

## THE NAGA MORUNG

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### ABSTRACT:

The Morung which was the central institution of the Nagas during the early period where young men were imparted knowledge on the past glories, customs, traditions and warfare. It served as a guard house of the village against enemies. It was also a place of feasts of merit and other religious ceremonies. The coming of the British and the spread of Christianity slowly led to the withdrawal of the Morung from the Naga society which was once a significant aspect of the Naga culture and tradition.

**KEYWORDS :** Dormitory, Institution, Feasts of merit, Animism, Christianity, Missionaries.

### INTRODUCTION :

There are many forms of dormitories in India, each with different names and customs. The institution of men's dormitory is found largely among the tribes of India. And as such, among the Nagas the men's or bachelor's dormitory is called, Morung. Not every tribe had Morungs nor followed the same pattern.

After the attainment of certain age the boys were admitted to Morungs where they use to sleep the night there for a time period or till they get married. But in the case of Angami Morungs, the boys did not sleep there. For them the Morung was a place for casual resort. The Morung was only used during occasions and ceremonies for the young men. However, the Semas did not have Morungs. Instead, the Chief's house was used to hold such occasions and ceremonies. The entry of women in the Morung was strictly prohibited in the Morungs of Ao, Lotha and Rengma.

The Morung was most developed among the Aos as it was well constructed and the village councils maintained strict rules to train the young boys. The transition from childhood to adolescence is taken place in Morung. After ever three years a group of boys about twelve years of age is initiated into the Morung. The Chang tribe have four different social institution and all these plays highly differentiated functions. In the Chang customs the Morung which is known as 'Haki' is not a bachelor's dormitory. They have separate boys' and girls' dormitory namely 'sochem' and 'shemshimang' and a separate sitting and meeting platform known as 'puhshin'. The konyaks are divided into two categories the Thenkoh and Thendu. Thenkoh is a democratic rule which is ruled jointly by the council of elders and the chiefs, Morung comes under Thenkoh whereas Thendu, who are autocratic and are

ruled by powerful sacred chief. The Morung works as a defence centre in the Naga society. Due to the defence role the Dimasakachari tribe did not have roofs in the Morungs. In most of the tribes the Morung is located near the village gate standing as a defence centre of the village.

Scholars have expressed different views about the purpose of Morungs in the Naga society. Elwin expressed Morung as "It was an institution to save Children from witnessing the primal scene", and "from being an embarrassment to their parents." Therefore Morung was the guard-room of the Nagas. Haimendorf was of the view that "The Morung belongs together with the log drum, the oldest cultural stratum of the Naga Hills". Whereas Peal has a different view, "is a survival of the communal house from which private dwellings split off." Morung also plays a pivotal role in the Naga society in the form of social, cultural, religious and educational sphere.

The Morung is a social centre where all the important rituals are taken place and strongly associated with log drum, which is built with a huge gong made with a single trunk of a tree. The arrival of the enemies is also announced with help of log drum and it is practiced as a part of their culture. In the days of head hunting, the beheaded heads will be brought to the Morung and placed as a souvenir. Most of the important decisions are made and taken in the Morung by the village elders. Morungs are more or less autonomous and are managed by the council of village elders even conducting their own political relations with other village Morungs.

Morung was a tradition that was practiced long before the advent of the British and American missionaries. It served as a soul of the livelihood of the Naga culture. It is a place for educating the younger generations with knowledgeable past glories, customs, traditions and warfare. According to Anand, "The Morung plays vital role in preparing younger generations for posts in the village council. The Morung is the club, the public school, the military training centre, the hostel for boys and meeting place for village elders. It is as well the centre for the social, religious and political activities. In short, it is the fulcrum of the village democracies." It also served as a place for performing feast of merit during various occasions and festivals, various sacrifices are also performed to please their gods. During those times the Nagas were purely animist worshippers. It was the coming of British and missionaries that turned their traditional society upside down.

There were many changes cum development that the British has brought in the Naga Hills. One of the most significant changes was the spread of Christianity. Once Christianity spread, missionaries began to implement Christian principles strictly. The candidates for Baptism were required to know Christian Doctrines and were not allowed to participate in any 'Heathen ritual' nor were they allowed getting drunk. Moreover the new converts were not allowed to stay in the Morung. Gradually changes were taking place drastically and they also started wearing the Assamese jacket and body cloth and later on the European style of dressing was adopted.

The Morung which was the core of the Naga society was slowly losing its importance due to the conversion of Christianity. The missionaries were becoming more powerful in their religious rituals and were stricter than ever. They were successful in converting the animist Nagas to Christianity. The rate of conversion was at faster rate after Indian Independence turning Nagaland to 99 per cent Christian State.

All the traditional rituals, customs sacrifices were completely abolished from the society and most importantly the Morung slowly faded from the Naga society. Thus, the Morung which was once the core of the society was swiftly vanished and now only the traces can be marked and studied as it still remains as the part of the Naga history. Some important traditional rituals are still practiced and celebrated with some modifications.

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