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Revisiting Pettigrew's Education: The Ushering of the Colonial Ideology Through Schools and Textbooks Amongst the Tangkhul Nagas (1896 - 1938)

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Abstract

This article attempts to relook at the works of Rev. William Pettigrew from the point of view of the native eyes. The dwindling of the Tangkhul Naga language and the introduction of the western education system to the Tangkhul Naga tribe in the year 1896 led to the tribe embracing Christianity. The systematic overhauling of the education system from being rooted in oral culture to that with a written education system brought a sea change in the lives of the tribe. The article sought to relocate the

intricate coupling of the Bible and the school texts in the late 19th century and the early 20th century.

Keywords: Tangkhul, William Pettigrew, Conversion, Education, Missionary, Manipur.

Introduction

The advent of different social and political theories in the recent past such as post colonialism and postmodernism have opened up floodgate of understanding social theories and social paradigms in wide-ranging ways as never seen before in the history of mankind. Through these democratizing schools of thought there have been growing realizations of the need to re-scrutinize and re-question the existing paradigm of education and its dynamics. In fact, the whole paradigm of social and political perspectives has shifted. Through these newfound perspectives the once marginalized societies are now getting a fuller view of education and of the matrix of its functions in the society. Educational practices and curricula do not take place in isolation but are the result of human tendencies to influence, shape, impose and refine existing practices. In fact, curricula are in some cases, determined by certain ideologies. Opining on the nature of education and its development in time Zvi Lamm, in his essay 'Ideologies and Educational Thought' (Zvi) says

"In one of the early stages of the passage of society from a traditional to a modern way of life - even before it was

possible to define them as really modern societies – a change occurred in the legitimization of education. In traditional societies, this legitimization is mainly ritualistic. According to it, the accepted patterns of educational practice are good because they are accepted, or because they have always been accepted according to the common beliefs. Their acceptance granted them the status of basic facts of life, and anyone trying to change them was viewed as damaging and undermining these basics. Except for short periods of change in people's views, which were usually accompanied by crises, the individual living in a traditional society rarely faced alternatives of educational practice. His identification with the society in which he lived always included an identification with one given type of education, accepted and even sanctified by the society, and - according to most of its members - the only possible and acceptable type. When traditional societies began to undergo changes, the ritualistic legitimization of education gave way to a new type of legitimization - the ideological legitimization of education. (Zvi 1)

Thus, education, later involves a whole societal experience and a social experiment contained into a system that is legitimized by the narratives/poetics of the powerful and comes to be known as ideology. To understand the nature of education and the system that provides the impetus it is essential to recognize the relationship between ideology and education.

It is essential, however, to understand ideology before one analyses the role of ideology in education. 'Ideology' is an elusive term which has been used in different periods with different connotations. In the past, the term had negative connotations, but in contemporary times it is used synonymously with 'philosophy'. 'Ideology', in simple words, can be defined as a set of beliefs, usually

entertained at group levels. Ideology at group levels can be contrasted with individual opinions in a society.

Ideology constructs the stereotypes that are legitimised and supported by certain social institutions. Thus, ideology that has the backing of powerful, social institutions becomes dominant in a society and has the potential to capture the minds of marginalised groups. It is this subtle 'hegemony' of ideas which was first focused and elaborated upon by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* (1935).

Among other social institutions engaged in the process of socialisation of the individual, educational institutions play an important role in the construction and perpetuation of certain ideologies which generally serve the interests of the dominant groups of society. If we look at the history of education in Manipur, we see how education has been used to propagate certain ideologies favoured by the dominant culture and community.

No ruler ever asked the masses for their choice or preference. As they enjoyed power, they could decide on behalf of others. The fact that every ruler tried to use education to legitimise and promote a certain ideology points to the significance of education and its two-way relationship with ideology. This ideology of knowledge encourages a certain pedagogy, the sole objective of which is to transmit or pass on pre-existing knowledge from one generation to another. This ideology of

pedagogical practices does not encourage any innovation, creativity, or reflection. The students and the masses are considered passive recipients and the teachers become the engines that endorse the narrative of the state.

Since the beginning of human history power has always been deployed in different ways. Yet the exercises of human power are always transmitted through discourses, which are embedded in various social structures and religious sanctions. This article is an attempt to highlight the overarching elements of dominance in the early textbooks of the state of Manipur. The paper will also try to investigate into the role of popular culture in normalizing and legitimizing the discourse of domination.

The Kingdom of Manipur and the Arrival of Pettigrew

Though the state of Manipur had its own history of rhetoric and literature even before the advent of the British, the arrival of the British in the state marked the coming of modern education in Manipur. As the British took control of the state in 1826, through the treaty of Yangdaboo, the colonial government took keen interest in introducing the natives to a new form of education, thus the first school of the state was established in the year 1872. This was followed by the establishment of 12 new schools all over the state and by 1914 a few Manipuri students had as a result started joining the service of the British Government.

However, the aim of imparting education to the natives in Manipur by the British was no different from what they had conceived for the rest of India.

"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect"
(Macaulay 1833)

Thus, the primary objective of education was to produce good translator who feared the might of the colonial power and could interpret the colonialists' needs and wants.

Pettigrew in the Tangkhul Country

The year 1894 heralded a landmark change in the history of western education in Manipur. The arrival of William Pettigrew to evangelize the Hindu Meitei, led to the spread of education in the hills of Manipur. Though Pettigrew could not convert the Vaishnavite Meiteis his attempt to understand the language of the Meiteis led him to publish many books on the state and its language. The first work of Pettigrew was published in 1896 as soon as he reached Manipur, it was a translation of the *Book of John*. The first Anglo Manipuri Grammar titled *Manipuri (Mitei) Grammar* was published in 1912. By 1903 Pettigrew had published 23 school textbooks by himself. In the years that followed Pettigrew's attention ultimately veered toward the Tangkhul Naga language and the evangelization of the tribe.

On reaching the hills of the Tangkhul country in 1896, Pettigrew came out with a primer meant for the Tangkhul tribe in 1897. The primer was not only important as a document of western education of the Tangkhul, it became a colossal foundation of the demise of oral tradition and the beginning of written tradition in the annals of the tribes of Manipur. The introduction of the primer soon brought about phonetic changes in the language of the Tangkhul tribes and gradually the shifting of syntax and semantics. The publication of the primer was soon followed by '*Luke wui Lairik*' a translation of *the Book of Luke* from the Bible in 1902. A collection of a few western hymns translated into Tangkhul dialect titled '*Jesu Wui La: Hymns in Tangkhul Naga*' was published in 1907. This marks the beginning of western musical culture in the history of Manipur. A dictionary titled '*Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary*' was published in 1918. The new dictionary not only tries to explain English to the students, but it also attempts to standardize meanings and pronunciation of the Ukhrul dialect for the entire Tangkhul regions. The first Tangkhul New Testament was published in 1926. Thus, the advent of western education was accompanied by the missionary's zeal to evangelize the native. This evangelizing approach brought about an uncompromising inclusion of Christian ethos and ideals in the curricula of the schools. Designed and written by Christian missionaries for missionizing the people, the

texts were replete with notions of western sense of history, education, and superiority.

The Objective of Educating the Native and the Result Thereafter

The result of such education system was that the first educated Tangkhuls could not help but abhor everything that was Tangkhul, including Tangkhul sensitivity. A popular chorus sung by the first educated convert goes:

*Mangkama Hao naobingna
Thingalunglikhorumsai
(Laden with ignorance, the Haos
Worshiped stone and trees)*

The underlying meaning of the above chorus reveals an overzealous semi educated convert revelling in his newfound identity as a man no more like his brethren but like the colonial teacher and reviling the culture he was born into.

The missionary's emphasis on education for the indigenous tribal was rooted in the colonial belief and principle of 'civilizing the native' in order to create a new order in the likeness and convenience of the colonial power. As Musa Dube, the Botswanian Postcolonial feminist theologian aptly puts it in her essay "Post-coloniality, Feminist Space and Religion":

The modern colonizer (whether English, French, Portuguese, German or Dutch) believed in the superiority of his religion, race, economy and culture. This superiority

called upon the colonizer to bear the vocation of converting and ordering the world toward his own identity. Such an ideology was grounded in the belief of modernity, Christianity, and industrial advancement. The colonized (nations, races, and countries ruled by foreign imperial power) on the other hand, were imbued with the belief that their own religion, race, economy, and culture were backward. Within this dichotomy however, there was a third space: the space of conversion or transformation.

The colonized could be saved, progress, developed, become modernised and assimilated to their colonizers in this conversion space, which had the institutions of Church, public administration, school education, language and trade at its services. (Laura E Donaldson & Kwok Pui-Lan 101)

Thus, on reaching Ukhrul, Pettigrew as expected inevitably resorted to naming and placing the Tangkhul Nagas and their custom into colonial stereotypes, which was nothing less than dehumanizing and debasing the traditions and culture of the Tangkhul. Describing the people Pettigrew noted that:

Brethren in other hill stations will probably testify to the truth of this, and Manipur is far worse than any of the hill tribes - a fact which Government officials declare often. The Missionary not having had any experience whatever in opening up work of this description amongst such a people, it was a case of feeling his way and profiting by experience. No doubt there have been mistakes made, and perhaps with more fact, suspicion might have disappeared sooner. The missionary found a people anything but truthful or reliable. The Manipuri is reckoned a liar, but these Tangkhul Nagas can beat him. The missionary has not come across one yet whose words or actions can be relied upon.

Again, it seems to be the custom to bring a bottle or two of their rice beer to any European official on tour, who usually accepts it. The missionary wishing to introduce abstinence principles refused in the first instance, and kept refusing,

until no Naga of any village thinks of tendering the stuff to him. This is another thing that tended to estrange them, for all know that they expect a 'bakshish' after the "zu" has been taken. These may appear trivial things, but trivial or otherwise there remained for a long-time utter indifference to the missionary's desires towards them. (Solo 23).

Pettigrew not only portrayed the tribe as unreliable, but he also painted them as a people

... like the rest of the Nagas of Assam, they are animistic in their worship, very superstitious and addicted to "zu" drinking to a great extent". ... They are naturally a cowardly set of people, susceptible to ridicule, and any suggestion of punishment frightens them. (Solo 14).

The plans for introducing the Bible in the schools were laid bare from the very beginning of the missionary's journey. Even before setting up the school in the Hills, Pettigrew made it clear to the Assam Baptist Mission Union, that the reason for setting up schools to provide modern education was to evangelise the Nagas. In his report to the Assam Baptist Mission Union, Pettigrew wrote:

Visits to the Capital mentioned above were for the purpose of inspecting schools in existence, opening up new ones, and appointing teachers etc. The raison d'etre for the Missionary's connection with the above work must be told from the beginning. Prior to the A.B.M.U. taking over the work the Political Agent of the state. (Solo 15).

Segregation and Education

The work of establishing schools to disseminate western educational doctrines and religious views were soon followed or immediately followed by the process of segregating the students from the rest of the community.

This segregation of the potential converts or students was seen as necessary since the home atmosphere was not considered conducive for the students to learn. Classification of the students/convert was convincingly laid down by the missionary even as he began going about his missionary works. This act of separating the students from their community also helped the missionary to introduce the Christian text into the syllabus of the school without any hindrance from the parents and the Government. The segregation of the new converts from the 'heathen society' brought about a devastating effect on the social and political fabric of the tribe. Reports of clashes between the new converts and the villagers became a regular episode. However, with the total freedom given to him by the Government of Manipur, Pettigrew was able to successfully introduce and establish many schools within a short span of time. By 1906 after much persuasion a few women started attending the night School. Pettigrew established the first girl school in 1909 which was attended by 13 girls. The following year, i.e. 1910 the Phungyo Baptist Church established the first Women wing of the Church led by Alice Pettigrew and the girls who graduated from night schools.

Writing to the American evangelical Ministry, Pettigrew wrote the following in 1896, which was published in the 1900 Baptist Missionary Magazine. He wrote that a

...satisfactory progress in the school is to be seen. ... The second class have begun in the life of the Lord Jesus, first part, as their textbook, in their own language, for the year.

Every Lord's day the boys turn up regularly, and their interest in the Bible stories is gratifying. They take delight in writing out from memory. Each boy has a book of his own for this work, so that at the end they will have a good collection of the Bible stories to read about in their home. (The Baptist Missionary Magazine Vol. LXXX, 1900)

This process of teaching the Bible to the students was however coupled with the twin purposes of skilling the converts to become, what the missionaries called 'servant of God'.

Thus, education was tailored to cater to the needs of the missionary to evangelise the Tangkhul Nagas. It was through the medium of education that the native could be converted, so as to impart what was perceived to be 'right' by the colonial power. It was through education that Pettigrew could succeed in taking home the message of the Bible to the people of the hills. Pettigrew being the superintendent of education in Manipur from 1895 to 1903 made full use of his position to imbibe and imbue the students into believing and accepting the principles needed by the missionaries and the colonial administrators. The purported objective of schooling the children was drawn upon the belief that the natives who are heathens and who live in 'miserable darkness' had to be 'delivered from darkness'. Thus, education became the sole means of achieving that purpose of deliverance.

The writer's firm conviction is that this educational work in the Valley should not be given up; and seeing that in this State Aided School at Ukhrul, there is a grand opportunity to train up young lives to be disciples of the Master, no question of abandoning this work should be thought of.

Again the education of these Manipuris is preparing the way for an intelligent grasp of the truth, and even now those who can read have an opportunity of reading the Gospel that are being distributed amongst them, and the constant prayer is that the Lord may bless His word in this silent way. (Assam Mission of the ABMU, 1899)

The result of Pettigrew's method of combining the Biblical teaching and western education in the school curriculum was astute yet predictable. Eight years after introducing the Tangkhul Nagas to the western education and the Bible, in 1904, and before he left for furlough, the native boys who were first admitted to his school in 1896 were given the charge of evangelising and teaching the Tangkhuls. In the words of Pettigrew:

I spent much time during the latter months preparing some of my boys for evangelistic work during my absence, and I was glad to be able to leave our young men for this work. One, the eldest, I left as temporary pastor of a church, and with him the others will visit their own village and the villages around. (The Baptist Missionary Magazine, 1904)

Pettigrew's twin purpose of producing evangelist and other non-ecclesiastical native scholars through education bears much upon education itself. Soon after successfully producing pastors and evangelists from his first crop of students, young boys from his school started manning the various Government schools of Manipur in the Hills. Although these boys were not educated enough from the point of view of formal education, the boys were used as teachers to fill up the vacant posts. In the same Report of 1904, Pettigrew happily acknowledged the success of his endeavour:

As a result of the school at Ukhrul two of the higher class boys have been appointed teachers, one as under teacher at the Ukhrul school and another as a pundit of a school for our Nagas that I have opened at another village of the tribe. Two others have been appointed teachers by the Manipur state authorities. (Solo 32).

In his report of 1932 in the Baptist Missionary review, Pettigrew once again highlighted the success of his endeavours. By this time, having worked with the Tangkhuls for thirty-six years, Pettigrew could clearly see the overwhelming success of his work. It was to his great satisfaction that the sons of his first converts were foraying into higher ground.

The son of one of the first boys to enter the school at Ukhrul in 1897 is now in Cotton College, Guwahati. A large number of boys who graduated from Ukhrul are to be found in different walks of life in the State, serving in various capacities for the State as well as for A.B. Mission. A large number are also serving under the three associations as either evangelists, teachers and pastors. All church buildings, all pastors, and village teachers are supported by association funds. Village school buildings and equipment are supplied by the village owning the school. (Baptist Missionary Review Vol XXXVIII, 1832)

Conclusion

William Pettigrew, as a pioneer of education and as a missionary in Manipur, contributed immensely in bringing western education and Christianity to the Tangkhul Nagas. His works and achievements cover various fields and walks of life. Many educationists to this day consider this first missionary and his work as the foundation of modern education in the state of Manipur. Pettigrew's

translational works in Manipuri, Tangkhul, and Thadou Kuki are still used as a benchmark for measuring perfections. In his forty long years of stay in Manipur he translated and wrote more than fifty books. Both the Bibles of the Tangkhuls and the Thadou Kukis are, to this day, dependent on the first translation for meanings and references. Yet, the issue of how much was lost and gained during the process of 'transformation' or 'transplantation' remains an issue that is yet to be settled.

One of the most apparent changes that Pettigrew brought for the Tangkhul besides changes in religious world views and lifestyle was the loss of the oral tradition. With the introduction of western alphabetical system, the Tangkhul language underwent a series of changes. From being a society with a rich heritage in oral tradition and knowledge, the community slowly transformed itself into a society that prioritised writing over oral narrative. This change, to say the least, is both cataclysmic and tragic. It is cataclysmic because the Tangkhul language could not be contained by the rule of western phonetic. While it helps in preserving certain amounts of information and knowledge, the introduction of the written narrative moves the Tangkhuls towards a new way of seeing and perceiving the sound of their own words. Instead of being in command of the phonetic symbols, Tangkhul words became the other way round. Thus, words taught in the schools became slavish to the phonetic rules. Secondly, it is tragic because, with the introduction of western system

of education the native system became irrelevant: not because it truly is but because the system was forcefully associated with backwardness and wildness. The system of community learning through practical association was soon replaced by rote learning and text-oriented classroom learning.

The addition of the Biblical teaching in the school text during the early 20th century was not only the missionaries' endeavour to propagate Christian teaching among the tribals, this practice of incorporating Biblical doctrine in the school textbook has a deep rooted colonial tradition in the belief of 'civilizing the savage'. Thus, the introduction of education to the Tangkhul Nagas was not only an attempt to spread western education but also to 'civilise' the native. This act of incorporating the Bible in the school text directly resonates with the observation made by the Reverent E.W Clark in 1881, while evangelising the Ao Nagas. *There is an American Baptist Mission station, Assam being one of the districts in which the American Baptist Society co-operates with us for the civilisation of the natives'* (Tezenlo 86). Pettigrew's idea of educating and indoctrinating the Tangkhuls in the south was no different. His orientation and practice and the Board to which he was affiliated (The American Baptist Mission Union, ABMU), was an offshoot of the Baptist Board for Foreign Missions (1814). Thus, disseminating the Biblical 'truth' through education and schools was his utmost intention.

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