



## Relevance of Indigenous Ao Naga System of Education in the Present Context

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**Abstract:** *The present system of education is not only western in concept and practices but it is text book centric with little or no place for activities and experiences unlike indigenous education. The Nagas are at the risk of losing their identity, if initiatives are not taken up sooner for the preservation of their culture and heritage. Critiques of modern education advocate that incorporation of indigenous knowledge in the field of development, conservation, education and sustainable living is essential. For the study, questionnaire was used as tool for collecting primary data, while books, journals, newspapers, government gazetteers and other relevant sources were used for collection of secondary data. The study found out that majority of the samples are in support of incorporation of indigenous education in the present context of education. It concludes that indigenous education should be revived and restored by identifying the relevant content which are suitable in the present context.*

**Key Words:** *Indigenous education, Mokokchung, Morung, Educational institutions.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Education is dynamic in nature. It does not only mean learning of 3Rs, but it actually means learning the skills for self-sustainability. The skills for self-sustainability are varied and are pursued in response to a society's cultural systems and in different geographical locations. Education includes a culture's values, beliefs, skills, ideas, and practices. Indigenous communities impart these skills for self-sustainability within their community in an informal way. Such practices can be seen in their daily living style and it is passed down to younger generations through oral traditions (folkways, storytelling), plays, practices, rituals, dance, art, craft, imitation and a number of other aspects of daily life. Nagas are generally egalitarian with strong community spirit which is opposed to centralised decision making and social segregation such as the caste system, which is widely prevalent in other parts of India. Their traditional institutions which are highly developed since time immemorial, have provided them strong security and a fervent belief in the benefits of the community system (Luithui, 2010)(1). In Naga society, indigenous education was transmitted through institutions like Morung, home and social gatherings as 'transmission of indigenous knowledge is rather a matter of collective compromise' (Muller, 2009)(2). The functions of Morung can be called educational institution in every sense. However, with the coming of Christianity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the institution of Morung gradually lost its functioning and importance as it was not encouraged by the missionaries who failed to understand its relevance and significance for the Naga villagers. Now it is merely preserved as a cultural heritage in some villages in Nagaland.

Critiques of modern education advocate that children should be educated in their own culture using indigenous language. The present system of education is not only western in concept and practices but it is text book centric with little or no place for activities and experiences unlike indigenous education. The Nagas are at the risk of losing their identity, if initiatives are not taken up sooner for the preservation of their culture and heritage (Ngullie, 2011)(3). National Common Minimum Programme 2004 has pointed out that in Nagaland, though culture, customs and traditional way of life are strongly practiced, there is no course in this regard in the formal system of education except for a course on Nagaland politics and geography at high school level. Indigenous knowledge is presently living a revival (Mistry, 2009)(4) and its incorporation in the field of development, conservation, education and sustainable living is essential.

The present study is an attempt to highlight the opinion of heads, teachers and students on the importance of incorporating indigenous education in the formal system of education. The study could also supplement measures for



effective implementation of the same. The present study is qualitative in nature. Study is delimited to Mokokchung district of Nagaland, India. Questionnaire is used as tool for collecting primary data, while books, journals, newspapers, government gazetteers and other relevant sources are used for collection of secondary data. The sample for the present study includes 60 educational institutions of Mokokchung district; from which 60 heads of the institutions, 200 teachers and 200 college students are drawn through simple random sampling. The educational institutions include all levels of education such as pre- primary school, elementary (primary and upper primary) school, secondary school, higher secondary school, general college, professional college, teacher education institutions, technical and vocational institutions.

### 1.1 Education in Mokokchung district

During British rule, Mokokchung was created as a sub-division in 1889 and remained so till 1956. It was upgraded to a district in 1957 out of the erstwhile Nagaland Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) then under central government of India. Mokokchung district is mainly inhabited by the Ao Nagas. The Ao Nagas represents one among the major Naga tribes with a population of 101,092 (according to 2011 census). The formal system of education first laid its foundation in Mokokchung district in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of American missionaries and gradually spread to other parts of Nagaland. Today, Mokokchung district has a literacy rate of 91.62% the highest in the state with 92.18% among male and 91.01% among female (2011 census). Educational institutions have also increased reasonably over the years. Presently, there are 14 pre-primary schools; 286 schools (primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary schools); 5 colleges; a DIET centre, an Institute of Communication in Information Technology (ICIT), a National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT extension) and an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) each.

### 1.2 Indigenous knowledge and indigenous education

According to the UNESCO's program on Local and Indigenous Knowledge System (LINKS), indigenous knowledge is referred to the understanding, philosophies and skills developed by local communities with long histories and experiences of interaction with their natural surroundings. It is defined as 'knowledge which is spatially and/or culturally context specific, collective, holistic and adaptive' (Mistry, 2009)(4) and used by local people to make a living in a particular environment. Indigenous knowledge is creative and experimental; constantly incorporating outside influences and inside innovations to meet new conditions (Langill, 1999)(5). It is considered as the social capital for the poor (Senanayake, 2006)(6). Although indigenous knowledge is widely misunderstood as backward or old fashioned (Langill, 1999)(5) it is now widely recognised that many lessons could actually be learn from it.

The very concept of indigenous education is 'complex, multiform and many-sided, insofar as it is supposed to respond to the nuances and differences of each indigenous culture' (Muller, 2009)(2). Indigenous Education involves oral traditions, group work, apprenticeship and high level of cultural context. Knowledge to indigenous people is sacred, on the idea that each pupil construct knowledge individually, rooted in experience and culture. Indigenous education involves a unique sense of passion and self-identity, as well as focuses on the importance of community survival and contributions to life and community sustainability.

Thus, the concept of indigenous knowledge and indigenous education is very similar. May & Aikman (2003)(7) in their research paper titled 'Indigenous Education: Addressing current issues and development' states that Indigenous education specifically focuses on teaching Indigenous knowledge, models, methods and content with formal or non-formal educational system.

### 1.3 Indigenous education of the Ao Nagas

#### *Morung*

Before the coming of Christianity indigenous education was imparted through family, peer group, village community and Morung (which is believed to have originated from Assamese word) or the youth dormitory in an informal setting. The Morung is typically a huge building over 50 feet long, 30 feet high, and richly decorated with carvings representing Hornbills, Tigers, Mithun and human heads and sometimes with projecting barge boards representing wings or horns which physically dominates a Naga village and it is in some sense a school, since young people learn about social practices and belief from their elders (Julian Jacob et al., 1990)(8).

Morung is known as *Ariju* in Ao Naga dialect which means fortress from which the enemy is carefully watched. '*Arr*' means the enemies and '*Ju*' means to guard or watch. *Ariju* was a barrack in which young men sleep at night and who



are supposed to be in readiness to repel any night attack on the village (Clark, 2013)(9). Therefore, *Ariju* means watch people of the enemy in real sense of the term. The concept of *Ariju* among Ao Naga community is as old as the legend of Chungliyimti or Longtrok. It is not only a sleeping place for bachelors but it serves the needs of society such as social security, promotion of culture and master craftsmanship. It is in fact a real training institute that promotes the process of socialization of people in general and men folk in particular. A male who did not go through *Ariju* life was not chosen for leadership in village council. Therefore, an Ao Naga male had to undergo such difficult training in order to pass the basic tests to be accepted as a responsible and respectful member within the community.

*Ariju* is one of the best examples of rural social institutions from where socialization of a man takes place. It can also be explained as an educational institution in ancient times. Mills (1973)(10) said that *Ariju* is a 'Public School'. The number of *Ariju* erected in an Ao Naga village depends on the number of population. Bigger villages have several *Ariju* or at least two and in smaller villages sometimes only one. The *Arijus* are placed inside the stockade and near the chief entrance to a village. A big drum made out of tree (*Süngkong*) is usually near an *Ariju* and near here is usually one of the village privy places for men. It was not deemed proper for a woman to enter *Ariju*. The dominating element of the *Ariju* was martial, but since the annexation of Ao Naga territory by Government, this martial element has dropped (Clark, 2013)(9).

### *Tsüki*

For Ao Naga unmarried girls a separate dormitory was set up known as '*Tsüki*' which literally means garden of the young girls and the inmates were known as '*Tsükir*'. The dormitory would always be established in the house of a respected widow who served as a matron to the girls rooming in her house. The custom of the *Tsüki* was that girls belonging to a clan would gather to sleep in the house of a matron of the same clan. The young girls would be trained in singing traditional folk tunes, in different vocations like spinning cotton yarns, basketry, arts and handicrafts. They also learn social etiquette and manners; discipline and rules of social conduct; and also sex education (Zeliang, 2011)(11). Further, all household chores in the *Tsüki* were done by the girls. The ladies' dormitory was a centre, which served as an informal educational institution where all of life skills were taught, trained and inculcated. The main aim of the existence of *Tsüki* is to groom young girls to be eligible to get married and self-independent (Zeliang, 2011)(11). Similar practice is also found in other Naga tribes such as Zeliang (*Releiki*), Sumi (*Illiki*) and Angami (*Kichüki*).

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Review of literature is both summary and explanation of the complete and current state of knowledge on a limited topic. It provides a framework for the foundation of the study and a benchmark in weighing with various findings (Creswell, 2009)(12). **Briedlid and Botha (2015)**(13) conducted a study on "Indigenous Knowledge in Education: Anticolonial Struggles in a Monocultural Arena with Reference to Cases from the Global South". Here, they found out that in South Africa and Chile, the policies and practices for including indigenous knowledges into the national curricula are generally superficial, folkloristic manner and western in their approach. An indigenous consciousness is suggested as a guiding principle to incorporate indigenous knowledge into the mainstream knowledge community. **Woodroffe (2016)**(14) conducted a study on the topic "Creating the ideal classroom environment to ensure success for indigenous students". The study finds that if teachers are able to successfully bridge between Western Knowledge (WK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) they will be able to better understand the expectations of indigenous students and their families. **Topkok, et al. (2020)**(15) create a special topic course called *Indigenous Values in Education* based on his (Topkok) *Katimarugut* (we are meeting) methodology for the students of Iñupiat (member of an indigenous people of North Western Alaska). This course gives teachers the tools to implement value based instruction with any curriculum. It was found out that incorporating indigenous education in general curriculum has made the students conscious about cultural values, knowledge and its importance that they otherwise may not have learned.

Different studies reveals that formal education is too westernised and it does not teach anything about indigenous knowledge. There is a fear in losing indigenous cultures and values in every indigenous community. Incorporation of indigenous education in formal curriculum shows promising result on how students become conscious about their indigenous cultural values, knowledge and its importance. Study also reveals that teacher plays the most vital role in bridging the gap between western education and indigenous education. However, no studies was found about indigenous education among the Ao Naga. Therefore, the study was an attempt to study the relevance of indigenous Ao Naga system of education in the present context.



**3. Analysis and interpretation :**

Analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the samples are given below:

**3.1 Opinion on incorporation of indigenous education in the present context of education**

**Table 1: Table showing opinion on incorporation of indigenous education in the present context of education**

Response	Heads		Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
It should be incorporated in the present curriculum	37	61.67	96	48.00	39	19.50
It should be studied independently	9	15.00	33	16.50	45	22.50
Studying of indigenous education should be made optional	6	10.00	54	27.00	53	26.50
I don't see any importance in studying indigenous education	-	-	-	-	1	0.50
No comment	8	13.33	17	8.50	62	31.00
Total	60	100	200	100	200	100

Majority of the heads and teachers feel that indigenous education should be incorporated in the present curriculum i.e. 61.67% and 48% respectively but only 19.50% of the students feel the same. However, majority of the students i.e. 26.50% were more inclined towards the opinion 'Studying of indigenous education should be made optional' although only 10% of the heads and 27% of the teachers were in favour of this opinion. 22.50%, 16.50% and 15% of the students, teachers and heads respectively feel that indigenous education should be studied separately. Furthermore, 31% of the students, 13.33% of the heads and 8.50% of the teachers opted 'No comment' which could indicate that the samples does not fully understand the concept of indigenous education

Undoubtedly, none of the heads and teachers feel that studying of indigenous education is not important, only 0.50% of the students (i.e. one student) feel otherwise.

**3.2 Opinion on revival of Morung system of Education in present context of education**

**Table 2: Opinion on revival of Morung system of Education in present context of education**

Response	Heads		Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
It should be revived	19	31.67	45	22.50	64	32.00
There is no scope in reviving	10	16.67	13	6.50	12	6.00
No comments	31	51.67	142	71.00	124	52.00
Total	60	100	200	100	200	100

Study shows that 71%, 52% and 51.67% of the teachers, students and heads respectively gave no comment when asked about the revival of Morung system of education in present context. But on a positive note, 31.67% of the heads, 32% of the students and 22.50% of the teachers are of the impression that Morung system of education should be revived. However, 16.67%, 6.50% and 6% of the heads, teachers and students respectively feel that there is no scope in reviving the Morung system of education.

**3.3 Opinion on whether the indigenous education of the Ao Nagas was comprehensive in approach**

**Table 3. Table showing opinion on whether the indigenous education of the Ao Nagas was comprehensive in approach**

Response	Head		Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	7	11.67	22	11.00	33	16.50
To some extent	50	83.33	170	85.00	152	76.00



No	3	5.00	8	4.00	15	7.50
Total	60	100	200	100	200	100

Most of the heads (83.33%), teachers (85%) and students (76%) were of the opinion that the indigenous education of the Ao Naga was comprehensive in approach to some extent. Whereas, 16.50% of the students, 11.67% of the heads and 11% of the teachers agree that the indigenous education of the Ao Naga was comprehensive in approach but 7.50%, 5% and 4% of the students, heads and teachers respectively does not agree with the question.

### 3.4 View on introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies in school level

**Table 4: Table showing view on introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level**

Response	Heads		Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very Relevant	8	13.33	28	14.00	13	6.50
Quite Relevant	11	18.33	59	29.50	92	46.00
Relevant	35	58.33	103	51.50	84	42.00
Not so relevant	3	5.00	6	3.00	10	5.00
Not relevant at all	3	5.00	4	2.00	1	0.50
Total	60	100	200	100	200	100

Introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at School level was found to be relevant by 58.33% of heads, 51.50% of teachers and 42% of students. However, 46% of the students feel that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level is quite relevant but only 29.90% of the teachers and 18.33% of the heads feel it is quite relevant. The percentage furthermore decreases under the criteria 'very relevant' as only 14%, 13.33% and 6.50% of the teachers, heads and students respectively agree to this criterion. Also 5% of the heads, 2% of the teachers and 0.50% of the students feel that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level is not relevant at all.

### 3.5 Whether Nagaland Heritage Studies provide some idea to students on indigenous culture

**Table 5: Table showing whether the introduction of Heritage studies provide some idea to students on indigenous culture**

Response	Head		Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	42	70.00	136	68.00	90	45.00
To some extent	18	30.00	63	31.50	107	53.50
No	-	-	1	0.50	3	1.50
Total	60	100	200	100	200	100

It was found out that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level does provide some idea to students on indigenous education as 70% of the heads, 68% of the teachers and 45% of the students agree to the question. 53.50% of the students, 31.50% of the teachers and 30% of the heads feel that Nagaland Heritage Studies provide some idea to students on indigenous culture only up to some extent.

## 4. FINDINGS :

- It was found out that majority of the heads and teachers feel that indigenous education should be incorporated in the present curriculum i.e. 61.67% and 48% respectively. Whereas majority of the students i.e. 26.50% were more inclined towards the opinion 'Studying of indigenous education should be made optional'.
- The study shows that 71%, 52% and 51.67% of the teachers, students and heads respectively gave no comment when asked about the revival of Morung system of education in present context. But 31.67% of the heads, 32% of the students and 22.50% of the teachers are of the impression that Morung system of education should be revived.
- The study found out that 83.33% of the heads, 85% of the teachers and 76% of the students were of the opinion that the indigenous education of the Ao Naga was comprehensive in approach to some extent.
- The result shows that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level was found to be relevant by 58.33% of heads, 51.50% of teachers and 42% of students.
- It was found out that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level does provide some idea to students on indigenous education as 70% of the heads, 68% of the teachers and 45% of the students agree to the question.



## 5. Discussion of the study :

- The present study shows that majority of the heads and teachers of educational institutions in Mokokchung district were in support of incorporation of indigenous education in present curriculum. The result shows similarity with a survey conducted by South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) on South African's perceptions and attitudes towards indigenous knowledge (2015)(13) indicates that people are confident about the potential of indigenous knowledge for contributing to their well-being. The survey also found out that majority of the participants expressed more positive attitudes towards indigenous knowledge than modern science. The definition and privileging of particular forms of knowledge from a Western perspective have been especially problematic for indigenous people and their relations not only to knowledge but also to their social and economic circumstances (Wotherspons, 2015)(14). Incorporation of indigenous education does not only mean teaching of a particular part of prescribed curriculum, but it also means and should be imparted by the educators through his/her outlook and attitude.
- A contradictory result can be found between opinion on revival of Morung system of education in present context of education and opinion on whether the indigenous education of the Ao Nagas was comprehensive in approach. Majority of the samples did not give any comment when asked about 'revival of Morung system of education in present context' whereas majority of the same samples are of the opinion that the indigenous education of the Ao Naga was comprehensive in approach to some extent. It will be impractical to restore the exact Morung system of education but the Naga perhaps need to revive and restore (Zeliang, 2011)(11) by identifying the relevant skills in present context. Scientist now recognise that indigenous people have managed the environments in which they have lived for generations, often without significantly damaging local ecology. Traditional knowledge can be blended with the modern technological ideas and innovations to have continuity between the past and the present (Ngunllie, 2011)(3).
- It was found out that introduction of Nagaland Heritage Studies at school level is found to be relevant and provide some idea on indigenous education by majority of the heads, teachers and students of Mokokchung district. In other studies, also introduction of indigenous education is found to have significant impact among the students. For Alaska native people, a Cultural Value Curriculum was created by Marchant as a part of her M.Ed research. The curriculum was based on the level of interest the community had in having cultural values be shared and aware of in a school setting. After piloting this curriculum for the entire school year, the student began to show a significant love for learning about their culture; the students were able to make a deeper connection with the elders, family and environment and the curriculum allowed the students to link indigenous values to their learning and be aware of all the values (Topkok et. al., 2020)(15). Incorporation of indigenous education provide students as well as teachers with cultural knowledge and understanding that they otherwise may not have learned.

## 6. CONCLUSION :

Effort has been made by the Government towards indigenous education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has introduced a number of strategies and approaches with a focus on tribal children by considering them as 'special focus group' (SFG). The programmes specially designed on indigenous learning are such as designing a curriculum with locally relevant teaching materials and teaching skills; preparation of text books in mother tongue for children at primary level; deployment of local teachers. Also National Policy of Education, 2020 has strongly focused on indigenous education.

In Nagaland state, as early as 1935 a new curriculum including teaching and learning of Naga folklore, dance and songs were introduced in the institutions (Jamir, 1987, as cited in Ngunllie, 2011)(3). After a long period, in 2016 Life Skills Education was introduced by Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) where handicrafts, weaving, gardening, folklore were instructed to teach. Further, in the year 2018, State Council Research and Training (SCERT) and the Text Book Branch of the Department of School Education, Nagaland introduced The Nagaland Heritage Studies (NHS) in a joint venture for School level. The Nagaland Heritage Studies would form the basis for the contents of all MIL (Modern Indian Language) textbooks in the State and will teach the Naga Languages using local culture and heritage as its content base (SCERT, 2018)(16). At Higher education level, Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung has introduced an indigenous Skills Training Centre known as '*Ketsangriju*' which is a symbolic *Ariju*. The main aim of '*Ketsangriju*' is to create a solid grounding on one's culture and tradition as it is vital to the development of an individual's character and personality. Students must be clear about their roots and identity before they step out to a world of multiple possibilities (Nagaland Page, 2021)(17).



Incorporation of indigenous education in formal system of education can perhaps save the losing culture, values and tradition of the Naga society. Naga indigenous knowledge, historical commemorations, languages and cultures are necessary in the school curriculum to provide self-identities for Naga students. Teachers and classroom is an ideal starting point for any positive outcome. All teachers should be aware of the importance of cultural expectations. If teachers are able to successfully transverse the bridge between knowledge systems, they will be able to better understand the expectations of indigenous students and their families (Woodroffe, 2016)(a14). The policy maker and curriculum developers should intelligently curate indigenous education curriculum and employ suitable pedagogical strategy for maximum benefit of the students.

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