



Indigenous vs. Modern Education: Exploring the Bridging Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Education is a one of the significant aspects of socialization that entails acquisition of knowledge and learning skills to develop beliefs and moral values. Education promotes and strengthens social solidarity and consensus of the society. It also plays a vital role in socio-economic and cultural development of a society.

This article is an attempt to look at the educational shift from Indigenous to Modern education in Manipur. This paper seeks to study the importance of Indigenous education and its need for revivalism in the modern education system. It also seeks to question whether we need to revive traditional/indigenous forms of education. How far it can be effective in contemporary society. It also tries to examine why it is important to incorporate the indigenous education with the modern system of education. This article tried to explore the bridging knowledge of indigenous education and modern education through the illustration of 'Focus Group Discussion' conducted in a few select villages of Manipur.

(Key Words : Indigenous Education, Modern Education, Revivalism, Moral Values, Manipur)

Introduction

Manipur, situated in the easternmost part of northeast India, is earmarked by two different sets of landmass called 'the hills' and 'the valley'. The various ethnic groups exhibiting in the state had shared unique socio-cultural and historical ties. Concerning ethnicity, culture, language and religion, Manipur is a plural society.

During the pre-colonial period in northeast India, education was confined to only particular sections of the population. The Priestly class, the Hindu Brahmins, the Ahom Deodhais and Bailung, the Maichous

of Manipur were the only Royal patronage who could attain education (Kamei, 2002). In northeast India, education was imparted through three different agencies: i) the Christian missionaries, ii) the Provisional Government, and iii) the Private Schools. In upper Assam especially in the Sibsagar region and among the Nagas, education was imparted through American Baptist missionaries whereas among the Khasis, Garos in Darand and Nowgong, it was imparted with the Welsh missionaries. Later on, the missionaries spread their activities in Mizoram and Manipur as well. Gradually, education was imparted to everybody (Kamei, 2002). In fact, the educational development in all the states of the Northeast region was the outcome of the missionary efforts (Biswas, 2008; Mainom, 2001).

During the earlier period in Manipur, the traditional education was exclusively meant to perpetuate the rule of the Meitei kingdom (Kamei, 2002). In many occasions, informal education took place through interaction between children and parents in the family and workplace. Formal education comes quite later in Manipur (Biswas, 2008; Mainom, 2001).

The education system in India, particularly in Northeast India, has been impacted by the British invasion by introducing the Christian philosophy of education in India. This period has been considered as the modern period in India where the British spread modern values through various reforms in education such as Indian Universities Commission 1902; Indian University Act 1904; National Education Policy for 1912; Hartog Commission in 1929 (Parmar, 2016).

Concept

Education can be defined through different theoretical perspectives. From a sociological perspective, education can be described by two basic ideas: i) education as a social process and ii) education as a process of learning through social interactions which means education is socialization (Saxena, 1975). According to Durkheim,

‘Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined’ (Durkheim, 1956).

Indigenous education can be defined as the indigenous knowledge which is unique to a given society. It includes the basic component of any society’s knowledge system encompassing the skills, experiences and insights of people which is essential to improve or maintain one’s livelihood. Indigenous knowledge passed down from generations to generations. It is the biggest asset of society (Ekeke & Theresa, 2015). In Indigenous/Traditional education, the knowledge of weaving, hunting and the use of medical plants are learned from elders to children in the home or workplace. Such knowledge is

fading away with the increase in modernity. Youths are giving more importance to high paid salaries rather than learning such knowledge (Ekeke & Theresa, 2015).

In earlier Manipur, particularly among the tribal people, the traditional/indigenous education was learned through their elders in the form of training in warfare and martial arts, creative arts, handicrafts, customs and traditions, morality and discipline. The main motive of the traditional/indigenous and tribal education was to produce a comprehensive individual, a tribal warrior, a committed member of the village community with full knowledge of the creative arts, customs, tradition and folklore of his tribe, clan and village. Indeed, education is considered as a lifelong, continuing process in tribal society (Kamei, 2002). In fact, the education of warfare and military activities were given more importance than that of the formal education. The pursuit of the military is the most important asset that one should have particularly among the male members in the society (Mainom, 2001).

Educational shift from Indigenous to Modern education

Modern education with the western culture has an immense impact on the culture and tradition of the native people. Education in Manipur was greatly affected by the outbreak of World War II. Later, after 1944 few schools started functioning in Manipur (Kamei, 2002). The ancient educational system of Manipur was based on the method of oral teaching. The teaching and learning were transmitted through orally from generation to generation, before it was not transcribed in the manuscripts. In the earlier Manipur particularly among the rural poor, teaching and learning was based on oral tradition or method that passed down from generation to generation. Indeed, education is a lifelong, continuing process of learning customs, traditions and moral values, creative arts, discipline etc. There was no specific place for learning. Learning can be done in any place either in the workplace or sitting around the *punga*¹ after dinner (during leisure time). In the earlier times, children gathered around the *punga* to listen to folk tales narrated by elders. Manipuri 'phunga wari' (folktales) narrated by elders in the earlier periods encompasses moral values, discipline, customs and traditions. Through these folktales, elders imparted the knowledge about the value of life and the society (Kamei, 2002; Mainom, 2001).

¹ *Punga : Kitchen furnace or stove*

In the earlier period in Manipur, it was the Manipur State Durbar's responsibility to look after the educational administration. There was no separate education department. In the state Durbar, a member was selected as in charge of education to look after the Schools in the Valley of the state. However, it would be under the supervision of the British officials. In fact, the inspections in Schools were done by the Political Agent during their tour (Mainom, 2001).

Till 1855, there was no formal institutionalized education in Manipur. The education system started growing with the arrival of the British missionaries in Manipur which brought a sea-change in the educational scenario of the state. The formal education in Manipur was established in 1872 by the British Political Agent, W.F. Nuthall (Kamei, 2002; Mainom, 2001). The Middle English School established by Sir James Johnstone was re-opened on 1st June 1892 in a temporary building because of the destruction of the former (Mainom, 2001). With the upgradation of Johnstone Middle English School in 1909-10, the school has started teaching till high school standard. This can be considered as the beginning of Secondary Education in Manipur. In 1921-22 the Johnstone High School was formally recognized by Calcutta University with pupils appearing in the matriculation examination. Till 1930-31, Johnstone High School was the only high school in Manipur (Mainom, 2001). With the help of public initiative, another High School was established at Uripok (Imphal) in 1932-33. In 1937-38, the school was named after Maharajkumari Tombisana, daughter of Maharaja Sir Churachand Singh. The school got financial assistance from the Maharajkumar for the construction of the building. The fourth High School in the state was the Bengali School which was upgraded to high school standard in 1934-35. In the same year 1934-35, the Manipur Girls' High School was established. In May 1935, another private Girls' High School named Maharajkumari Tamphasana came up. Gradually, the former School was abolished with the development of the later Girls' High School. During the period 1931-41, there were five High Schools in Imphal; four for boys and one for girls. (Mainom, 2001).

Education in ancient Manipur was under the control of private agencies. The policy for exercising control in the educational sphere was mostly determined by the individual Guru or a set of Gurus, pundits or teachers (Devi, 1989). Modern system of education comes along with privatization of education. Private education in the state started in the 1930s. The decade (1931-41) is considered as the decade of private enterprise in the history of modern education in Manipur. Within a short span of 11 years, the private unaided schools had occupied a huge

space in the educational set up of Manipur. Gradually, the Government Schools had risen since independence. From 1975-76 onwards, there was immense progress in education. The private unaided Schools were rapidly increased from the late 1980s. The private unaided Schools had risen from 83 in 1985-86 to 226 in 1996-97. (Mainom, 2001).

The western education (modern system of education) introduced in Manipur was the initiative of the then British Political Agents. During the rule of native kings and princes, there was little encouragement for western education. Initially, the English education in Manipur was misconstrued and resisted as it is considered polluting the Hindu culture. In fact, modern (western) education gradually brought social change in the twentieth century (Mainom,2001).

The Western education model came quite later in Manipur. In the earlier times, children were not allowed to acquire English education by considering it as taboo and those who attend the school had to perform ablution as a mark of purification (Mainom, 2001) The western education was effectively introduced in Ukhrul by a British Christian missionary, William Pettigrew. His main aim was to bring western (which is considered as advanced) education to the people of Manipur. However, his effort failed among the Meiteis in Manipur. Being a hindu, the then Maharaja of Manipur strongly objected to the work of Pettigrew since it might introduce new religion in the guise of educating people. Therefore, Pettigrew had to discontinue his work from the valley . Later, the then British political agent directed him to start his work in the hill areas and Mr. Pettigrew started his work in Ukhrul. At the initial stage, the people of Ukhrul refused to go to school. The people of Ukhrul were warned that if they do not go to school they would be given heavy punishment or sent to jail. Subsequently, the then Chief of Ukhrul agreed to send 20 boys to the school including himself. It was the first step towards western education and imparting Christianity (Valui, 2012).

Indigenous education vs. Modern education

In Indigenous way of learning, indigenous education/knowledge taught was meant to improve or maintain the livelihood and adaptation to the society. On the other hand, modern education is based on a formal way of teaching and learning where knowledge is imparted from written or printed scripts. In modern education, there will be a proper curriculum that can be changed and modified from time to time for innovation in teaching and learning. While in indigenous education, the teaching content is based on folklore and rituals.

Therefore, the knowledge is transmitted orally from one generation to another. Indigenous education was considered as static and conservative and it has been unchanged from generation to generation. Indigenous education was more practical and it has provided a strong sense of belongingness to culture and their community while modern education could not provide such in their learning process. Nevertheless, due to its oral method of transmission of knowledge, indigenous education can be easily diminished or lost in the event of the death of custodian of some useful information.²

In Indigenous form of education, learning takes place throughout the day, both in home and in an adult's workplace, children develop an understanding of cultural values and norms in the entire

household (Ekeke & Theresa, 2015). King & Schielmann indicated that traditional/indigenous knowledge is not in manuscript rather knowledge is learned through the transmission of oral methods by dancing, narrating, singing and practicing (King & Schielmann,2004).

Modern education has emerged as the most important single input in promoting human resource development, economic development and technological progress in the form of virtues of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities. In recent times, education plays a vital role in raising living standards and also acts as a mechanism to prevent conflict situations in the society (Singha, 2013). In this contemporary society, the private sector plays an important role in all activities. Thus, the private sector in education has been emerging by leading to increased competition and providing better quality at competitive prices (Shah, 2012).

Nevertheless, both have different approaches while imparting education. Indigenous education is based on a particular community by focusing on strengthening the community whereas modern education gives emphasis on the society. Modern education is structurally well-formed curricula and timetables from lowest to the highest levels and have its own school buildings, formal organization of either national or local educational system whereas indigenous education had an unstructured type of education (Orumbie, year does not mention). It is the informal type of education with no schools or buildings or no formal organization. Besides, knowledge was imparted through the transmission of oral methods.

Recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge is very important to form a peaceful, unity, solidarity and diversified society. Earlier indigenous/ traditional knowledge was imparted with the motive ‘we learn, we taught and we practice’. People try not to hurt the sentiment of the society or the community from their actions. However, many claim that the era has changed. People give more importance to themselves rather than to the community or the society. People would learn, read and teach but never care about what they had learned and taught. In Manipur, elders used to give proverbs for this ‘Lairik Heiraga Laisu Yaodaba’ means ‘Persons earning/learning higher education but no moral values in his actions’. Therefore, modern education should incorporate with the indigenous knowledge in order to promote tolerance, understanding, peace and justice towards cultures, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

² Orumbie, Regina Minye, (Year not mention) “Compare and Contrast Indigenous Education with Modern Education” Pp.8-10.

During an interaction and discussion among the elders in a few select villages in Manipur, the elder generations claimed that the younger ones in today's generations do not have time to mingle with the older generations. They are busy with their schools, private tuition, phone, tv, etc. Children in recent society give more importance to the bookish knowledge and modern system of education. Many of them did not give importance to indigenous knowledge which has enriched knowledge about culture, customs, skills and experiences. Such knowledge is very essential to form a disciplined, well mannered and responsible person. Even the parents give more importance to their children's private tuition particularly in the urban areas. It also added to other economic problems among the lower income group of parents. Some further added that they cannot really blame the children because it is also the parents responsibility to make their children learn from their elders. Subsequently, they added that the breakdown of societal norms and increase in various crimes and conflicts has a significant connection with the fading away of moral values and discipline.

Private tuition culture deteriorated the education system in Manipur. It even brought inequality between the children of rich parents and poor parents. Besides, there is no moral value among the young students or children. Moral values are earned from the elders through the folk story and experiences narrated by them. However, in recent times the culture of listening to folk stories from the elders has been lost. Therefore, the society needs to revive the indigenous education and the culture of learning customs, traditions, and moral values from the elders.

Ekeke and Theresa stated that Indigenous education is an effective system of learning which provides children or youths to connect with their own inherent perspective, customs, languages and traditions (Ekeke & Theresa, 2015). Both argued that due to lack of indigenous knowledge in learning in some education systems and curricula lead to develop an educational gap among the indigenous people. Later, it became one of the main reasons to lower enrolment and high dropouts, poor performance as well as low literacy rates (Ekeke & Theresa, 2015).

In recent times, growth of education has become a center point for social and economic development. People believed that education is the vital agent that provides an individual a better life (Kamei, 2002). Shah (2012) elaborates three different groups of people in a changing society. The first one is those who are quite traditional, conservative and are not ready to change; the second is those who show partial adjustment to change and not fully resisted; the third is those who can fully adapt and change. The questions arise here that whether society could provide a uniform educational system to all three categories?. Shah further points out that somewhere else the achievement of the students are related with quality and quantity of physical equipment of the schools (Shah, 2012).

In recent times, education is the key factor for economic development which indicates the development of human skills and knowledge of the people or labour force. Due to its (education) significant contribution to economic development, education has become a human capital and investing in education is considered a vital duty for the adults and later expecting the outcome in the form of income (job).³ The objectives of education seem to be diverted, instead of making ‘an individual’ through education money making become one of its main objectives. Indira illustrated that education has become a commodity in the market or an investment for shaping a student to be a cog in the wheel (Indira, 2012).

Education becomes a ‘social right’ for the people. Education becomes a key agent for wealth, status and power by leading economic growth of the individual as well as the family as a whole. Kamei elucidated that quantitative expansion of education led to the problem of quality and standard of education (Kamei, 2002). What we see in present society is modern education moving towards the material culture where education is the tool to fulfil economic necessity like property, assets etc. rather than developing a responsible individual who cares about societal norms, values, culture and tradition. Therefore, many elderly people claim that we need to revive our indigenous way of learning and teaching where it gives moral values to our culture, customs and tradition. In order to have a peaceful, unity and diversity society, one needs to incorporate indigenous knowledge or education in the modern system of education. Therefore, to some extent it did not bring a generational gap in the society as well as to maintain the social solidarity where people give emphasis on society or community rather than individual development.

Here, Durkheim’s moral education is still relevant and convincingly dealing with moral discipline in forming character and personality in general. Durkheim illustrated the importance of moral education in every stage of childhood. In Durkheim’s three fundamental elements of morality, the first fundamental element of morality is to reunite the child with the society. For this, school is the most essential element to link the child with society.

³ Guru, Supriya, (Year not mentioned), “*The Role of Education in Economic Development*”, Available at:

<http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/economics/the-role-of-education-in-economic-development/38355/>

The second element of morality is an individual's attachment to those groups of the society of which he /she belongs. The third element of morality concerns autonomy or self-determination. Here, Durkheim is trying to convey the understanding of morality itself. The morality varies from society to society and it is a social product (Durkheim, 1961). According to Durkheim (cited in Lawrence, 2011), schools were the primary socialisation agents to produce future adults which places development of consensus and solidarity in society in the hands of the school. It is the education that maintains social consensus and solidarity through its socializing function (Lawrence, 2011 : 301).

In recent times, many have claimed that incorporating indigenous knowledge as a learning process in the education system is very essential. It can develop moral values for the younger generations. Both the indigenous education and Modern education have shared a similar purpose for educating and learning young generations into a useful adult life. Both the systems of education were the agents of transmission of culture and knowledge to the young generations.

The issue raised here is not with the modern way of teaching and learning but the content. Elders claimed that 'lairik tamlaga laisu yaodaba' means a well educated person but no moral values. They used this proverb when an individual failed to respect and look after their elders after becoming a successful person. It is believed that society needs an education system or process of learning that gives importance not only on individual development but also on the development and growth of society or community as a whole.

Conclusion

It is evident that both indigenous education and modern education play vital roles to the individuals as well as the society. Both have advantages and disadvantages on their own. What is important here is that we should know when to utilize the valuable ideas and knowledge which helps to serve the needs of various communities. In Durkheim's term, the solidarity and consensus of the society. It is not the system they are concerned about. It is evident that people are supporting/appreciating modern education however it has to encompass the inputs of indigenous culture, tradition and moral values which gives enrich knowledge to make an individual a better person leading to build/develop a better society.

To perceive a peaceful, unity and diversity society, one needs to incorporate indigenous knowledge or education in the modern system of education. So that, it did not bring a generational gap in the society as well as to maintain the social solidarity where people give emphasis on society or community rather than individual development. What the elders see in present society is modern education moving

towards the material culture where education is the tool to fulfil economic necessity like property, assets etc. rather than developing a responsible individual who cares about the societal norms, values, culture and tradition. Therefore, many elderly people claim that we need to revive our indigenous way of learning and teaching where it values one's culture, moral values and tradition. Lately, the importance of indigenous knowledge is acknowledged and use of indigenous education in response to reclaiming the value, culture, language and traditions of the society has become a common phenomenon.

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