



The development of colonial education in Mon district with special reference to Totok village

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Abstract

This study examines the development of colonial education and its impact on the Konyak Naga community, with special reference to Totok Village in Mon District, Nagaland. The colonial education provided by Christian missionaries has had a profound impact on the Konyaks in general, changing many facets of their way of life. Prior to colonial education, Konyak Naga men and women received their education and learned their ways of life in an institution known as Ban, a dormitory for men and Ywo for women. However, these indigenous institutions gradually lost their importance with the advent of the colonial education system. The Ao Naga missionaries were the first to introduce formal education among the Konyaks. Among the Konyak areas, Tamlu and Wakching were regarded as pioneers of English education, which later spread to other Konyak villages. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and is delimited to Totok Village in Mon District. Totok comprises five villages: Totok Chingnyu, Totok Chingkho, Totok Chingha, Totok Chinglen, and Totok Omlen. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources and analysed using content analysis. Interviews were conducted with ten respondents, including early educated elders and senior citizens of the village.

Keywords: Konyak, Totok, Colonial education, Missionaries

Introduction

Nagaland, established on December 1st, 1963, is the 16th state of the Indian Union. It is inhabited by the Nagas, a tribal group of the Indo-Mongoloid race and part of the Tibeto-Burman Linguistic group. The state comprises 16 administrative Districts, home to 17 major tribes and several sub-tribes. As per the 2011 census, Nagaland boasts a literacy rate of 79.55%, with female and male literacy rates at 76.11% and 82.75%, respectively.

The beginning of formal education among Nagas was initiated by missionaries who came solely for proselytization (Sarkar, S. 1979). Before this, education was mainly imparted through indigenous systems within families, communities, and the Morung institutions. With the coming of the American missionaries, schools were established to provide both general and Christian education to the Naga people. Education thus became one of the most significant forces bringing social change in Naga society.

The Konyaks

Konyaks are the major Naga ethnic group native to the Northeast Indian state of Nagaland. The word Konyak is derived from two root words, 'Khao or head', and 'Nyak or black', since Konyaks have jet-black hair. The other version states that they referred to themselves as "Kong-nyak", meaning "tattoo on the nose." Mon District is home to the Konyak Naga tribe. It attained separate district status on December 19, 1973. Renowned as the "Land of the Anghs", Mon District's social structure is deeply rooted in the tradition

of hereditary kingship or Angh-Wanglam. Like their counterparts among the Naga tribes, the Konyak tribes had no written form. Instead, their historical accounts were passed down orally from generation to generation.

With a population of 250,260 people as per the 2011 census, Mon District ranks as the third largest but remains categorized as economically backward, with the lowest literacy rate recorded at 59.66% compared to other districts and the state literacy rate of 79.55%. The district has 131 villages, and Mon town is the headquarters of Mon district. The dialect spoken in the Wakching area has been formally recognized as the common language of the Konyak community, serving as the primary medium for educational materials, literary works and scholarly publications. However, English has become the predominant medium in schools and offices since the Nagaland government adopted it as the state's official language.

Totok village - A brief profile

Totok is located about 13 km from the headquarters of Mon District in Nagaland. The Totok area consists of five villages: Totok Chingnyu, Totok Chingkho, Totok Chingha, Totok Chinglen, and Totok Omlen. The villages are administered under Rule 3 of the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act, 1979. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the people. The residents speak the Totok dialect, which is named after the village; however, the standard Wakching dialect is commonly used in churches and social gatherings. At present, there are five government schools and one private school in the area, with a total enrollment of around 519 (As per the report on 22nd September 2021, DEO Mon Town).

The objectives and research questions were formulated based on the researcher's experiences and observations of the important role colonial education played in the development of Totok village. Considering the limited availability of written sources and the historical significance of the topic, the study seeks to explore the development of colonial education and its impact on the community. The study also aims to document and preserve valuable historical knowledge for future generations.

Objectives

- To explore the development of colonial education in the Totok Village of Mon District
- To examine the impact of colonial education on the society of Totok Village in Mon District.

Research questions

- How has the colonial education system been introduced in the Totok Village of Mon District?
- What impact did colonial education have on the society of Totok Village in Mon District?

Review of related literature

Elwin V (1961) ^[10] stated that missionaries were the pioneers of education in Nagaland and that one of the most significant areas of progress in the region has been education. He also observed that conversion to Christianity brought considerable changes to Naga society, including the abandonment of several traditional practices and improvements in the economic condition of the people. Temjenkaba L (1984) noted that the Naga community as a whole is greatly indebted to the Christian missionaries for their pioneering work, especially in the field of education. James W (2022) ^[3] notes that education introduced by Christians became a major force for transformation in Northeast India. It reduced illiteracy and superstition, created new occupational opportunities, increased social mobility, and improved the living standards of the people. Lonkumer (2022) ^[5] in her study states that the formal education in Nagaland was first introduced by the American Baptist Missionaries. Meyase (2025) ^[6] in his study showed that the society in the Naga Hills was entirely transformed by the introduction of Christianity and Western education. Vaiphei and Gangte (2025) ^[9] in their study revealed that Christian missionaries played a significant role in bringing profound changes to the lives of both tribal and non-tribal communities through their pioneering efforts in establishing schools, introducing Western education, and promoting literacy. Sumi (2025) ^[8] in his study indicates that the colonial education played a significant role in transforming the culture, religious beliefs, social norms and political identity.

Overall, the reviewed literature consistently indicates the significant role played by Christian missionaries in the development of education in Nagaland. However, most of these studies focus on Nagaland in general and provide limited attention to the specific experiences of individual Konyak villages such as Totok. No written sources pertinent to the topic are available in the public domain. Furthermore, resources

pertaining to colonial education in Totok village are largely confined to oral stories and anecdotes. This gap in the literature generated interest in the present study. The study seeks to document and examine the impact of colonial education in Totok village, which can serve as a valuable reference for future generations and help preserve historical knowledge for the future.

Traditional education system among the Konyak

Haimendorf (1938) reported that the Morung of the Konyak Nagas are the centre of village life and the pillar of their social and political organization. Before the British colonial period, a traditional education system existed that revolved around dormitory setups, such as the Morung system, known as 'Ban' in Konyak dialect, for boys and the 'Ywo' for girls.

Chingang (2008) ^[1] stated that the Morung functioned as an educational hub for young Konyak men, providing an immersive environment where they absorbed the tribe's wisdom and traditions. They were taught various skills such as hunting, agriculture, fishing, construction, art, culture, social norms and values, trades and business, sports, religion, etc.

On the other hand, Ywo served as a dedicated space for unmarried or young girls, offering instructions on weaving, folk songs, dance forms, social etiquette, values and household chores (Konyak, 2003) ^[4].

These institutions played an integral role in shaping the education and cultural upbringing of the Konyak community during that period. The traditional education system gradually lost its prominence with the advent of Christian missionaries, British colonial rule, Indian influence, and the Ao Missionaries.

Development of colonial education in Mon district

R. P. Shukla and Buno Zetsuvi note that the origins of formal education among the Konyak people can be traced to 1840. It was found that the first attempt to introduce formal education among the Konyaks was made by Rev. Miles Bronson, who established a lower primary school at Namsang. Unfortunately, this initiative was short-lived due to the departure of the founding family. In 1918, the British introduced a primary school in Tamlu village, which remained confined to that specific locality. Subsequently, the first primary school was founded in Wakching village in 1932.

In his work, Y. Chingang highlights that the development of vernacular education was closely linked to Christian missionary efforts. Under the leadership of Longri Ao, education and evangelism were integrated through indigenous social institutions, particularly the Baan (traditional men's dormitory), which served as a center for evangelistic activities, literacy instruction, and community learning.

A significant milestone occurred in 1957 with the establishment of the Bible training school in Wakching village by the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India CBCNEI later evolving into the present-day Konyak Theological College. The school aimed to promote Christianity while fostering the development of a common Konyak

language, with Rev. Longri Ao and his wife serving as its first tutors.

In 1980, the Chingai English school, recognised as the first English medium school, was founded and later renamed Don Bosco school Mon by the Catholic Association. Additionally, in 1984, the Konjong English School was founded, followed by the Anghjong English School under the patronage of the Konyak Christian Association.

Historical overview of colonial education in Totok village

Among the Konyak areas, Tamlu and Wakching were considered pioneers of English education, which gradually spread to other Konyak villages. Located in Mon District, Nagaland, these historically significant villages have played a crucial role in the spread of Christianity and the promotion of education within the Konyak community. Tamlu emerged as the earliest centers of formal education with the establishment of a British-administered primary school in 1918. Similarly, Wakching emerged as an important hub of educational and religious activities following the establishment of a primary school in 1932 and the Bible Training School in 1957.

The first primary school in Totok Chingnyu was established in March 1951, with Bentick from Tamlu Village serving as the first teacher. At present, the village has a total of four schools: one Government Middle School, two Primary Schools (Sector A and Sector B), and one private institution called Pinnacle Private School. The Sector B Primary School functions under Totok Chinglen Village.

In Totok Chingkho, the first primary school was opened on 20 May 1952, and in July 1952, Lanutemjen from Ao Merangkong was appointed as the first primary teacher and also served as the pastor-in-charge. Since he belonged to a different tribe, the villagers were initially sceptical of his teachings due to a lack of awareness. Many parents were reluctant to send their children to school because they believed that the children might be used as domestic helpers. As a result, it was only in the year 1953 that he started teaching basic numbers and the alphabet, along with the gospel. However, due to certain circumstances in the area, the school functioned only until the end of 1953 and was later closed. After a gap of 12 years, it was reopened in 1965. Currently, the village has one Government Middle School.

The first primary school in Totok Chingha was initially established in 1954 with Sri Shahyong as the first primary teacher. However, the school did not function for long. It was later re-established in 1965 with Lempa Phom as the second primary teacher, and the year 1965 has been officially recorded as the establishment year of the first school. At present, the village has one Government Middle School, and Totok Omlen is attached to Totok Chingha School.

Methodology of the study

The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilising both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was gathered through interviews from ten respondents, which was purposively selected for the study, including early educated elders and senior citizens of the village. Secondary data was

obtained from relevant literature, including books, articles, journals, archival documents, church publications and both published and unpublished documents. The data was then analysed using content analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings presented below are based on qualitative data obtained through interviews and discussions and are further supported by insights from the reviewed literature. The analysis revealed the following key findings:

The colonial education provided by Christian missionaries has had a profound impact on the Konyaks in general, changing many facets of their way of life. Before the introduction of colonial education, the Konyak tribes did not have a written language; their history and traditions were transmitted orally from one generation to another. With the arrival of colonial education, the Konyaks were introduced to the three R's—Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. Through English education, they gained knowledge about the wider world, including world history, different political systems, and various social structures. This exposure broadened their understanding and awareness, which became possible through the skills of reading and writing.

Colonial education has significantly improved literacy among the Konyak tribe. Gradually, education has enabled individuals to access wider opportunities and enhanced the living standard of the people.

Colonial education, associated with Christian missionaries and their teaching, has converted a larger population of the Konyak community from animistic beliefs to Christianity, reshaping their social and moral values.

Colonial education introduced new norms in the Konyak community, which discouraged practices such as headhunting and various superstitious beliefs.

Colonial education empowered women to share equal opportunities in all spheres of life, enabling them to become economically independent, socially aware and confident.

It also played an important role in preserving oral traditions by helping to document and record traditional epics, folktales, and stories that were once transmitted orally.

Colonial education has also brought development in various areas such as road conditions, school infrastructure, community life, science and technology, health centres, and the idea of a global village. It has influenced people's ways of thinking and living, and also contributed to the improvement of the economic status of the people and overall progress in society.

Conclusion

Colonial education brought tremendous changes to the Konyak areas. The Konyaks remain indebted to the Christian missionaries for introducing and spreading education in Mon District. They helped free the people from many social and traditional constraints and fostered a positive attitude toward quality education. Schools gradually developed into local centres for community development, encouraging people to participate in collective efforts for progress.

Over the years, Mon District has witnessed noticeable developments in its educational system, particularly in terms of increased enrolment, the establishment of more schools, and the appointment of qualified teachers. However, the pace of growth remains slow. In today's digital age, where technology plays an important role in everyday life, many schools, especially Government schools, still lack basic amenities, let alone digital infrastructure. Therefore, the stakeholders of the education system need to take greater responsibility and work together to ensure better growth and development of education in Mon District.

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