

YOUTH DORMITORIES:

According to Hadson, dormitories are “the survival of communal houses which were the first stage in the development of homes and the whole village lived together”. It is a communal living space for tribal youth. This space is meant to help members of tribes to learn skills, while also creating a community from young age. Schurtz was the first Anthropologist to point out the widespread existence of voluntary association. Dormitories reported to be existent in preliterate societies from all parts of world. One of the most exquisite-Trobriand islanders dormitory is known as **Bukumatula**.

The tribal communities in India have had their own system of being, knowing, and doing. They have institutions for each aspect of their social life and behavioural patterns. The youth dormitory in Tribal India is an integral part of their culture.

The youth dormitories are of three types i.e. for the boys, for the girls and for both jointly. It is the training centre where the youths are trained in different fields like dancing, singing, social works etc. Such dormitory has got its different names in different places, e.g. Dhumkuria of the Oranns, Ghotul of the Murias, Morungs of the Nagas, Darbar of the Juang, Dekachang of the Garos, Kinchku of the Angamis and Nodrang of the Dimasa Kacharis.

It is known by different names in different tribes – *Morung* among the Nagas, *Nokpante* among the Garos, *Giti Ora* among the Mundas, *Ing khynraw* among the Khasis and *Zawlbuk* among the Mizos. This institution integrates in itself all the basic elements of a tribal community, socio-cultural, economic, moral and religious. What is being practiced in the west as compulsory civic service (military service or social service) for the youth, already existed among the tribal communities in the form of the bachelors’ dormitory. Essentially, this institution was meant for a holistic formation and training of the youth. A bachelors’ dormitory was essentially a house built usually at the entrance to the village. Here the youth of the village were expected to live for a period of time not less than a year. They were to live under the supervision and training of an elder who was considered to be a good and exemplary person. The young girls would have their own dormitory and were supervised by an elderly woman chosen by the community.

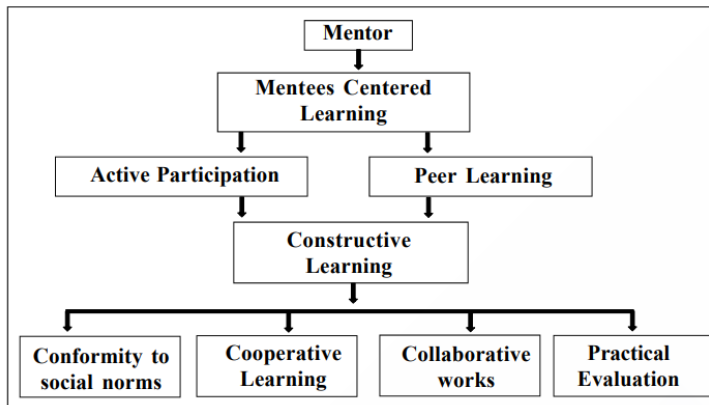
These dormitories were schools where learning and skilling took place. Here they were taught basic trades of life, everything about their culture and tradition which included learning of folk songs, dances, folktales, myths and legends of the people. The young men were also given training in martial art so as to prepare them to be warriors to defend their communities. The girls were taught basic skills in housekeeping, weaving and farming etc. Besides all these, the dormitories were schools of self discipline. The young boys and girls were taught strict discipline and how to conduct themselves in society. The result was that the young men and women who came out of this institution were well disciplined, well cultured, skilled in traditional trades, knowledgeable in culture and tradition and martially well trained.

FUNCTIONS

Anthropologists have pointed out different usage of this institution from their own perspectives. Roy (1915) states three functions for this youth dormitory. One was to serve as an effective economic organisation for purpose of food quest. Then, it was used to train youth in socio-cultural and other activities. Thirdly, it was a place for performance of magico-religious ceremonies designed to bring about success in hunting and enhance the procreative powers of young men.

Elwin (1947) suggested **two distinct roles of Dhumkuria**. One, semi-military barrack type which aims at strict segregation of the boys and is connected with wars, hunting and magic. The other which allow or encourages relation with the other sex and possibly aims at regulating pre-marital interest of ST youth.

Sachchidanand (1958) categorised **three purposes** – as a sleeping house, as a school of dance and music and as a co-operative labour unit on request by any needy member of the village. Despite different perspectives on the assumed functions of this institution, there are few things on which there is possible agreement. Most scholars who knew this institution pointed out that the process in which knowledge was imparted was different in these institutions



Representation of structure of relations in the *Dhumkuria*

In this youth dormitory, approach of imparting knowledge was based on experienced-based learning technique. This technique was used to solve problems, learn and discover. Instead of a guru, usually seen in a typical Hindu learning milieu, tutor was found in these institutions (Roy, 2006). These tutors acted as a mentor to the young cohort. They helped organize the activities while sharing knowledge they had experienced. Role of

mentor was to bring the mentees in a comfort zone in which knowledge construction and sharing would be easily achieved.

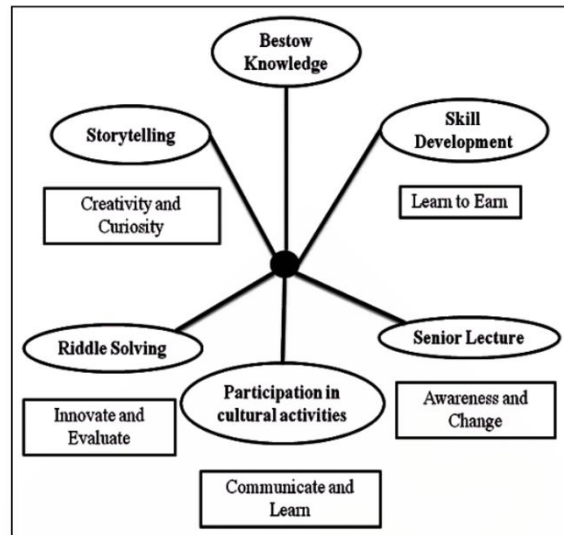
The process of learning and teaching involved storytelling which may look traditional but is a powerful medium to express experiences, emotions and other ideas. The theme and the context are best expressed through stories and without directly stressing the need to be memorised on a linear scale. Grumet (1988) in her book *The Bitter Milk* points that our curriculum is nothing but stories that elder generation chooses to tell the younger generation. Among ST community in India, storytelling was also used for passing of beliefs and values of culture in hope that new generation will preserve and pass on to the next generation.

Another approach involved riddle-solving which sharpens the mind and generates new thoughts in an open and creative process. These acts improve judgemental capability, simplify thinking and provide better memory retention. Participation in cultural activities was encouraged to make them aware of themes of culture and belief in culture heritage.

On occasion, senior gave focused lecture on social, cultural, political, economic and other issues. They revitalise arts and cultural practices in various forms. With their experiences, they try to connect young ones with society and environment through specific rituals and practices. After delivering lectures, mentees are allowed to negotiate on lectures to increase ability to create and be creative.

When these mentees become responsible person of society, they have their own thought, views, concept to behave and react within their group. This reflects personality and shapes the life of young generation. After gaining education, mentees have to act as mentor in Dhumkuria. Only getting knowledge is not enough for youth. Time comes to impart knowledge to new young groups.

Now, they have to act as mentor. The learning process recognised that in early stage of life, young ones learn every day in stimulating context about oneself and the society in the company of their peers. Roy (2006: 24) suggests that in Dhumkuria youth received knowledge and skills of training through sharing and unconscious imitation. Values helped in socialisation and formed the kernel of learning milieu.



Approach of imparting knowledge in Dhumkuria

Along with values youth learned skills for their livelihood. Skill development was related to hunting practices including arrow-head making; medicinal-practices such as recognising herbal plants and parts to use, as well as magico-religious practices.

Decline

- a) Unfortunately, with the advent of Christianity, lack of encouragement from the part of the missionaries to preserve this institution, has led to the gradual extinction of what could be called a socio-cultural institution. Most western missionaries considered this cultural practice as promoting superstitious beliefs and thus tribals who became Christians were forbidden to resume this practice. Thus, when we go to Kohima village, we see morungs in every khel but they remain empty and deserted. The disappearance of the bachelors' dormitory is a great loss to the tribal communities.

Haimendorf in his study of Apatanis and Nagas found that as long as young boys and girls go to dormitory the intra-familial relation are good and smooth. But when they stay at home at night, there develops hostility in between family members.

- b) Most of the children who go to school do not want to attend the dormitories. They feel that they would have to massage the legs of old members and are used to call girls from girl dormitories.
- c) Cultural contact with the Hindus
- d) Frequent and deeper contacts with urban ways of living — loss of love, confidence in their own ways of living.

Writing about Rengma Naga, Mills says that a fairly quick and efficient method of ascertaining whether a particular tribal village is prosperous and thriving or in decay, is to look for condition of dormitory which reflects the total condition