sup> Besides, schools have always been “a good means of disseminating knowledge” and therefore, it depended on how that means could be utilized to impart knowledge about the ‘eternal truth.’<sup>xxvi</sup>

## **DIVERS PERSPECTIVES ON NAGA IDENTITY**

There were tensions between the American Baptist missionaries' efforts and the British administrators on the question of identity and culture. The British saw conversion to Christianity as a concern for the colonial enterprise, since it had the potential to challenge their stated policy of non-interference. Despite such constraints and challenges, the American Baptist missionaries played a major role in the transition and transformation of socio-cultural life of the Naga country. To quite an extent, the teachings of Christianity had influenced Naga ethnic identity formation and had considerably altered its traditional and cultural identity. Hence the American missionaries than by the British administration erased Naga traditions more effective.

The administration was also determined to keep the Nagas from any outside cultural influence. The British thus restricted any innovation in the culture of the Nagas despite strong opposition from the American Baptist missionaries. On the other hand, the British alleged that American missionaries were unsympathetic to the Naga indigenous way of life. According to Fürer-Haimendorf, "Government officials and missionaries took unfortunately exactly opposite views on what was good for the Nagas, and a great deal of confusion must have been caused in the minds of the tribesmen if one Sahib praised their Morung as the most excellent institution and other decried it as an invention of evil spirits."<sup>xxvii</sup>

These comments are not to deny that the missionaries were involved in doing significant work, nor to question their energy and enthusiasm. They were doing admirable works in the medical field and made thousands of Naga children literate. However, it may be that with little more understanding and sympathy for Naga culture they might have brought more happiness to their flock and avoided many of the more unfortunate results of a sudden clash of cultures. The British alleged that the Christian missionaries were responsible for forbidding the Feast of Merit for the Christians among the Nagas, which according to the British was an extremely important social and economic function. To rise in the social scale a Naga had to give a series of feasts, defined by custom in every detail and necessitating expenditure of large quantities of foodstuff. A man did not gain prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of the community.

The wealth of the ambitious was utilised to provide food and enjoyment for the less prosperous members of the community. For the Feast of Merit there was meat, rice, and rice-beer for every man, woman, and children in the village. However, the missionaries felt that during the Feast of Merit, the animals slaughtered and consumed in their course sacrificed with appropriate invocations of spirits, to which the missionaries objected. The Christians defiance against the traditional custom and observation of Sabbath started as early as in 1905. Dr. Clark, on behalf of the Christians urged the government authority to prevent the primordial believers from taking disciplinary actions against the Christians for breaking of ‘ traditional rituals’ and violating other customary practices.<sup>xxviii</sup> Considering the above evidences one can agree that it was not colonialism as such nor the British that were responsible for altering the ethnic Naga culture, but the Baptist missionaries, who were American.

It was only after the Independence of India that the government took education more seriously, more schools were established in every sub-division, and efforts were made opened at least primary schools at every village.<sup>xxix</sup> Nagaland attained statehood on 1 December 1963 as a state in India. The state inherited the political, economic, administrative and education systems which the Indian government had established after the Independence in 15 August 1947. The Constitution of India article 371(A) has given special protection to the Naga customary laws and their social and religious practices in Nagaland. After attaining statehood, the Government of Nagaland has taken a number of steps to strengthen the educational base. In 1971, exactly one century after the coming of Christianity into Nagaland, the state had 21.27 percent of literate persons, which increased to 42.57 in 1981. The literacy rate of Nagaland figured at 67.11% according to a 2001 census report<sup>xxx</sup> and within a decade, it increased to 80.10% according to 2011 census.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The advent of modern education and coming of American missionaries and colonialism in Naga society ushered in a new era leading to social transition. Many aspects of the traditional society of the Nagas, including identity formation, and the cultural value system encountered a transitional experience. Given that pre-eminence of modern education, it was inevitable to

have influenced the Naga traditional education system. Education became the chief agent for the preservation and promotion of Naga culture and identity rooted in tradition. The educated Nagas therefore strongly affirm that education should strengthen their unique identity.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> J. H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas* (1969), London: Oxford University (Originally published in 1921), p. 253.

<sup>ii</sup> The word *Morung* is an Ahom (Assamese) word, each tribe has its own name, Ariju for Aos, Kichuki for Angamis, Ban for Konyaks, 'Champo' for the Lotha, Dekha Chang' for Sema, Longshim for the Tangkhul Nagas.

<sup>iii</sup> Christoph Von Furer-hainmondorf (1939), *The Naked Nagas*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, p.50.

<sup>iv</sup> Constituent Assembly Debate, Vol. IX, 1949, No. 27, p.1004.

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- x Molungkimong Arogo Spongmeren Mission Silver Jubilee Otzu (1979-2004 Pub. Mission Board 2004, printed at: New Screen, Printer Dimapur, pp.10- 12.
- xi Molungkimong Baptist Arogo Leniba (Church guidelines) pub. Molungkimong Baptist Church, 2004, p.2.
- xii Assam was already been annexed and the East India company's trade and business activities in Assam. The hilly peoples around the plain especially the Aos had clear idea and knowledge of the British Company intrusion. It was reported the Aos have given refuge to Assamese during the Burmese war.
- xiii Tajen Ao (1984), *Christianity versus Ao Nagas*, Mokokchung: Tribal Gospel Mission publishers Shoppe, p. 38.
- xiv Clark report, The Naga Mission Molung, *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* Vol. LXXI July 1891 Vol.7. p. 275.
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- xvi Kilep & Wati (1992), *Kilep: Takemzelu Ka*, Clark Theological College, Aolijen, p. 52.
- xvii Downs (1971), pp.116-139.
- xviii The Mark class was equivalent to class II .The name was taken out from the Holy Bible, the gospel of Mark.
- xix ABAM (1997), p. 153.
- xx Records and Indices of the Nagaland State Archives, *Annual Administrative Report of the Naga Hills, 1905-06*, 1st Edition, Sl. No. 226.
- xxi Rev. & Mrs Bengt.I. Anderson in C. Walu Walling (2008), ed., "Down the Memory Lane Vol.1. Mission to the Nagas" Dimapur: Heritage Publishing House, p.4.
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- xxiii Anderson (2008), p.33.
- xxiv Joseph Puthenpurakkal, *Baptist Missions in Nagaland*, Vendrame Missiological Institute Shillong, (1984), p. 129.
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- xxvii Christoph Von Furer-hainmondorf was a Professor of Asian Anthropology in University of London, *The Naked Naga (1939)*, p.50-55.
- xxviii Tajen Ao (1984), *Christianity Versus Ao Nagas*, Tribal Gospel Mission Publishers Shoppe, Mokokchung, Nagaland, pp.78-79. On certain occasions Naga village observed a number of days as a traditional 'Sabbath' (Among for Aos, Amongmong for Sangtam etc), villagers were to abstain themselves from entering in or going out of the village. During such 'Sabbath' the ancient believers considered the breaking of the Among's code of conduct as serious offence.
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