



MORUNG; NAGAS TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND CENTRE OF ARTS AND WARFARE.

Rajeanlung Kahmei

Research Scholar
Political Science Department
Manipur University, Imphal, India.

Abstract: The Morung or the dormitory occupied a significant place in the socio-cultural life of the Nagas. The Morung was an important institution of the Nagas to impart various skills of arts and warfare. Not only as a dormitory but served as a guardhouse during times of war. The Morung was built next to the village or in a strategically advantageous position to defend the village. Above all, it served as an institution that transmits the tradition, customs and laws from generation to generation. The dormitory is an important social institution, which sustains society, religion, culture and beliefs. The dormitories perhaps evolved to meet the need and requirement of society. The dormitory inculcates the young man and young women a strong sense of fraternity and corporate life in the village, essential for sustaining the tribal community life. With the advent of Christianity and the introduction of western education, these institutions began to decline gradually. This article attempts to examine the traditional system of education and the systematic functioning of the Morungs among the Naga tribes. The youths became acquainted with their history, culture, folklore, songs and dances. Above all important decisions of wars and raids were taken in times of emergencies at Morung.

Index Terms - Institution, tribal, village, youth, education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nagas comprise various ethnic groups living in North-eastern India and North-western Myanmar. These ethnic groups belong to different tribes having similar cultures and tradition. The majority of their population resides in the states of Nagaland, and a significant population are found in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. All the Nagas tribe lived in a village. Every village is dominantly independent of one another, either in the form of a republic or democracy or in the principle of democracy. The democratic form of government and the village's functioning as an independent unit was made possible because of the Morungs. Each Naga village possessed well-defined territory, cultivated and terrace land and jhum and wasteland.¹

Edward Winter Clark gave the earliest definition of the Morung, the first American Missionary to Naga Hills, derived from the Assamese word, "a big tree drum". In the olden days, A Naga village was never complete without a Morung. Soon after the establishment of a village, a Morung was set up. Scholars have expressed different views about the origin and purpose of the Morung. Morung possibly "is a survival of the communal house form which private dwellings split off" is the opinion of Peal.² "The object of

¹ T.C Hudson, The Nagas Tribes of Manipur, Macmillan and Co, Limited, London, 1911, p. 73.

² Peal, S.E., 1893, On the Morung' as possibly a Relic of pre-marriage Communism, Journal of the Anthropology Institute, Vol. 22, p. 244.

the dormitory was to prevent incest” was the observation of Shakespear. Elwin was of the view that “It was instituted to save children from witnessing the primal scene” and “from being an embarrassment to their parents.

All youths were compulsorily required to become members of the Morung and sleep together. The seniors carried out the functioning and administration of the Morung with the aid and advice of the village elders. Young boys entered the dormitory when they reach adolescence and remained there till they get married. The youths were willing to serve the communities; they sacrifice for society's interest and personal interests. They were ready to sacrifice their lives for the defence of the village. It is a vital and essential institution for the security of the village. They remain vigilant at night. A huge drum was placed at every Morung to raise the alarm in emergencies and wars. The Morung nurture the youth for physical fitness and well developed in conscience for the youth's well-being. Ursula Graham Bower observes that dormitories are an admirable institution that discipline and educate the young and unite the householders.

Most of the dormitories are away from the usual task and women folk. Most of the dormitories have a recreational factor, with feasting, drinking, dancing, storytelling etc., incorporated in its activities to enjoy life. Morung or dormitory system of the tribes in the hill areas played many important roles in the village administration. It was the only institution for the youths concerning social life.³ The educative role of the youth dormitory in forming the tribal personality is very significant. Dormitories serve principally to maintain the existing social order and thus have a conservative cultural effect. The dormitory trains the individual in traditional values, ideas, and ethics of the community and transmits the culture to the next generation. The training's scope is much broader as it initiates the growing generation into their cultural heritage. It is the place for performing magico-religious activities designed to bring about success in hunting, agriculture to augment men's procreative powers and for the overall well-being of society. The members of dormitories may be called in at any time to work for the tribe. Any public work like house construction, harvesting crops on request, building roads, searching for lost children, preventing crime, etc., are required.⁴

II. DORMITORIES AMONG NAGAS

The dormitory system (Morung) is an important traditional social institution for the Naga tribes. Morung is common to all the Naga tribes. Every Naga village has a dormitory for unmarried youth. Among the Nagas the dormitories are known in different names Apuki in Sema, Arju in Ao, Kichuki in Angami, Herangki in Zeliang, Rahangki in Maram, etc. Regarding the origin of dormitories, several anthropologists have put forwarded different views. According to Hudson, the dormitories survive the communal house in the early stage of human development when the people stayed together to avoid possible attacks from neighbouring societies. S.C Roy describes it as a helpful seminary for training young men in their social and other duties. The dormitory promotes brotherhood's social fiction among its members.

In most of the Naga tribes, the Morung is located near the village gate, standing as a village's defence centre in strategic locations. Among the Semas, the house of the Village Chief was used as a Morung. While the Ao Nagas organized Morung on the clan system, every clan has a Morung of its own. The village elders fixed the date for the construction of Morung. Priest with rituals etc. etc., each household contributes the material for the construction of Morung. It is regarded as the most beautiful or magnificent house in a village. The Morung ultimately promoted the maintenance of social cohesion and group solidarity within the villages. The village's most prominent building is the bachelor dormitories, where the young men sleep and learn the arts of discipline, customs, folklore, culture, and military training. They became acquainted with the history, culture, folklore, songs and dances. An important decision of wars and raids were taken in times of emergencies.

The time series monthly data is collected on stock prices for sample firms and relative macroeconomic variables for the period of 5 years. The data collection period is ranging from January 2010 to Dec 2014. Monthly prices of KSE -100 Index is taken from yahoo finance.

III. FUNCTIONS OF THE YOUTH DORMITORIES

Every Nagas village has a well-organized dormitory system. It served as a vital social institution of growth and survival of Nagas' religion, culture and religion. The dormitory is an important social institution, which sustains society, religion, culture and beliefs. The dormitories perhaps evolved to meet the need and requirement of society. Morung served as a socializing agent and learning to take responsibilities, and he continued till he is married. This institution played a pivotal role in shaping the future of the young

³ N.G. Ngalengam, 2011, Politics in Manipur (1972-2001), Maxford Books, New Delhi, p. 256.

⁴ N.K. Das, Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Social Stratification in N.E India, Inter Publication, Delhi, p. 121.

generation. The main functions of the dormitory were a defence of the village training of arts, etc. All boys attaining puberty must live in a dormitory until they are married. The boys of the family from the time they reach maturity sleep with all the other young men of the village in what they may call the guard house.⁵ It was the village guard room and the centre of the social and cultural life of the tribe. The Morung was empty during day time but came to life after sunset only. The villagers financed the Morung.

The dormitory teaches the young man and young women a strong sense of fraternity and corporate life in the village, which is essential for sustaining the tribal community life.⁶ Verrier Elwin has suggested two functions of youth dormitories; the semi-military barrack type, which aims at strict segregation of the boys and is connected with war, hunting and magic, and another which allows or even encourages them to have relations with girls and possibly aims at regulating the pre-marital interests of the tribal youth. It plays a significant role in preserving and sustaining the religion, culture and traditions of the Naga tribes. Though the highly developed morung institution of some Naga tribes absorbs much of men's social and political energies, there is no conflict between a man's loyalty to his Morung and his obligations towards his family and household".⁷

The Morungs are guarded-houses, recreational clubs, and the centre of education, art and discipline and have a ceremonial purpose.⁸ The Morung resembles the modern-day educational institutions as it imparts discipline, knowledge, traditions, customs and religious practices. The Morungs also served as a ceremonial and recreational centre and often play essential roles in mates' selection and mobilization of village labour. Morungs were a house of wars and education and for bringing understanding and reconciliation of different shades of opinions. It also provides young men opportunities to talk face-to-face and discuss their differences and reconcile matters. Morung was a tradition that was practised before the arrival of British and Christian missionaries. It is a place for educating the younger generation with knowledge of past histories, customs, religion, traditions and warfare. The spread of Christianity imposed strict rules with regards to Morung.

Defence of the Village

The main functions of the dormitory were a defence of the village training of arts, etc. It served as an institution to impart various arts and warfare skills, which will enable the village to protect from enemies and any external interference. The safety and prestige of the village were dependent on the vigilance and well-preparedness of Morung. In times of wars and raids, the youth stood to watch against intruders. It was a sleeping hall for the young men to keep vigil at night against the enemies.

Recreational Centre

It also served as a ceremonial and recreational centre; also an important role in mate selection and mobilization of village labour. As a centre of recreation or entertainment, sitting around the fires, sing songs, gossip, make jokes etc. It also served as a centre of recreations and cultural activities. The dormitories played an essential role in organizing the various social and cultural festivals organized in the village.

Educational Centre

It serves as a learning institution in the long and continuing education process that nurtures young men and women to become self-reliant, disciplined, and well-mannered, responsible, and good citizens. To transmit the history, traditions, culture, folklore, dances etc., to the younger generations. To make them more acquainted with the religions, social, cultural practices disseminated from the past generations. Education and discipline of the young, training martial arts, warfare, values, the technique of hunting, fishing, agriculture etc. also skills of warfare, handicrafts, sports, song folklores, basket making. In the absence of formal educational institutions, the Morung served as an institution for educating young men and women.

Community Service

To inculcate the sense of sacrifices and selflessness in their minds and render voluntary services to the community's needs and welfare. The dormitories take up various social services, community welfare, such as helping the poor and needy. There are numerous activities centred on the Morung, including education and discipline of the young; the inculcation of tribal morals and values; and training in arts, warfare, and hunting and fishing. The Morung served as an institution of learning, educating and imparting traditions, customs,

⁵ Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 455.

⁶ Gangmumei Kamei, *The History of the Zeliangrong Nagas*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahat : Delhi, 2004, p. 255.

⁷ Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *Youth Dormitories and Community Houses in India, A Restatement and a Review*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Anthropos, Bd. 45. 1. /3. (Jan.-Jun., 1950), p. 120.

⁸ Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, P. Dutta for the Research Department, Adviser's Secretariat, Shillong, 1961, p. 8.

etc., to the young people. To impart social behaviour, manner and discipline to the young generations. To teach various social norms and values of the society in the minds of the young people.

IV. DECAY OF DORMITORIES

With the banning of head-hunting and cessation of continued hostilities between villages, the Morung ceased to be necessary as a 'guard-room or building housing warriors and serving as an armoury.'⁹ The missionaries always dissuade the tribal people from dismantling the institution of dormitory and succeeding in numerous cases. The disobedience towards the institution of dormitory because being a Christian meant being something superior. The dormitory's charm and usefulness deteriorate slowly and gradually by sustained and systematic planning of the Christian missionaries in tribal India, particularly in India's north-eastern region. Circumstances transformation-consequently affected the Morung. It still does exist as a youth club among the Nagas. The spread of Christianity had adversely affected the significance of Morung and its importance. Morung was seen as an institution that does not go in teaching and principles of Christianity. The functioning of dormitories came to ceased, the importance and significance of dormitories which is regarded as an essential institution, came to an end, lost their relevance. But it is undeniable that the dormitories played a significant institution in the olden days. The early Christian missionaries were probably confused regarding the religion and cultural values; therefore, considered the institution of the Morung, a cultural centre, as heathen institutions, and the use of this institution was against the doctrine and rules of Christianity. The Morung slowly started losing its importance due to the conversion of Christianity. All the traditional rituals and customs sacrifices were abolished entirely from society. Most importantly, the Morung faded away and just remained as an institution during the times of entertainment.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the Nagas has written history, traditions and customs are transmitted orally through folklore, myth, hymns, dances, festivals, etc. The Morung served as an institution to moulds the young generation into responsible, moral, sincere, discipline and a good citizen. The extinction of the institution of Morung began with the advent and spread of Christianity. The Christian missionaries directly attacked this institution and forced the Christian youths not to be part of it. The missionaries regarded Morung that it is a heathen institution. There was a fear that this institution would go against the teaching and values of Christianity. Christianity alone is not responsible for the degradation of these institutions, the spread of western or modern education and its impact also affected even with the non-Christian villages. With the banning of head-hunting practices among the Nagas and the end of hostilities and feuds between the villages, the importance of Morung as a guardhouse began to lose its significance. However, there were no possibilities to revive these institutions due to the changing circumstances and modern social structure of today's society. Haimendorf deeply lamented Morung institution's decay and said, "Gone are the days, perhaps never to return. Modern schools, colleges and modern institutions had replaced these institutions, which led to the decline of old-age institution. With the coming of contemporary education, the boys and girls were sent to schools and colleges that drastically affect or undermine the dormitory's functioning: modern outlook and western approach of living adopted by people.

References

- [1] Das N.K. (1989), "Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Social Stratification in N.E India", Inter Publication, Delhi.
- [2] Elwin Varrier. (1961), "Nagaland", P. Dutta for the Research Department, Adviser's Secretariat, Shillong.
- [3] Fürer-Haimendorf Christoph. Von. (1976), "The Naked Nagas", Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- [4] Horam M. (2016), "Naga Polity", Sunmarg Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
- [5] Hudson T.C. (1911), "The Nagas Tribes of Manipur", Macmillan and Co, Limited, London.
- [6] Kamei Gangmumei. (2004), "The History of the Zeliangrong Nagas, From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu", Spectrum Publication, Guwahati: Delhi.
- [7] Kumar B.B. (2005), "Naga Identity", Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.
- [8] Nsoga A. (2009), "Traditional Naga Village System and its transformations", Anshah Publishing House, Delhi.
- [9] Shimray R.R. (1985), "Origin and Culture of Naga", Mrs. Pamlephi Shimray, Delhi, 1985.
- [10] Vidyarthi L.P., Kumar Rai Binay. (1985), "The Tribal culture of India", Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.
- [11] Venuh N. (2004), "Naga Society: Continuity and Change", Shipra Publications, New Delhi.
- [12] Yonuo Asoso. (1974), "The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study", Vivek Publishing House, Delhi.

⁹ M. Horam, Naga Polity, Sunmarg Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2016, p. 92.