

Colonial Education Policy in Nagaland

Piketo Sema

Prior to the British arrival at and their conquest of Nagaland, the modern scripts and education were unknown to the inhabitants of the Land. However, it was the British who subdued the Nagas by their might and introduced colonial administrative subject was introduced to the Nagas, no notable attempts were made to make the system successful during the period under study. This paper is an attempt to highlight the colonial Education Policy in Nagaland covering the period from 1881-1947.

Education as one of the most powerful agents of British Colonialism began with the Christian missionaries. It may be noted that from the very beginning of their contact with the Nagas, the British Officers perceived the necessity of introducing Christianity and education among the Naga tribes, for they considered education as the best agency for reclaiming the rugged Nagas to order and civilization. With this viewpoint, the Colonial Educational Policy was mainly directed to the extension of pecuniary grants to the Christian Mission in Naga Hills².

However, notwithstanding the Naga Hills District, the government had not made adequate efforts for the development of education in Assam province as a whole. In 1904, it noted that the primary education in Assam province in general was still in an experimental stage. In 1903-04, 60 percent of the students in schools were classed as illiterate as they were unable to read and write³. The government attributed slow progress of education in the province to the lack of fund⁴. In the Naga Hills District, although government largely depended on mission schools for the education of the tribes, it also opened schools on its own. For example, on 31st March 1904, the district had six lower primary schools maintained by the government

and sixteen mission schools were receiving grants-in-aid from the government⁵.

Change of Policy

Although, initially, Government's policy was to leave the responsibility for education to Christian missionaries with its annual pecuniary aid, in view of the necessity of providing healthy rivalry to schools run by American Baptist Mission, it made a significant change in its educational policy during the first decade of this century⁶.

The factors which chiefly influenced the government's new policy were, firstly, that it saw that education was not the primary object on which missionaries were engaged, on the other hand, education went hand in hand with their religious works. It was therefore considered that when the interests of the two would clash, education would be made to take the second place. Secondly, it was seen that the mission schools were understaffed and often faced with a dearth of qualified teachers. Thirdly, in view of the teaching of the gospel in mission schools and the subsequent conversion of pupils, animists were reluctant to send their children to missionary-sponsored schools for fear of conversion. In these circumstances, the government feeling that it had a moral obligation and responsibility towards their animists subjects, even though it had no objection to conversion, realized that simply on account of fear of proselytization, animists Nagas should not be deprived of modern education. In consideration of all these aspects, government modified its Education Policy in the District and accordingly started taking over more and more of village schools, which were in fact, mission-venture schools.

It appeared that the missionaries did not quite approve of the government's initial attempt to take over the village schools.

The quinquennial report on the progress of education in Assam (1901-07) Stated: "In the Naga Hills after somewhat delicate negotiations,

Government has taken over the village schools leaving the missionaries in charge of the training schools which are to supply village schools with masters⁸". Nevertheless, Christian missionaries still continued to establish schools with the grants-in-aid they received from the Government.

The missions had many venture schools which it ran with government's annual grants-in-aid. As for instance, in 1922, the number of government lower primary schools and aided venture schools had risen to 42 each¹⁰. However, by the 1930, the general policy of the government was to take over the responsibility of education from the missions as early as possible. In 1937, government stated its view on missionary schools, "While acknowledgement must be made of the debt owned to the missions for their work as pioneers in the field of education it must also be recognised that the missions have interested themselves in education solely with object of Christianizing the children. Portions of some of the hill tribes have refused education because it brought Christianity with it, and it is unfair that they should be deprived of education because they are unwilling to abandon their tribal customs"¹¹. Meanwhile, during the 1930s government schools had significantly increased. Nevertheless, there were still considerable number of mission schools in the district¹². In 1938 out of 167 educational institutions, 115 were government lower primary schools, 10 government aided lower primary schools, 36 mission aided lower primary schools, 1 government middle English school, 2 government aided training schools (upto middle English standard)¹³, 2 mission aided upper primary standard and 1 government industrial school¹⁴.

In trying to take over the responsibility of education in the district, the government in 1939, further decided to take over 10 schools annually for a period of five years. This step as stated earlier was also directed to reduce the number of mission schools in the district.

As a consequence, the number of government schools increased year by year; but it appears that the government did not keep up its policy of taking over 10 schools a year¹⁵. It may be mentioned in this connection that by the end of the colonial period the Naga hills District had a total of 165 educational institutions out of which 161 were primary schools, 2 middle English schools and a High school. Where as the number of schools increased from 6 in 1882-83 to 165 in 1947-48, the number of students increased from 107 to 17,443 during the same period. The first M.E. School was established in 1897 and the first High School in 1937.

Education under Deputy Commissioner

Education as a subject of colonial administration was placed under the general control of the Deputy Commissioner¹⁶. Accordingly, government schools were opened from time to time on his recommendations. Moreover, the schools were under his close supervision. In 1912, given the report of education in the district, the Deputy Commissioner stated; "the Nagas as a rule failed to appreciate the advantages of education, so that year the number of primary schools and scholars dwindled until from 32 schools with 787 pupils on the rolls on the 31st March 1907, the number has fallen to 22 schools with 327 pupils on the 31st of March 1912"¹⁷. The declining aspects of schools and scholars became a matter of concern for the government. The Deputy Commissioner attributed the decline to the literary nature of the educational system. This opinion was backed by other officials saying that the Nagas had a very practical turn of mind and hoped that they would do well¹⁸ if given education which would be of practical use. Moreover, one of the causes of the decline of enrolment the government identified was the heavy language burden in the school curriculum.

Technical Education

The large scale dropout of students and the dwindling number of schools in the district compelled the government to re-examine the system of school education. It was considered that practical type of education would be suitable for the Nagas. To meet that requirement, in 1907, an industrial school, called the 'Fuller Technical School' was opened at Kohima for training the Naga boys in carpentry and blacksmithery¹⁹. This institution offered a three-year training course for the pupils. At the initial stage, the school admitted 3 students annually but increased the annual intake to 7 students per year during the 1930s. In 1941, the school was brought under the education department and amalgamated, with the first Government High School of the district, located at Kohima. Since then, the high school boys attended technical classes in the afternoon as part-time pupils²⁰.

Medium of Instruction

The diversity of tribal languages posed considerable difficulties in determining the medium of instruction in schools in the district. At the initial stage, however, the pupils were taught in their local vernaculars, Assamese and English. Out of the three media of instruction two were foreign languages for the Naga boys. Experience showed that the three courses were difficult for the beginners in modern education. Subsequently, in order to remove the linguistic burden, Assamese was dropped as a compulsory subject and the vernacular and English were taken as media of instruction, with English acting as the medium for higher classes. Nevertheless, Assamese was also retained as a compulsory subject, though it was made a non-examinational subject, in consideration of the fact that the Nagas needed to learn it for their commercial transactions with the people of the plains²¹.

School Curriculum

The text books used in schools were mostly

translated by the missionaries and their converts. However, in view of the language difficulties involved in translation work and the absence of script in tribal languages, the government readily accepted the available books for use in schools as text books²².

As discussed earlier, because of diversity of language, no vernacular books could be used as uniform school text-books in the district. Accordingly, each tribe had to use books translated or written in their own local language. As for instance, books written in Angami could not be used as text books for Sema students and vice versa. Consequently, the government closely co-operated with the missionaries in the publication of school books. Text books translated into tribal languages were mostly published at the expense of the government although Christian missions also partly met the cost of some publications²³.

Stipend

As a measure of encouragement for the prosecution of post-primary school studies, the government also provided scholarships to the Naga students. In 1942 there were three Primary scholarships of Rs. 3/- each and three middle English scholarships, of Rs. 10/- each available to the Naga boys. In 1946, there was a significant increase in the grant of scholarships whose total number rose to 13. These scholarships were of the value of Rs. 3/- a month, each tenable²⁴ for three to four years for post primary education.

Constraint in Government Educational Policy

In view of the lack of employment opportunities, the government followed a very cautious policy in the promotion of education for the hill tribes, while welcoming the increase of primary education, it expressed doubts regarding the expansion of secondary school education. The quinquennial review of the progress of education in Assam, 1932-37 stated: "There is very little

chance of employment for Naga and Lushai matriculates in their own hills, and practically none for them outside"²⁵.

The government discussed the problems of hills education at a conference in Shillong in 1935 and again in 1937 and decided that education upto Class VIII should be given to the Naga boys in their home hills, and that they should then be given opportunities for training in mechanical pursuit, or agriculture, and that facilities for high school and college education should only be given to exceptional boys²⁶. Needless to say, the backwardness in hill education was partly the direct effect of government policy which restricted the scope for higher studies in general.

Even though Government's efforts in the development of education reached a significant mark as is seen during 1882-1948, its policy for tribal education was later found to be defective. The analysis of colonial education policy in Naga Hills may be summed up in the words of the report on the North East Frontier Agency of June 1944, which noted: "No educational policy has yet been laid down and the matter will require very careful consideration. Our present system is clearly gravely defective when applied to primitive tribes, for it tends to effect the individual rather than the community and instead of making the individual more fitted for his community, to separate him from it and cause him to seek a living elsewhere, with the result that such good as he may have received is not ordinarily passed on by example to his fellow villagers"²⁷.

Thus, though Government had made considerable progress in imparting the rudiments of education in the district, it still had to make efforts for higher and oriented planning of education. However, with the exception of taking over of a high school at Kohima in 1941,²⁸ no further notable measures were taken for the improvement of education in the district.

Notes & References

1. For. Dept. Po. - A, May 1840, No.143.
2. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, 1912-17,** p-99.
3. **Imperial Gazetteer of Assam, 1906,** pp.71-72.
4. Ibid.
5. **Gazetters of Naga Hills and Manipur, Vol. IX, 1905,** pp 67-68. The Six Primary Schools maintained by the Government were located at Mokokchung, Wokha, Henime, Khonoma, Jakhama, and Cheswejuma, and the Sixteen mission schools were situated at Molunga, Yayong, Siresomen, Womaken Merangkong, Akoia, Asangma, Waromung, Chungliyimsen, Changki, Mangmetong, Longkhum, Ungma, Lungsa, Lungpa and Lungjang.
6. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, 1901-07** p.106.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. During 1937-42, the Impur Mission Training school used to get an annual grant of Rs. 600/- . It appears that with Government grants, the mission also supported some venture village schools. Because the lumpsum grant was later withdrawn and schools were given direct Grants from the Government.
10. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, 1917-1922,** p.99
11. Ibid. 1932-37. p.63.
12. **Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol.IV, 1938,**pp. 799-800.
13. Ibid.
14. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, 1937-42,** p.109.

15. **Assam Education Report, 1882-1948.**
The number of schools and scholars continued to fluctuate from 1880s to early 20th century. Ostensibly schools during these periods were at the experimental state and accordingly the number of schools and scholars during the period had frequent rise and fall. Data for the 1940s are not available at all. This is attributed to the disruption of the second world war. However the significantly increased number of students in 1948 is a clear sign of the progress of education in the district.
16. Assam Education Report. 1891-92, p. 25
" " " 1912-17, p. 102.
" " " 1932-37, p. 63
" " " 1937-42, p. 109.
17. **Report on the progress of education in eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907-1912, Vol. I, p. 121.**
18. Ibid.
19. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, Op.cit., p. 118.**
20. **Quinquennial Review of the Progress of education in Assam, op.cit., 1942-47, p. 36.**
21. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam, Op.cit., 1907-1912, Vol. I. p. 121**
22. Allen, B.C., op.cit., Although it was difficult for the primary student to take the gospel of St. John and the Acts of the Apostles as their textbooks, for lack of printed books in tribal languages, they were used as textbooks.
23. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam. 1901-07. p. 118.**

24. Ibid.
25. **Quinquennial Review of the progress of education in Assam**, Op.cit., p.63.
26. Ibid.
27. Home Deptt., File No 31/15/45 Public (secret).
28. **Quinquennial review of the progress of education in Assam**, Op.cit., p. 109.