Development of Higher Education in the Hill Areas of Manipur

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Abstract

This article attempt to briefly narrate the development of higher education in hill areas of Manipur which was started only from 1964 with the initiative of the local educationists. Thereafter, it was a slow pace of development. By 2013, there were still only 18 colleges. The share of contribution of private colleges is far bigger than the government colleges as there are more of them with better output in the form of university results. The strength of enrolment look promising only after 2000. In terms of result too much improvement have been observed after 2000 in the government colleges, bringing the overall average of output to a very promising standard. However, in the midst of such development, women colleges and professional colleges find no place yet in these areas despite the need for such institutions in development of the regions.

Keywords: Higher education; colleges; tribals; hill areas, Manipur, India

Introduction

The state of Manipur lies in the eastern most part of the North-East India between longitude 93.20° E and 94.47° E and latitude 23.50° N and 25.4° N bordering Myanmar. Geographically, Manipur can be divided into the hills and the Valley. The Valley has an average elevation of about 790 meters above sea level and that of the hills is between 1500 meters and 1800 meters. It has a total land area of 22,327 square kilometers of which 92% is hill area and the valley covers only 8% of the total geographical area. It has a total population of 25,70,390. The erstwhile princely kingdom of Manipur was for several years under the British colonial powers, freed only when India got its independence in 1947. Then, Manipur merged to the Indian union on 15th October, 1949. It became one of the union territories of India in 1957, which again became a full-fledged state of India on 21st January, 1972. Manipur has a recorded history of its existence as an independent princely kingdom ruled by its kings for centuries. However, the hill areas surrounding the Imphal valley was the domain...
of the head hunting tribes, who were mostly the allies of the kings of Manipur rather than being loyal subjects. Therefore, the king had to occasionally suppress and crushed any potential threat thereby exercising his control over the vast 'un-administered' hill ranges.

The Tribals living in the hill areas of Manipur had a very exciting history before the coming of modern education and Christianity through the colonial agents. Safe the occasional expedition and suppression of the Maharaja of Manipur, the hill areas of Manipur was virtually independent as the free loving tribal resided without any external disturbances for centuries. It was an area dominated and ruled by the tribal chiefs. Despite the inter village feuds, inter clan fights and inter tribe wars, the hill areas of Manipur was virtually the tribal territory which the nearby Maharajas also do not want them disturbed. They were for long time left to themselves. The hills surrounding the Imphal valley was considered the domain and head-hunting ground of the Thadou Kukis until they were subjugated and controlled by the British in the 1917-19 Anglo-Kuki War.\(^2\) For these tribals, learning in the past was very closely associated with Agro-economic culture and survival. The most developed system for learning was the dormitory system. The institution of youth dormitory was known by different names in different tribal societies. It is Zawlbuk in Lusai, Arichu in Ao-Naga, Kichuki in Angami, Som or Sawm in Thadou-Kuki, Longshim in Tangkhul and Buonzawl in Hmar.\(^3\)

**Education in the Non-Literate Tribal Society**

The Dormitory system was the only learning institution for the tribals although it was not solely devoted to learning alone. It has been rightly termed by Shimray as ‘the Naga School’ in his book, ‘Origin and Culture of Nagas’.\(^4\) It was also a socializing institution, where the youths especially the young boys in most cases were trained to make life out of their living. The practice of majority of cases among the tribals in Manipur was that of a separate building where the young boys of certain age sleep together for the night. When a boy reached the age of puberty, he is required to come to the dormitory after every dinner to sleep with the village boys in a group. It is between dinner and lunch in the morning that these boys stays in group and the elder ones among the group leads the younger ones in learning many things from stories telling to courting girls, craft making to wood cutting.
agricultural activities to wild animal hunting and social life to warfare. In most cases, some of the village elders also plays a big role in the organization and activities of the Dormitory lodgers. Their activities also extends to the philanthropic acts of helping villagers in need and maintaining order in the village.

The village Dormitory building was built on the highest elevated place of the village to ensure visibility of all the corners of the village. Not only does this serve to help in times of war but also in other emergency like fire, feuds etc.

While most of these dormitory practices were similar in the basic concept, structure and practice, the Thadou-Kukis had a slightly different practice of the same, among the tribals in Manipur. They did not have a separate building to name the Dormitory House. Instead, few boys will gather in one of the house of the villagers, where a girl who is caring and hardworking to be able to care for the boys is there. The young boys sleep in the girl’s house and help the family also while in need. The man of the house became SOMPA (Elder of the Dormitory) who is responsible in passing down the oral knowledge apart from the knowledge shared among the young boys. This unique development of Dormitory system among the Thadou-Kukis was more of recent development as compared to other practices although the time and period could not be established accurately. It is believed that this practice come as a war strategy during the inter village feuds and head hunting era. It is believed that this sort of strategies had made the adopting community or village more successful in defending themselves against any attack.

Coming of formal education among the Tribal
When the idea of formal education was introduced by the colonial agents and Christian missionaries, the tribals resisted the idea tooth and nails for a very long time. They were afraid that they would be Christianised and lose their credibility in their society. They fear that their love for their simple and contented village life, their culture and traditional practices would be threatened with the new religion and the ideas brought in by the white man. They also considered any young person desirous of pursuing formal education as a lazy person, because their economy demands labour. In their concept, a successful person is one with sufficient labour force in the form of abled body members in the family. Thus, the gospel of modern education and Christianity had to strike hard at the ignorance and innocence of the tribal heart. As such, the government had to adopt certain steps and policies to penetrate the hill areas in the colonial period. The chiefs of villagers were given orders to send their sons and some village boys compulsorily to the schools run by the missionaries to ensure the education of the tribal people. These steps were taken only after proper subjugation of the hill areas because the tribals living in the hill areas were independent loving and do not appreciate any outside interferences from the pre-colonial period. Any move for development from the Manipur Maharaja or the British were considered acts of aggression. Any person or group outside the village was observed with suspicion.

The first formal school in the hill areas was the school at Mao Thana established by the government in 1893 which later had to be closed in 1932 due to lack of student attendance in the school. The Christian Missionary Reverent William Pettigrew reached Ukhrul in 1896 and starts the first missionary school on the plot of land that the government gave him. In the following year, on February, 1897, the school had 20 boys enrolled. This was the first beginning work of formal education by the most important contributor of education and Christianity in hill areas among the tribals. Whereever, the missionary work reached, the establishment of modern education although at the basic level, followed and the light of the gospel of Christianity and education eliminates and dispelled the prevailing superstitions and ignorance among the tribals.

Slowly, the conversion of tribals to Christianity helped them to accept schooling to some extend because they need to read the Bible and their song books. Many tribals remained literate enough only to be able to read
the Bible and their songbooks for decades without really considering the leap of development education was about to bring them.\textsuperscript{10}

Even after the Indian independence, the hill areas coped up with the primary and secondary levels of education available at their reach. In the interior villages of the hill areas, primary education was still a far cry for decades.

Higher Education among the tribals in Manipur

Although the basic concept of education and its subsequent benefits were accepted by the tribals due to the efforts of the Christian missionaries and the government agents in the late nineteen century, the concept of formal higher education, which is beyond primary and secondary education was still a strange thing to the tribals for many decades. The hill areas of Manipur remained untouched by the consciousness of the need of higher education for decades until the early nineteen sixties, when some tribal elites started feeling the need to establish institutions of higher education in the form of colleges.

In the hill districts of Manipur, Higher Education was introduced very late. R.W. Valui had claimed that it was Rev U.M. Fox from America who first started higher education for boys in 1911 in Ukhrul.\textsuperscript{11} He first introduced the vocational trade of carpentry to the hill people as a formal course and trade. However, it was not properly institutionalized.

There are, at present 18 (eighteen) colleges in the hill areas of Manipur, of which 17 colleges imparts General higher education and one college of professional higher education. The first college established in the hill areas was Churachandpur College, which was established in 1964, after 17(seventeen) years of India’s independence and after 18(eighteen) years of the introduction of higher education in the valley (i.e. 1946), followed by Pettigrew College in Ukhrul (established in 1965). Others followed sued. The latest or the youngest college established in the hill areas of Manipur is Asufii Christian College in Senapati in the year 2011. These colleges are institutions imparting general education which is divided into Arts stream, Science stream and Commerce stream. There is no professional college in all the hill areas of Manipur, safe the lone Private Law College in Churachandpur which is LMGM Law College. Out of all these colleges, 56.25\% are private colleges.\textsuperscript{12}
Analyzing the college histories, it is surprising to see that the initiative taken to first establish these colleges in the hill areas are coming from the very few elites of the hill tribals. In between the year 1978-79 and 1980-81, the state government took up a brave move toward its policy in higher education by converting all the private colleges into government colleges. Only after a considerably long periods the government decides to take some of these colleges under its administration and took the initiatives to establish some more.\(^{13}\)

The district wise break-up of the number of colleges is that Chandel district has two private colleges of which one is a government Aided and a government college which total 3. Churachandpur has two private and two Government colleges, altogether 4 in number. Senapati district has 8 colleges of which two are government colleges and 6 private colleges including one private aided college. Tamenglong and Ukhrul district each has one government college each.\(^{14}\)

Table.1 District-wise distribution of colleges in the hill areas of Manipur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the hill district</th>
<th>No. of colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CHANDEL DISTRICT</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CHURACHANDPUR (LAMKA) DISTRICT</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SENAPATI DISTRICT</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TAMENGLONG DISTRICT</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>UKHRUL DISTRICT</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18 colleges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDC, MU.

Table.2 Management, stream and level wise distribution of colleges in the hill areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Arts/Sc</th>
<th>Arts/Sc/Com</th>
<th>+2</th>
<th>+2+3</th>
<th>+3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: College Development Council, Manipur University.
Most of the colleges in hill areas of Manipur, whether government college or private college, have a similar pattern of courses and subjects offered. Mostly Arts subjects found fertile soil with Science subjects slowly following it. Commerce subjects although had been introduced, is available only in some selected colleges so far. Besides these subjects, Don Bosco College, Maram had started BCA and BSW courses. The vocational courses available in some governmental colleges are but for the beautification of the college prospectus. They attract very few students and so the enrolment is almost nil in many cases. No doubt, the resources and manpower for taking up such courses effectively do not exist.

Expansion of higher education in hill areas

Higher education in hill areas of Manipur has a late beginning and a very slow growth quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Although minimal, expansion did occur. Expansion of higher education in hill areas, however, was inspired not only by the ideals of equality of opportunity but also by demographic, geographic and economic considerations. Higher Education Institutions in hill areas of Manipur were initially the initiatives of the handful tribal elites, who had felt the need for establishment of colleges in order to mentor the growing educational consciousness and social changes among the hill tribal communities. The government also on the other hand was busy with universalization of elementary education (UEE) and many other programmes focusing on the secondary education. Besides, there were no proper policy for implementation at the moment. Therefore, the hill areas had to rely solely on the contribution of individuals and private firms for the establishment of colleges in the initial years.

Among the few private colleges established for the benefit of the tribal people in the hills, not all colleges survived. There is a college established for Arts and Science Faculties, which registered students’ enrolment till 2003 and then vanished. As J. Mate (2013) had pointed out in his work, the case of dying colleges also can be observed in the hill areas too. Many others remained like defunct for almost the whole academic year, while some others became active at examination times only and remain less functional for the rest.
During the late seventies and early eighties the state government began to see the need in the hill areas. It therefore, adopted a policy of absorbing the existing private colleges, one college for each district to come under the management of the government. Districts without any private colleges were given the opportunity of establishing one college in the district. Tamenglong College for the district of Tamenglong is an example. Few colleges established privately and has the potential of growing and has gained the trust and confidence of the public were absorbed by the state. Thus, the state run government colleges began to exist in each district in the hill areas. The expansion of higher education institutions in the hill areas can be observed through the decadal growth of colleges.17

Table 3 Decadal growth of colleges in the Hill Areas of Manipur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Decades</th>
<th>New Colleges</th>
<th>Cumulative Total Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1960-69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1970-79</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1980-89</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1990-99</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2000-13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CDC, Manipur University; Various Annual Reports of Manipur University

Most of the colleges in hill areas of Manipur offered graduate courses in Arts, Science and Commerce which are categorized under general higher education. The hill areas, so far is no fertile soil for educational growth especially professional education. This can be attributed to various factors such as Geographical, Administrative Policy, Communications, Thin Density of Population, Poor Socio-Economic Status, and Wrong Attitude of the people and Lack of Development. Geographically, the hill areas are mountainous and rough. Deep gorges and steep slopes characterizes most place in the hills. Only small areas and pockets are fit for human settlement. This character of the hill areas make communication very difficult and developmental works very slow. However, with the availability of modern tools and techniques at our disposal, it should be attainable challenge anymore.

The state government has no set of specific proper policy towards the hill areas and its development especially concerning higher education. Only short-term and individual
specific attempts were made in piece meals here and there. There is no separate policy for Higher Education in the hill areas. A long-term and firm policy needs to be adopted to bring about mainstreaming the hill areas in its development process to be at par with the more developed areas of the state. Low density of population is the result of geographical condition and lack of development in the region. The poor attitude of the people and socio-economic conditions of the people holds them to the state of poverty. Therefore, there is much to discuss on the general aspects of the region while little to discuss on the types of educational institutions in the hill areas. When these colleges are classified as General Higher Educational Institutions and Professional Higher Educational Institutions, the strength of professional institutions became very insignificant. However, understanding the need for such institutions in the development of a district or region, the government planned to set up a professional and technical institutes in each district.

Table 4: Types of colleges in hill areas of Manipur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Type of colleges</th>
<th>No. of colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>General higher education Institution</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Professional higher education Institution</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Women College</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: College Development Council, Manipur University (CDC, MU)

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus, Manipur was started in the year 2009 due to much pressure of the tribal students and tribal people as Manipur University which became a Central University in 2006\(^{18}\) had adopted the central norms in all it process of recruitment and admission of giving only 7% reservation for the tribals of the state which comprise of 34% of the total population of the state.\(^{19}\)

**Enrolment in colleges of the hill areas**

The colleges in hill areas of Manipur registered a progressive increase in the enrolment. The increase in enrolment became more significant and noteworthy in the recent most decade. In the forgone decades, these colleges registered minimum number of students, paving situations for teachers to take excuses and idle environment in the campus.
Although nothing like a leap in the enrolment strength is observed, a gradual increase in the enrolment is encouraging. No doubt, enrolment trend goes in the right direction as it increases, however, the increase per year or session is far from satisfactory.  

Figure.1 Overall Growth of students’ enrolment in colleges of hill areas in Manipur (2002-03 to 2012-13)

The stream-wise percentage of enrolment tend to weight too much on the Arts subjects covering 74% (seventy-four percent) of the total enrolment. Students need to be encouraged to take up subjects other than Arts. This undue increasing enrolment in Art stream may be due to lack of knowledge of other courses, financial constraints to take up more expensive subjects, preoccupied notion or attitude that they are not good enough for other subjects. The undue emphasis of subject choice on humanities and Social Sciences is not a healthy trend. More enrolment into vocational subjects should also be encouraged. The growth rate of enrolment in colleges at 2012-13 with that of 2008-09 as based year is 58.17%. The decadal growth rate with the enrolment of 2002-03 session as the based year is 179.45%.  

During the decade 2003 to 2013, the percentage of boys and girls in the overall enrolment in colleges of hill area was consistently dominated by enrolment of boys except the year 2008-09 where the enrolment of girls was abruptly steep up to 60.19%. In this year, the percentage composition of boys’
enrolment went down to 39.81%, which was one of the lowest percent of boys’ enrolment as compared to girls’ enrolment all through the decade. Perhaps it was due to political situation of the state in the previous year, where educational institutions were closed for a long period. Students from pre-school to higher education all over the state lose months of academic life and activities. This would have convinced many parents to send their children outside the state for higher education, especially students from the hill areas. The problem of insurgency in hill areas have either distracted or disturbed young boys from making effort in their academic life due to fear of the undergrounds on the one hand and the Indian armies on the other. This was because both were on the lookout for young boys to either recruit or arrest. Schools and colleges were closed for prolong period and academic mode was completely shattered. For this reason many parents and children being traumatized by prevailing situation in the previous year did not wish to risk enrolling in colleges of the state. While the percentage domination of boys in the enrolment kept decreasing year after year, that of the enrolment of girls kept increasing.

**Outputs or Results**

Analyzing the overall average of the pass percentage of colleges in hill areas put together, the trend showed a steady increase in the pass percentage. The increase went up to 90% as the average is a matter of pride for the colleges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average output of colleges in hill areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>80.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>81.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>84.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>83.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>90.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from reports of colleges during field survey.

The achievement of some colleges in hill areas in term of college result is 100% passed out from the college. Beside this, there are also occasional rank holders from these hill colleges. For instance, Rayburn College in 2010 produced the first Rank holder.
(topper) in English. Meanwhile the lowest recorded achievement of a college was 36.05% passed out from a college. So, study of individual colleges gives diverse results of their outputs. Taking the trend on the average together, it can be seen that the passed out average increases every year, which is a very encouraging and promising trend. Within the span of five years the average has increased to about 10% in the overall achievement of the colleges put together.

Comparing the average output of public and private colleges in hill areas for five consecutive years, showed the trend of promising out puts. The trend in the five year showed that the result in the public colleges was more continuous and increasing although it stood less than the 50 percent till the academic year 2009. There was no fluctuation of pass percentage toward extreme values. The average pass percentage of the five consecutive years was 71.90% and the growth rate was at 0.40%.

Based on the report prepared by the college offices, the trend of result or pass students in the private colleges fluctuate. It went up to 97.79% in 2010 and comes down to 88.66% again in 2012. The average of the five consecutive years was 90.97%, which is much higher than the average of public colleges. The growth rate of pass percent in private college with 0.046% was much lower than that of the public colleges as shown in table No.4.14. However, it is to be noted here that the average of the pass percentage of private colleges was already very high.

**Figure.2 Percentage of passed out students in colleges of hill areas**

![Figure 2: Percentage of passed out students in colleges of hill areas](image)

Source: Report collected from individual colleges in hill areas
The trend of pass percentage of public (Government colleges) and private colleges move closer toward a unifying point. This can be observed from the high pass percentage of private colleges remaining close to constant while the public colleges soar upward closing in near to the point where the percentage of the private colleges stands. This improving condition of the public colleges can be attributed to public pressure, students’ competitiveness, more devoted teachers recruited in recent times, improving management and infrastructures, availability of accessible study materials etc. The recent trend of people’s awareness of the need for cost effective higher education possibly available at their reach in their places have given the impetus to push these institutions toward better quality and output.22

Beside the university examination results of these colleges, mention may also be made of the college students’ achievements in the form of being successful in various fields of endeavors and careers. Many of the colleges made public display of their former students being successful in various competitive examinations and career courses. Rank holders and award winning students are also often displayed in public places for attracting potential new students too.

Conclusion remark

From dormitory system to formal higher education, the hill areas witnessed a slow pace of development and transition of a significant nature as the traditional education system is completely replaced by the modern higher education system. The pace of development of the modern higher education was indeed slow. So far, there are 18 colleges and a university campus in the entire hill areas of Manipur. Yet, these hill areas remained still without Women’s college and professional colleges. There is undue emphasis on general colleges which need to be rectified by establishing professional and technical colleges. Besides, diversifying courses need to be taken up. It is also time for the government also take more interest in higher education in these areas by framing a long term policy in regards to higher education in hill areas.
Acknowledgement

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Notes and References

5 Interview with Pi Nejahlhing Haokip, 80 years old, from K.Salbung village on date 21st March 2012. She is the youngest daughter of the Anglo-Kuki War (Kuki Rebellion) 1917-19 hero, late Pu Tintong Haokip.
6 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Derived from verbal discussion with the two principals of public colleges.