

IMPACT OF EDUCATION BROUGHT ABOUT BY CATHOLICISM

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the Impact of Education. Catholicism did not come with the goal of educating the population but it came to Manipur to proclaim the 'Good News of Salvation'. The Catholic missionaries entered Manipur only in 1956 and the first days of the foundation of their mission were hard and painful. Their initial bountiful provisions were exhausted quickly by sharing with the needy, and the Tribal Baptists began to oppose their entry. The Catholic missionaries believed that people were good, and in a short time, as there was a crying need for education and boarding houses, for the poor Catholic Tribal children, they established schools first at Imphal and then throughout Manipur. One of the reasons for the differential impact of Catholicism in the Hills and the Valley of Manipur was that the Valley had evolved a pluralistic society and passed on to modernisation, but not the Hill areas.

Key words: Education, Catholicism, Catholics, missionaries

Introduction:

'The Church is a community of believers in Christ Jesus, called and sent to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. So, she is a community with a mission to proclaim. Evangelization constitutes the essential mission of the Church because she exists in order to evangelize (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 41). What the Church proclaims is not about herself but 'Jesus as Lord' (2 Cor. 4:5), 'the Way, and the Truth, and the Light' (Jn. 14:6)¹

'The Baptist missionaries were the first to establish Christian communities in Manipur since 1896. When Christianity entered Manipur, the Tribal of the hills, who followed the animistic belief, gradually gave up their animistic way of life and accepted the liberating love of Jesus Christ. Thus, they opened wide their door to Christ and the Cross was planted in Manipur in the nineteenth century. The Catholic missionaries entered Manipur through the Chin Hills in Burma in the early forties and another group of 350 persons received baptism at Hundung on February 11, 1952, when resident priests were sent to Manipur. The people of the hills have responded well to the Gospel and today almost all the tribal people are Christians'.²

The Catholic Church had not been allowed in Manipur by a strange law enforced through pressure from the Baptists

¹ T.C. Hodson, Naga Tribes of Manipur, (New Delhi: Forward Books, Reprint 2014) p. 43

² Feast of merit: the social status of a tribal family is determined by the number of feasts given by the family

till the early fifties. So, there was no, resident priests in Manipur till 1956. The change for the better had come, when three highly placed officials in the government favoured such a change. They were the Chief Commissioner of Imphal, the I.G.P. of Imphal, a Rajasthani, whose wife was a Catholic, and the District Commissioner, M. Sundaram from Tamil Nadu. This policy permitted a turn of events, and Catholic priests stepped into Manipur'. The first days of the foundation of the Catholic mission in Manipur, were hard and painful. The bountiful provisions brought initially in the maiden jeep voyage from Dibrugarh to Imphal were speedily depleted, having been shared with those in want, and after a few weeks in Imphal, the missionaries found themselves in dire straits, lacking almost everything in their small, rented house. But generous benefactors came forth and Fr. Ravalico began the construction of two barracks, utilising boys from the villages, who were roaming the town in search of work, or in pursuit of their studies. Hardly had they been two months in residence, when Fr. Ravalico took 42 boys and girls to Dibrugarh, to be educated at the expense of the Catholic diocese of Dibrugarh, in various of its' schools.³ It was equally natural for some of the Baptists to indoctrinate their followers against the danger of contagion by the Catholic Church. They had printed and diffused a libellous publication against the Catholic Church, its teachings and practices. All the old objections, accusations and calumnies had been collected and printed, and the simple Naga believed all that stuff, more so, as it was from a book, printed abroad in a Christian country. At first the people were convinced that the Catholic missionary was bad, and any stick was good enough to beat him with. But the Catholic missionaries took all in their stride, knowing that this campaign would abate once these naturally good and upright people came to know them better'.⁴

The enemies of the Catholic missionaries had also been busy, spreading 'calumnies and lies galore,' preaching on leaflets and on one occasion at least, Fr. Ravalico and his protector received some blows. The two missionaries had up to now been residing on the outskirts of Imphal town. But soon a far more spacious lodging with a small compound was found for sale. The S.P. (Superintendent of Police) of Imphal, a respectable Bengali, whose term of office had just expired was preparing to go back to his native Bengal, and was willing to sell his residence, which was bought for Rs. 58,000, this house was in the heart of Imphal city and Fr. Ravalico christened the house 'Nirmalabas' (the present Nirmalabas school, a well-known educational institution for girls, has been reconstructed on the original plot purchased by Fr. Ravalico and in 1986 had more than 1600 students).⁵ At present the Nirmalabas School has 1745 students. Nirmalabas though located in the heart of Imphal city, was neither sufficient nor suitable for developing a mission Centre according to Fr. Ravalico's plans. There could be accommodated, only a small group of boys, while there was a crying need for a big boarding school for Catholic children from different tribes, who from their villages in the interior were coming down to the town to study in any school, that would admit them, boarding in any house that would receive them, with no comfort for either body or soul. Fr. Ravalico found a suitable place in a locality called Chingmeirong, just as one enters Imphal from the Assam Road. It was a low land, marshy, full of mosquitoes and frogs, and the locals believed it to be inhabited by evil spirits.

Most respondents concur with this view that Catholic education is superior because of the virtues and values they give to children, teaching them ethics, morality, discipline, courtesy, respect for all and maintenance of peace and harmony. Character formation imparted gives an advantage to the students who in later years are able to pursue prestigious careers in the civil services and other disciplines. The academic excellence that characterizes Catholic education is a good foundation for continuing life education.

People like the fact that Catholic schools are more vigilant and dedicated in their service. They make sure that their syllabus is covered and the needs of the students are taken care of. They provide good facilities and

³ Gailangam Kamei, *The Basics of Socio-Cultural Life of the Nagas of Manipur with special reference to the Zeliangrong people in* L. Jeyaseelan (ed.), *Op.cit.* pp. 24-26

⁴ William Nepuni, *Socio-Cultural History of Shupfomei Naga Tribe*, (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), pp. 144-157.

⁵ *Ibid* p. 126

opportunities. They are more stable, well organized and managed. The dedication of the teachers is unquestionable. When the people were asked to rank the list of reasons for the good results in board exams and other exams, the general views were as follows:

- 1st. Quality instruction/ teaching
- 2nd. Discipline
- 3rd. More regular study
- 4th.Children of influential family's study in the school 5th. Private tuition
- 6th. High expectation from the school
- 7th. Prevent weak students from appearing in the final board exams. Besides these they have attributed the following reasons for the success:
- 8th. Remedial class
- 9th. Personal effort and hard work of the student's 10th.Competitive atmosphere in the school
- 11th. Pooling of bright students
- 12th.Children of educated Parents studying in the schools

Priority given in the list of reasons speaks clearly about the quality of education given in Catholic schools. It also speaks highly about the systems and methods in which education is imparted in these schools. They also appreciate the English-speaking skills in the school premises.⁶ Interviewees were of the opinion that the quality of education in Catholic institutions is higher than that of government and private schools and provide a distinct advantage to the students.⁷

The people think that the Catholic schools are less discriminating. They provided equal opportunity to all students. According to one respondent, 'fairness and no corruption are two values instilled by Catholic schools. Such comments reflect on the value imparted by the schools. The boarding facilities provided by the school makes it possible for the non-locals to take advantage of the opportunities. It gives them chances to mix with other people, learn to adjust and adapt to each other. Students coming from multi-cultural background get to share, learn and appreciate one another, thus helping them to go beyond group-ism and learn to co-exist peacefully with others.

Catholic schools according to respondents open their doors to all people and all children are treated in like manner. In fact, it appeals to the various communities' resident in the state because of this perspective adopted.⁸

The charity work they do is another plus point of Catholic schools. Giving concession to poor students and free education for orphans, has won great admiration from the people.

The Impact of Education:

With the spread of education as Usha Nayar has said, Education is 'perceived as the most important tool for both accumulation of social assets and formation and accumulation of social capital'. This was proved by research across disciplines, over time. This is why educational development occupies a central position in social development in any society. A society's progress is dependent mainly on its capability in the acquisition and accumulation of social assets. 'The effect of social assets on societal change would depend upon the quality of accumulated social assets. One may think of education (facilities, levels, quality, and equality across sections), health, etc as social assets and the advances made in these sectors result in the accumulation of social assets. Such accumulation is expected to put society on the path of progress and since the accumulation would not be reversed (in the natural course) itself cannot be reversed. Education is not merely narrow or limited to classroom experience but, a holistic and experimental learning aimed at social transformation. The collective and cooperative effort of

⁶ Interview with Retired (Prof.) Salam Irene (former HOD History Dept., Manipur University) at Her Residence Mantripukhri on 8th November 2019

⁷ Salam Irene, Catholic Education in Manipur, Op.cit. pp. 58-59.

⁸ R.M. MacIver and Charles Page, Op.cit. p. 520.

social institutions, state, voluntary sectors and most importantly, people themselves can bring about community effectiveness.

The historical contribution and breakthrough of the achievement of the Church in the field of education lies in the fact that it broke the monopoly of a single privileged caste and decentralized and democratized education. This made it possible for Dalits and Tribals not only to benefit by it but to have social mobility in life. The Dalits, backward classes and the Tribals were empowered by Catholic education.⁹

Benjamin Nattar's research thesis has also revealed that people of the state have high regard for Catholic schools. It is the desire of every parent in Imphal to get his or her child educated in Catholic schools. One can see the rush of parents to these schools to anyhow get their child admitted. Even Businessmen, who runs schools in Manipur, prefer their children to study in these schools. As mentioned earlier, the Catholic schools are imbued by a strong Catholic ideology of the universal and national church doctrines. These schools aim to promote a holistic development of the students. Even non-Catholic teachers teaching in Catholic schools have been influenced by this mind set of the Church. The Catholic Church does not aim to forcibly convert people to Catholicism. Thousands of non-Christian students, who have studied in these schools for more than 10 years, have no knowledge of difference between Catholic Churches and other denominations. According to the survey conducted by the scholar, the respondents have remarked 'Catholic Schools give better education than the others. The formations they provide in these schools are more holistic. They have better discipline, instilled good moral values, and shaped the personalities of the students in a humane, responsible, honest, upright and God-fearing manner. They are taught to respect the diversity existing in our society, learn to live in peace with each other and appreciate the beauty of each other's culture, tradition and religion. They are not only given academic instruction but are also taught skills which will in future, enable them to make a better life for themselves.'¹⁰

There is immense change in the lifestyles of the Tribal in Manipur with the coming of Christianity and more specifically with education spread ingits roots through the length and breadth of Manipur. It cannot out rightly be stated that spreading of education had no effect on the Meitei as well as in the present-day Manipur, as there have been modification in the various rituals and ceremonies. Religion as mentioned in the earlier pages had always played a pivotal part in influencing the adoption of the new cultural values, the adieu to their old animistic beliefs, their old habit of sipping 'zu' together, and the importance/relevance of 'zu' (rice beer) in every celebration or occasion. The influence of religion is not only confined to amongst the Tribal. Religion can be universally accepted as a dominant force in determining the changes that takes place in any human life at any given place.

Hence, with the coming of Catholicism, there were changes everywhere. The similarities between the belief in Catholicism and also the belief in the old tribal animistic religion were quite many. For example, the tribal belief in the existence of God, a Supreme Creator could be compared to the God, the Supreme Being in the Bible. Though not exactly similar to the belief as per Catholicism, the Tribal also believed in a world after death and in certain ways, this is comparable to Purgatory. The Catholics also believed in Praying for their deceased family members and friends especially on All Soul's Day (2nd November), the Catholics would go visit burial places of those who, left this world already. The same way, the Tribal also practised sacrificing, fasting, abstinence, offering prayers, etc for their loved ones, who had left their worldly lives.

Now, with all these similarities with their old beliefs, the Tribals compared to the Meitei endorsed Catholicism without much hesitation. However, it is important to mention here that Catholicism did not vouch for a complete breakdown of the old traditional belief and culture but only to do away with or modify certain aspects of the old culture. It is crucial, when a new religion is introduced that, it should never be done forcefully. When things are

⁹ S. Karotemprel, *The Role of Catholic Schools in Evangelizing and The Socio-Economic Development of Shillong*, (Shillong: Vendrame Publications, 1983), p. 4.

¹⁰ J.P. Naik, *The Role of Private Enterprise in Education in the Christian College and National Development*, (Madras: Christian Literature, 1967), p. 32.

forced onto the population, the consequences are often not gratifying. Nonetheless, when any change is introduced gradually after convincing the minds of the people, the results are rewarding. With Catholicism, there were many changes that took place within the tribal society. They opened up for instance, their mindset were freed, which opened up space for improvement, up- gradation/upgrading of their thinking or standard of living.

Meitei:

With the coming of Catholicism, the Meitei population did not convert in large numbers. The number was negligible. However, at present, it has increased though the rate of conversion is still very less. Nonetheless, a huge number of them preferred Catholic institutions to bring up their children. And this resulted in the emergence of educated middle class amongst the Meitei. It is in this class, that we can find the biggest impact brought about by Catholicism through education. Some of the changes that took place amongst them are:

- Like their tribal counterpart, there are a lot of changes taking place in the Meitei's marriage. The presence of cakes, throwing of reception parties, buffet system of food catering, hall decoration, event planning etc, which were all absent earlier, are now in vogue. These days, all these are trending and the Meitei also have inclination towards it.
- The Meitei population earlier had many taboos. The consumption of pork, beef, etc. was/were considered as unclean. But now, it is starting to form a part of their regular diet especially of the younger generations. The younger generation, majority of them, have no qualms on the consumption of earlier tabooed diet/ foods/drinks (especially alcoholic).
- The Meitei also happily and equally participate in Christmas and especially the New-Year celebration. They would arrange for parties and get-togethers on New Years' Eve. It is not as if Catholicism encouraged the last, as on the 31st Dec. every year a thanks giving service is held to thank God for all the blessings he has bestowed during the year gone by.
- There has also been comparative change in the way, they dress. The males don't wear 'pheijom' (dhoti) everyday, but instead wear western pants with shirts. The females are also not always seen in phanek (sarong), but in skirts, pants, dresses, etc. It is obvious, that there had been changes in their dressing style this is definitely brought about by westernization, which in turn is brought about by education carried out voraciously by the Catholics and Christian missionaries. The Meitei too learned hygiene, elements of more scientific house construction, importance of clean kitchens and bathrooms from the Catholics.

Tribal:

- Some illustration of the changes or modification, that has been taking place in tribal society are as follows, though it would be impossible to mention every change.
- The use of western musical instruments like the guitar or the piano instead of using the tabla or sitar for singing praises of worship. The use of music players, while performing traditional dances, performances etc. the inculcation of khong (traditional drum) along with guitar/ piano inside the church to sing hymns (often in native dialects).
- The practice of using a coffin in the funeral services. The laying down of flowers and bouquets near the coffin. The deceased person is often covered up in the traditional shawl of the tribe to which he belonged to, inside the coffin. This could also be an example of the amalgamation of both the old tribal ways and the new faith. The visit of friends and relatives wearing black, often with shawls or parting gifts and the throwing of a stone or lump of mud on the coffin, after it has been laid into the ground are also still practised. There is a great measure of enculturation. Catholics always throw lumps of mud on the coffin after it has been lowered into the grave.
- There was also no custom of exchanging rings, marriage vows, white gown for the bride, black or other colour suit for the groom, invitation card, hosting reception parties, first couple dance, photo-shoot and others. Now, presently, all these are considered a convention for every tribal Catholic/Christian wedding.
- Sunday Mass/Worship was also non-existent. The Tribal were not aware that Sunday was supposed to be a rest

day to worship God. Today, it is habitual for the Tribal to go to church and worship Him especially every Sunday. The practice of partaking in the Eucharistic Service every Sunday has also been adopted by non-Catholics Churches like Kuki Christian Church while some others like Baptist churches follow it only on special occasions like Easter Sunday, Pentecost day, etc. Sunday schools are also conducted for the overall development of children morally and spiritually. Children are taught about the life stories of Jesus and his disciples and many other fables from the Bible.

- With the coming of Christianity/ Catholicism, comes the introduction to new diets, new ways of cooking, etc. there has also been variety in the items of foods consumed. Earlier, the tribal diets were mostly constricted to boiling, roasting, etc. now, the process of baking, micro-waving, pressure-cooking, etc. the tribal are now aware of the importance of consuming nutritious meals and maintaining hygiene in their daily conduct of life.
- Earlier, the tribal had limited clothing and accessories to adorn themselves even on special occasions, but with them opening up to the new world, hence to machines and innovations, there has been a revolutionary change in the type of clothes they wear, their taste and even on the work on traditional wrap around.
- The significance of birthday cakes, wedding cakes, congratulatory cakes, thank you cards, etc. in every celebration. All these were absent in their earlier traditional social cultural tribal life. Now, these are regular features of any celebration.
- Even their way of construction or building their houses has been improved drastically with education. The importance of drainage, proper kitchen, bathrooms, toilets, maintenance of privacy, etc. also the importance placed on hygiene are well illustrated nowadays.
- In earlier tribal society, the younger boys were sent to the village dormitory to seek knowledge, brotherhood, belongingness and learn the customs of the society like village defence, clearing of forests etc. these days, they are sent to schools or boarding schools or colleges to attain knowledge under the guidance of well qualified teachers and motivators. Even the girls are sent to schools, colleges, etc so that they learn to stand on their own feet and take care of their needs and requirements.
- The emergence of an educated middle class amongst the Tribal resulted in huge number of Tribal giving up their traditional Jhum/shifting cultivation and practising sedentary occupations by finding employment in government services with the education obtained by them. Though most of them are brought up in Catholic run institutions, not all of them are converted to Catholicism, however the fact that they are brought up in these institutions broadened their perspectives and take on life.

The above points may be debatable as some may argue that the changes that came about, with the coming of Christianity and not particularly because of Catholicism. However, it is important to mention here that, the changes were brought about by education, but it is in this field of education, that the Catholics were incomparable to anyone. They made the greatest stride in the field of education in Manipur like most other places they went to work in. Though, the Baptists and earlier missionaries' contribution were undeniable, nonetheless, the Catholic's contribution stands tall and firm.

CONCLUSION

The historical contribution of the Church in the field of education lies in the fact that it broke the monopoly of a single privileged caste and decentralised and democratised education. In Imphal especially, it is the desire of every parent to get their child educated in a Catholic institution because they provide a holistic education and shape the personalities of the students in a humane, honest, upright, and God-fearing manner. They are taught in short, 'Life skills'. The impact of Catholic education on the Tribal permeates every facet of life and although all types of education also produce similar results it is a fact that the Catholics in Manipur made the maximum contribution and still do in the field of education in Manipur. The impact may have been less on the Meitei as only a very small number have converted to Catholicism. But as many Meitei children study in Catholic institutions, the way of life has been revolutionised in many ways that affect daily living example, dress, hygiene, food, giving up some taboos etc.

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