

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT FOR NAGA WOMEN

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Abstract: Education is the cornerstone of empowerment. Because of the patriarchal nature of Naga society, women historically do not have the same status as males. Thus, women were deprived of education and other aspects of life. Morung stand as traditional institutions that served as a training centre for the youngsters. However, with the advent of American Missionaries to the Naga Hills, modern education was first introduced to the Nagas. Since inception of the formal schooling, education has proved as an effective tool for empowering women. Therefore, an attempt has been made to shed light on the historical perspectives on education as a tool of empowerment for Naga women.

Keywords: Education, Empowerment, Historical Perspectives, Naga Women

Introduction

To equitably engage women in all facets of life they must be empowered. This can be achieved by providing them with the necessary tools, resources and opportunities. One of the most effective ways to end the cycles of inequality and poverty is to empower women with education. When women have access to quality education, they will be able to increase their prospects of life, take an active role and greatly contributed to the growth and sustainable development of the society.

Brief Profile of Nagaland

Nagaland is a mountainous state located in North-East India with Kohima as its capital. The state shares common boundaries with Myanmar in the East, state of Assam in the West; Arunachal Pradesh and a part of Assam in the North with Manipur in the south. Nagaland became the 16th state of Indian Union on 1st December 1963 by an amendment in the constitution of India; prior to that it was a union territory. Nagaland is home to 16 major tribes who are known for their own unique and fascinating cultures.

Morung: An Educational Institutions of the Ancient Nagas

Nagas have a strong sense of community. In the ancient Naga societies, there was no written text. Therefore, the most effective means to pass down historical events to the new generations have been through folktales and oral historical traditions. In the past, the morung/ bachelor dormitory system, was a vital aspect of Naga society. Morung is considered as an institution of learning for both boys and girls. Every tribe has its own morung where it prepares youngsters for life. In the morung, a separate dormitory was available for boys and girls whereas for some tribes, only boys dormitory was available and girls were even prohibited to enter the morung. All of the customs, folk songs, tales, history, arts and crafts and life skills are taught to the youngsters. It also served as the headquarters of the village defensive militia. Girls dormitory was not very prominent as boys dormitory. However, girls learn weaving, handicraft, dance, music, songs and other etiquette. They were taught to be submissive, obedience and learn to do household works.

The foundations of every generation are shaped, laid, and developed here. In this way the morung functioned as a traditional school where traditional values were passed down from one generation to the next till the entry of modern education in Naga society.

Beginning of Modern Education

The history of education in the Naga societies has been eventful. Education shifted from Morung institutions to the classroom learning with the advent of American missionaries who introduced formal education to the Naga Hills, before the British invasion in the area. The Tirap Nagas were the first group of Naga tribesmen that the American Baptist Mission operating in Assam had contact with. In 1839, Miles Bronson opened a Christian Mission Centre in Namsang Village. He was joined by his sister and wife and opened a primary school. However due to certain circumstances, Bronson permanently quit the Namsang Mission. The Namsang Naga Mission was abandoned for almost thirty years, from 1840 to 1870 until Rev. E. W. Clark arrived in Sibsagar in 1869 and revived the Naga Mission from another Naga territory known as Dekahaimong or Molungkimong (under Mokokchung district). Subongmeren, the first Naga who paved the way for further evangelization of the Nagas, was baptised by Dr. Clark at Sibsagar in early 1871. After coming in contact with the Nagas, Dr. Clark developed his vision to evangelize the Nagas. Initially, Rev. Clark first sent Godhula, an Assamese Evangelist, to Molungkimong village. Later on, Rev. Clark himself went up to the village in 1872 and set up his mission station in a new village called Molungyimsen, near Deka Haimong in 1876 until it was shifted to Impur in 1894. A school was established in 1878, by Mary Mead Clark.

The Naga hills witnessed the modest start of evangelism and the expansion of Christianity between 1887 and 1896. Other missionaries were assigned to the other Naga tribes in addition to Dr Clark's missionary work at Molung in the Ao field. Rev. C.D. King was assigned by the American Overseas Missionary Board in Boston in 1878 at Clark's request to assist Dr. Clark in the Naga Hills.

In Kohima, the Angami Mission was established in 1881 by C.D. King along with his family, and their helpers. Subsequently, S. W. Rivenburg and his spouse took responsibility of the Angami work from the Kings, gradually winning more souls to Christ. In addition to the Clarks' and the Kings' missionary work at Molung in the Ao Field and Kohima Field respectively, W.E. Witter and his spouse started their promising work among the Lothas. The Kohima field served as the mission centre for missionary work to different Naga communities. With the effort of the American missionaries into the Naga soil, gradually, mass conversion took place in various parts of the Naga Hills. Since the beginning, the American missionaries have put a high priority on education to do their mission, which has resulted in the establishment of several Mission Schools. Meanwhile, the government also took a step in development of education by opening schools. Hence, with the historic act of the American missionaries in the land of Naga and the initiatives taken by the Government, there has been a tremendous growth and progress in the education sector.

Education as a Tool for Empowerment of Naga Women

Historically, Naga girls have faced several barriers to obtain education, because of poverty, cultural beliefs, and traditional gender roles. Women were confined only to their home. They were not given much attention for education. Naga society, being a patriarchal, preference was always given to men. Women were bound to do household works, help their parents in agricultural activities, looks after younger siblings and so on. However, with the opening of schools at various locations, girls started to pursue education despite the prevailing social taboos for girls. Thus, Education comes as a boon for the Naga women that enable them to attain a place in the family and society. Education has changed the life of Naga women drastically.

Historic Achievement of Naga Women: Indicators of Women Empowerment

Following are the list of first Naga women who have set a historic benchmark in Nagaland with their achievement and paved way to women empowerment:

1. **Rano M. Shaiza:** First president of the Women's Federation, Naga National Council, First woman Lok Sabha MP from Nagaland (1977), First Naga Woman President of the United Democratic Party, Nagaland
2. **S Phangnon Konyak:** First woman Rajya Sabha MP from Nagaland (2022)
3. **Tokheli Kikon:** First Naga Woman to become Chairman of a Village Council (2005), Naharbari Village, Dimapur.
4. **Neichulieu Nikki Haralu (Retd) IFS:** First Naga Woman IFS (Indian Foreign Service) officer; First Naga to serve as an Indian ambassador - *Served as Ambassador to Panama from June 1978 to July 1980 with additional charge of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.*
5. **Dr. P. Kilemsungla:** First Naga woman member of Nagaland Public Service Commission (NPSC) (01.02.2007 to 12.09.2012, and performed as Acting Chairman from 13.09.12 to 31.01.2013); First Naga or the first Naga Woman Member of the UPSC (2015)
6. **Smt. Chubala Ao:** First Naga lady to be Secretary of NPSC; First Naga Lady Padma Shri
7. **Dr. Khrielieü Kire:** First Naga lady doctor / MBBS (*Licentiate Medicine Surgery (LMS), Women's Medical College, Ludhiana, Punjab*)
8. **Dr. Khrielieü Kire:** First Naga Lady Doctorate (Ph.D)
9. **Mrs. Khrieleno Terhüja:** First Naga lady to passed Bachelor of Divinity (B.D) from Union Theological College, Bangalore in 1966.
10. **Ms. Rani Gaidinliu :** First Naga recipients of Padma Bhushan Award (1982) in the field of Social Work
11. **Major (Dr.) Neikhrietuonuo Ginuo Linyu:** First Naga or Naga Woman to conquer Mount Everest (25 May, 2012)
12. **Chekrovolu Swuro:** First Naga Woman (or second Naga) Olympian (Archery); First Naga to receive Arjuna Award
13. **Rev. Dr. Noksangla:** First Naga lady Reverend
14. **Easterine Kire:** First Naga novelist to write in English
15. **Roveinai Poumai** (from Manipur): First Woman Pilot from Naga Tribe

16. **Cdt Senchumbeni:** First girl of NCC Nagaland to fly a sortie
17. **Major K Kuotsu (retired):** First female Army Officer from Nagaland
18. **Rebecca Changkija:** The First Naga (Woman) Bollywood Film Producer
19. **Amongla Aier:** First Naga woman IPS Officer (2006)
20. **Toshirenlā Ao:** First Miss Nagaland (1981)
21. **Banuo Z. Jamir:** First Naga woman IAS officer (1977); First Woman Chief Secretary of Nagaland (2014)
22. **Sokhrieno Angami:** The First Naga Lady Graduate (1936)
23. **Hekani Jakhalu:** First Naga Woman to win Assembly Election (2023)
24. **Salhoutuonuo Kruse:** The first Naga woman cabinet minister in 2023 (14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly)

Conclusion

The strong cultural values and rich traditions of Nagaland form the foundation of its society. Although these customs have a certain allure, women have frequently felt restricted by them. But the contemporary Naga woman is no longer restricted to conventional positions. She is a force to be reckoned with; she embraces leadership positions, education, and vocations. Education as a tool has laid the foundation of women's empowerment. As a result, Naga women has made a remarkable and transforming journey by breaking past social prejudices in Naga society that was deeply rooted in the traditions and customs. Known for their tenacity and resilience, the Naga women started to challenge long-standing conventions through education, paving the way for equality and empowerment.

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