

Anthropological Journey of Education in The Tangkhul Community

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Abstract

This paper is a case study of the Tangkhul community, one of the major Naga tribes living in Manipur's Ukhrul district. It emphasizes how English education as a whole sheds light on communities that were “animistic,” “barbaric,” and “savage.” The discussion progresses from the beginning, when English language and literature were introduced to the community by a Scottish missionary named William Pettigrew in 1896, to its current state. The missionary was spreading the gospel, but he had to cultivate the English language and literature in the process, which led to enlightenment. Looking at the current situation, one can realize the refinement that has spread among the Tangkhuls, and that will continue through the English language and literature directly or indirectly.

Keywords: *Tangkhul, animism, education, Ukhrul, Naga, Christianity.*

Methodology

This paper extracts from the rigorous M.Phil. research during the two years at the University of Pune. The approval or consent for the same comes from Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU), previously called the University of Pune. Because they belonged to the same tribe or community, the researcher had no difficulties being accepted as their own and acquiring accurate data. The informants were duly informed about the study during the course of data collection.

Interviews played a vital role in supplementing the document and records regarding methodology. Oral history was a primary indispensable method. The observation was also crucial in the process; observing the people and culture gives an enormous amount of data about the subject's life.

Introduction

India has diverse cultures, languages, races, caste, classes, communities, etc. In the North-Eastern region of India, the state of Manipur is another intriguing place with a variety of people, languages, and villages. The unique community in Manipur or even India will be the Tangkhuls. They occupy the district of Ukhrul because almost all the 222 Tangkhul villages (Census of India 2001, 1-5) have their specific language. However, these unique languages are only used orally, and the Tangkhul language is the common language officially used besides English. Tangkhul is one of the significant sub-tribes of the Nagas, a union of 35 or more sub-tribes or clans according to the 1991 Census of India, with majorly inhabiting Nagaland and Manipur, and a few in Arunachal Pradesh. However, in 2010, it is

recorded to have 66 tribes that come under the umbrella of Nagas (“List of Naga Tribes,” 2011, para. 3).

The Nagas are scattered widely over the many North-Eastern states of India. The Nagas are simple in their thinking and approach to people. Talking about the physical features of the people, they are medium height, the men are muscular and full of stamina as they are hardworking hilly people. The nose is flattened, but some are sharp in their mongoloid features. It is said that headhunting was a widespread practice besides hunting animals in the mountains and hills with spears and bows for honor and food (Singh, 2008).

The Tangkhul Nagas are located mainly in Ukhrul, a district on the northern side of Manipur State, located in the Indo- Myanmar- Border area. It was demarcated as a distinct subdivision in 1919 during the British reign. Ukhrul was raised to a full-fledged district in November 1969 known as ‘Manipur East District.’ According to the CSI Publication 1976, the Ukhrul District area was 8200 square kilometers (District Report: Ukhrul, p 11). The Tangkhuls speak Tangkhul language. The population is about 183,998, of which 94,718 are males, and 89,280 are females in 35,694 average households (Census of India, 2011). The Tangkhuls occupy the Ukhrul District of Manipur, a hilly area, lying at the border of Myanmar, between the latitude 25°5’N and 25°41’N, and longitude 94° E and 94° E. There were some 222 Tangkhul villages and about 20 *Kuki* (a tribe not under the Naga Tribe) villages in Ukhrul District according to the 2001 census (Census of India 2001, 1-5).

Looking at the origin of Nagas, Richard Haleng mentions that before the arrival of the British into Manipur in 1832,

The Nagas lived in village-states, free from interference and domination from any external forces. Naga village-state was an independent unit and accordingly enjoyed the rights of sovereignty. Every village-state pursued independent foreign policy and implemented its own customary laws on all walks of lives of its citizens. Its economy was local and self-sufficient. In fact, the Naga community never felt the want of food (11-12).

Chandrika Singh (2008) also maintains:

It seems that they migrated to the present place (Manipur), sometime in the B.C. era when other tribes like *Caren, Shan, Chin, Singpho, and Koyans* of Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines, who bear the similarity in physique with the Nagas migrated from the same place (Central Asia) and settled where they found unoccupied lands (26- 27).

However, Chandrika maintains that British authors like A. Mackenzie and Hutton Robinson called them “savage, uncultured and semi-civilized.” It would be right to say that the people were fond of hunting heads or headhunting wars which was an important, common and popular practice to count the human heads they have hunted as honors or prizes. The Nagas lived without unity, living independently in those villages. Among the Nagas in Manipur, the Tangkhuls have the largest population, inhabiting the Ukhrul district. Missionaries and other writers have branded the Naga and the Tangkhul religion as animist, pagan, or heathen.

Account of the Early Stage of Education in the Tangkhul Nagas in Manipur

The English language and literature were first brought to the Tangkhul Nagas by William Pettigrew, a Scottish missionary and educationist. Now, the Tangkhul community has spread to the neighboring states of Manipur like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh. In the

true sense, we can say that the Ukhrul district is the origin of western civilization in the state of Manipur. Western education and Christian culture came as early as 1894 to Ukhrul through William Pettigrew (Sen, n.d.). However, another source says that English education or Christianity was first introduced in Ukhrul in 1896 (Shimray, 2001). A. S. W. Shimray writes that Rev. William Pettigrew arrived in Manipur in 1894 but moved to the Ukhrul area in 1896 after changing his Missionary sponsorship from the Ardington to the American Baptist Mission (the researcher will use the later version—1896) for the sake of convenience. However, the researcher will not ponder over this issue of his arrival and service.

It was a break of dawn for the Tangkhuls from savagery to civilization; they progressed with the arrival of English education. One should note and consider that when we discuss English education or Western education, English language and literature are a package of the same. It will be worthwhile to make a special mention of this missionary and educationist.

William Pettigrew was born in Edinburg, Scotland, on January 5, 1869. His father was a captain of the Irish ship. After his mother died giving birth to his brother, the family moved to Glasgow, where his father remarried. William grew up in a God-fearing Anglican family. After graduating from Livingstone College, he went to the Arthington Aborigines Mission to prepare himself for the ministry. He was the person to transform the Tangkhuls tremendously and Manipur at large very soon.

William Pettigrew originally belonged to the Church of England. He sought permission to work among the Manipuri Hindus (Meiteis or Manipuris are the people inhabiting the mainland of Manipur). Manipuris are people who speak Manipuri or Meitei as their mother tongue. The Tangkhuls are a tribe, like other tribes, mainly inhabit the hilly regions of Manipur, and Manipuri or Meitei language is their second language. Many Tangkhuls, like other tribes, do not even know Manipuri or Meitei language. So, there is a discrepancy in the use of the term Manipuris to address all the citizens of Manipur. The issue with the Meiteis was that when Pettigrew started his missionary and educational work, some Meiteis were intolerant to his work. They were conformist Hindu leaders, and therefore, they felt that their religion was under attack. After only six months of service, Pettigrew was ordered to leave the Meiteis' community.

According to F.S. Downs, Pettigrew had two options to re-establish his mission- the Hmar tribe in Southwest Manipur and the Mao tribe (another Naga tribe). However, both the possibilities failed respectively because of the chief's decision or refusal to sell land to the missionary ("How Christianity came to Manipur," n. d.).

The Ardington Mission (England) did not want to establish a permanent mission station in any specific place. He expressed the desire to preach the gospel and had no choice but to contact the American Baptist Missionary Union in Assam. Later, he was re-designated as a Baptist missionary to Ukhrul rather than a Church of England missionary. For the sake of his mission and interest, Pettigrew changed his denomination from Anglican or Church of England to Baptist Mission ("Meitei Christians," 2005).

Initial Stage of School Establishment

Christianity and Western (English) education seeped in only to bring civilization and enlightenment from savagery, headhunting, animism, and barbaric stage. Coming back to establishing an English school, after inspecting around in the Ukhrul area for his mission headquarter, Ukhrul (then called 'Hungphun') was decided and chosen because of the location and accessibility from the surrounding villages.

A. S. W. Sothing comments on the impact of *Awunga* (“Awunga” meaning “head” or “chief”) in the history of Tangkhul Nagas, stating that when a new religion (Christianity) came into Ukhrul, the *Awunga*’s (headman’s) decision of welcoming the new religion brought two opposing religious beliefs (the Hao Religion and the Christianity). Still, the citizens gave in to the decision of *Raihao* and followed his step as loyalty and honor to the *Awunga*. The account of this initial setup is quite interesting as we learn that the *Awunga* (chief) of the Hungphun village, *Raihao*, had tales about his great grandfather who dreamed of a white missionary coming to Ukhrul. The village chief permitted the white missionary to start his gospel work with this story in mind. When the chief accepted the new religion, the village and the whole tribe converted to Christianity. (“Tangkhul Naga,” 2005).

Pettigrew could have given up and blamed the situation. But he did not; he saw the importance of educational work and a huge opportunity to spread the gospel, which was very important to him. He had to teach the natives English to evangelize them and use English literature on various levels. Of course, he learned the Tangkhul language during this process.

In the beginning, the people were not interested in joining the school for education, nor did the parents want to let their children go to school because they had farmlands, where, they felt, their children could be more efficiently used for farm labor. Pettigrew first addressed the community leaders and requested that 30 children enroll in his school. However, the villagers were not in agreement with this. As a result, the political agent A. E. Wood was ordered and announced that children would come to Pettigrew's school to learn. The order was that the *Awunga* of Hungphun (Ukhrul) was required to provide 20 children from his village and Hundung (very close to Ukhrul) with ten children. Due to the fear of the order, the two villages gave 30 children for Pettigrew. *Raihao*, the Chief of the Ukhrul, enrolled at the school and worked as an interpreter for the students. In fact, without him, the children refused to attend school. (Education in Tangkhul Nagas Region, 2007).

Following are the names of Children who were first to enroll in Pettigrew’s Mission: 1. *Raihao*, 2. *Kuipang*, 3. *Ramkaiphang*, 4. *Holei*, 5. *Maninglum*, 6. *Kaphungkui*, 7. *Thisan*, 8. *Mangaleng*, 9. *Shangam*, 10. *Sakhayang*, 11. *Fasing*, 12. *Hamring*, 13. *Heitheng*, 14. *Khungsan*, 15. *Sangmayang*, 16. *Mapha*, 17. *Sakho*, 18. *Pheikho*, 19. *Yuishi*, 20. *Yarnao*, 21. *Haora*, 22. *Thisa*, 23. *Makheishai*, 24. *Luiraphang*, 25. *Mashokring*, 26. *Theingai*, 27. *Ngakap*, 28. *Changkar*, 29. *Shimkhaye* and 30. *Thitei*. (Education in Tangkhul Nagas Region, 2007). By 1899, the Ukhrul LP (Lower Primary) School students started learning English (R. Luikham, 17).

Education for Women

Pettigrew's wife, Alice Pettigrew of Brighton, was concerned about the girls' education. In fourteen years, Alice Pettigrew brought a significant amount of enlightened change to an often-neglected sector. A. Ngalew, A. Charani, A. Kasuni, A. Asera, Sanamla, Harngaila, Lasengla, Mahongai, Shurila, and Langzarla were the twelve girls from Chingcharoi, Ukhrul, and Paoyi who came to study at the Ukhrul school in 1906: A. Ngalew, A. Charani, A. Kasuni, A. Asera, Sanamla, Har (Education in Tangkhul Nagas Region, 2007). Alice Pettigrew's legacy lives on in the name of a local high school. Early education for women may also play a role in gender equality.

The Origin of Written Culture

The introduction of manuscripts, or written culture, was the most important aspect of education. After arriving in Ukhrul on February 11, 1896, Pettigrew established his Ukhrul

Mission School No. 12. (Vashum, 237). This was so named because he founded schools in Imphal and possibly elsewhere in the area. When the missionary first met *Raihao*, the then-Chief (*Awunga*) of Ukhrul village, the largest hamlet, he immediately planned to construct a school. Nonetheless, the superstitious Chief turned down the offer, claiming that the only Tangkhul script was engraved on animal leather (parchment). Still, a dog had taken it and possibly eaten it, so thinking about education was not a good idea after all (T. Luikham, 17).

One significant point to be considered here is that the Tangkhuls did not have their script as the Bengalis or Manipuris do. All the English alphabets have been employed for their literary and written language. By adding two letters, “*ā*” and “*ṁ*,” to the existing letters of 26 English alphabets and employing Roman characters, Pettigrew prepared Tangkhul language for its written and official works, without which written communication, civilization, or enlightenment is unimaginable. This means that the English alphabet has literally and figuratively transformed to the community’s literary domain. Renaissance, Modernity, or civilization or associated grand concepts would be originally credited to the English language and literature employment to the Tangkhuls.

Students learned to sing, pray, read, and study English. Thus, the school was an excellent means of indirect evangelism, but the valley was a separate matter (now Imphal). However, Pettigrew's work in the plain was inappropriate for missionary activity, and thus education was emphasized. Nonetheless, English education made a significant initial impact and milestone in Manipur as a whole.

Renaissance and Enlightenment

By 1902, a church was organized (Jonah and Mahangthei, n.d.). Being the best students, Heitheng and Hamring were trained to be teachers in 1903. From 1897 through 1903, William Pettigrew was designated as the honorary Inspector of the School of Manipur as requested by the Manipur’s Political Agent. Three times a year, he inspected both the Valley and the Hill. During this period, many schools in the valley were established; The curriculum at this stage consisted of Manipuri, Bengali, and English. Teachers were also arranged. In one of the articles in *Legacy*, entitled “Education: its Genesis and Progress in Ukhrul District,” Usham Dhananjay mentioned that the school was making an impact by 1906. With the government support through the Political Agent, Colonel J. Shakespeare, village Schools were opened thrice a year in about 12 Tangkhul villages where the schools were monitored by class VI young men from the school whose salaries themselves and were remunerated by the State for the same. This earning scheme was deemed a profitable scheme for the locals (Education in Tangkhul Nagas Region, 2007).

The important thing to be noted is the influence and progress of education upon the natives. It is motivating to know that in 1906 and 1907, after a decade of the arrival of Pettigrew, the number of schools increased to eight Lower Primary (LP) Schools in the Tangkhul region. Something more inspiring to learn is that eleven of the schools were under the supervision of his former students, and only one of the schools was under Pettigrew. The sign that the natives were catching up to the age of education and modernization is captivating.

The growth and development in terms of education do not end there. Those who have learned from the schools now were on their journey for further studies in Serampur, Jorhat, Shillong, Kohima, Golaghat, Nawgong, etc. These cities are in the neighboring states (“Education in Tangkhul Nagas Region,” 2007). This is a crucial stage because, from this point, learning and evangelical work is to be carried by the proteges of Pettigrew. The torch

has to be passed on; one day, soon, he will take his leave from this place. As far as the foundation is concerned, Pettigrew has been in full efforts.

Preview of Enlightenment

The above discourse gives the account of the genesis of English education in the Tangkhul Nagas. The pioneering work serves very well to keep the wheel rolling. The educated generation of this first phase received acclamation in the field of education and religion. Even before a century of education, the community has witnessed its fruits; for instance, Rungsung Suisa, Member of Parliament, Yangmaso Shiazza, the fourth chief of Manipur, Rashang Keishing (MP), and many more important officers in the Indian government.

To add to the list, the ongoing Naga issue of Greater Nagalim, which is faced by all the Naga tribes, Chandrika Singh, in her book, *The Naga Society*, expresses that the Tangkhuls are playing the primary role in the issue. In other words, the Tangkhuls have been able to utilize the knowledge sown by Pettigrew and thus face and have table talks with the ministers of India in the parliament and the world at large. These are the enlightenment brought forth by and through the English language and literature. With the command over the English language, Tangkhul Nagas have been made aware of domestic and international affairs.

Note to be taken, Pettigrew's works not only pertained to the Tangkhuls, of course, as mentioned earlier, but he was also with the other communities in Manipur such as Manipuris, Maos, Rongmeis, Thadou, Anals, Kukis, and more. Their culture and lifestyle have changed tremendously in a few decades. Nagas became more aware of the past and present and began to accept the values of modernization and civilization. The overall literacy level of Manipur rose; it has drastically risen from zero to 76.94 % ("Manipur population sex ratio in Manipur literacy rate data 2011-2020," n.d.) Manipur as a whole owes much to his English education, language, literature, or even religion.

Preview of the Progress

To provide the general landscape of progress in terms of education, language, and religion of Ukhrul, Table 1 below should do justice.

Literary (academic) and Cultural Progress	Before 1896	1896-1906	1906-1915	1916-1990	1991- 2001	2011
Educational institution	Longshim (A community hall where village issues and instructions, warfare strategies, etc. are shared.) (a)	One primary school, 1896 (b)	8 LP Schools, 1906 (c)	No specific data recorded	210 Primary Schools 1 College, 1991. (d)	213 schools Three colleges (e)
Literacy, language, and religion	Tangkhul Oral culture & Animism (f & g)	English was taught in 1899 (f). 1902 Church established (c). 1906, 10 women converted (h)	1906 first ten women to enroll in school (h) 1902-1915 sixty- three members Christians (c)	There was a rise in the literacy rate, but no records could be found.	73.1 percent Literacy Rate, 2001 & 95 percent Christian, 2001(i)	81.4 percent Literacy Rate (e)

The table depicts the district's progress from the so-called 'longshim' to a total of 213 official schools and three colleges in the district. Longshim was the closest form of school during those days. As a form of a community hall, this place was used to gather the adult men of the village to discuss and make administrative policies, discuss strategies for war (they were fond of headhunting), public announcements, etc. All these matters were supposedly done in oral form as there was no written tradition recorded before the arrival of William Pettigrew. In 1896, he set up a school for men, followed by the first ten women to get a formal education in 1906. By 1986, one school grew to as many as 8 Lower Primary (LP) Schools in 1906, and now there are even three under-graduate colleges and numerous private and government schools. Educational institutions have received an exponential increase in a matter of a century and two decades. Even when looking at the culture in terms of language and religion, the Tangkhuls have had an overall impact. From oral culture and practice of animism, Christianity grew alongside church progressively to 95 percent in the year 2001. This general preview of the statistics has provided ample evidence of the progress in literature and culture.

Conclusion

The Tangkhuls and the other communities in Manipur have sprouted, nourished, and are growing because of English Education. The literacy rate of the Ukhrul district is now around 81.87%. There are 213 schools in the district now, of which English is the medium of instruction (Census of India 2011, 25). Ukhrul district currently has two colleges, The William Pettigrew College (named after the pioneer) and St. Joseph's College. Even after the withdrawal of William Pettigrew, his legacy of education has continued to enlighten society. One can imagine the development and enlightenment the English language, literature, or education brought about to society.

Coming back to Christianity, the very work of Bible translation was done from English bible versions. The Bible is a necessity in Christianity. Several 94000 copies of the composite Tangkhul Bible in existence besides the New Testament Bible and Hymnals were all translated from the English versions. The Tangkhul community uses the Tangkhul Bible in various editions and reprints. K. Mahangthei, Director in-charge of Christian Literature Centre (2007-2015), stated that as per the guidelines provided for the translations by the Bible Society of India (BSI), the Tangkhul Bible had been translated from Revised Standard Version Bible, and Today's English Version (also known as Good News Bible) is used as the model for translation and no other versions. No direct translation has been done so far; direct translation means translation from the original languages of the Bible- Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew (Information received at personal Interview by the researcher). The point here is that, at every level, English language and literature (considering the English Bibles as English literature) play a crucial component in the enlightening process of society.

At the schools and colleges level, the instruction medium is in English. Churches also use Bibles and hymns translated from English (as mentioned in the paragraph above). Government offices, banks, and other offices employ English as their official language. We can see that the English language and literature have been extensively engaged, without which the process of civilization and enlightenment will retract for a community like Tangkhul.

One crucial point to be considered here is that the Tangkhuls did not have their script as the Bengalis or Manipuris do. As mentioned earlier, all the English alphabets with the addition of "ā" and "ṛ" have been employed for their literary and written language. This means that the existing Tangkhul script is English alphabet; this has literally and figuratively brought enlightenment to the community's written language; besides, one may note that all

the official proceedings are recorded in English. Renaissance, Modernity or civilization, or any of those aspired concepts would be originally credited to the English language and literature in the case of the Tangkhul community.

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