



Economic And Educational Status Of Muslims In Manipur

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The paper undertakes a comprehensive study of the economic and educational status of Muslims in Manipur. The paper is unique in the sense that it is designed to study the most understudied community of Manipur with a particular emphasis on understanding inequalities and deprivation of the community in the state. The economic problems of Muslims are not much different from economic problems of other communities in the state. However, poverty plays an important role in depriving Manipuri Muslims economically and educationally. The paper emphasizes the role of the State in taking initiatives and in implementing policies and programmes as a response to the demands of the Manipuri Muslims.

Introduction

Sachar Committee Report was the first systematic study of the Muslim community in India done by the government in 2006 to look into the socio-economic and educational status of the Muslims in India. The report presented the pitiable condition of the Muslims in India indicating rampant illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. The report has comprehensively documented the economic backwardness and deprivations of the Indian Muslims along most major indicators. Tanweer Fazal and Rajeew Kumar study of socio-economic and educational levels of Muslims in four states of India do reflect commonality in terms of certain socio-economic indicators, despite the inherent diversity of Muslims in India. The research focuses on certain key sectors such as education, poverty, food security and health which play an important role in the betterment of the conditions of minorities in general and Muslims in particular.

Muslims of Manipur are no different in the socio-economic and educational conditions from Muslims of the other parts of the country. From the socio-economic and educational point of view, Manipuri Muslims are the most backward community in the state. "Report on Socio-economic survey of *Meitei Pangals* (Manipuri Muslims) 2004" was conducted to assess the socio-economic condition of the Muslims in Manipur. This survey is the first and only survey conducted for Muslims in Manipur on socio-economic life of the community. The report helps in making an assessment of the multifaceted aspects of the Muslim community and enlightens the field where specific attention is to be given in order to bring the community in the mainstream. The report highlighted the deplorable socio-economic conditions of the Muslims in Manipur.

Muslims in Manipur

Muslims locally known as *Pangals* are the third largest religious community in Manipur. They had settled in Manipur even earlier than many other communities. They have a history of some 400 years of living in the state. The history of their settlement in the region is recorded in some of the archaic indigenous chronicles and *puyas* (*Cheitharol Kumbaba*, *Nongsamei* and *Pangal Thorakpa*). As per these accounts, the Muslims in Manipur are the descendants of the 1000 Muslim soldiers made captive by *Maharaja* Khagemba in 1606 A.D. He made those captives to settle in Manipur and appointed them to work according to their respective qualities. *Maharaja* Khagemba allowed them to settle in the valley by offering land and *Meitei* women in marriage.

The number of Manipuri Muslims was about 1,000 at the time of their first settlement in the state. According to the decennial census 1951-2001, the population of Manipuri Muslims in 1951 was 37,197, in 1961 – 48,588, in 1971 – 70,969, in 1981 – 99,327, in 1991 – 1,33,535 and in 2001 – 1,90,939, constituting 6.44, 6.23, 6.62, 6.99, 7.27 and 8.8 per cent of the total State population of Manipur respectively. As per the Census enumeration of 2011, the population of Muslims in the state stands at 2,39,836. Proportion of other religious communities in Manipur is as follows: Hindus – 11,81,876; Christians – 11,79,043; Sikhs – 1,527; Buddhists – 7,084; Jains – 1,692; Others – 2,33,767. Hinduism is the majority religion in Manipur with 41.39 percent

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followers. Christianity is the second most popular religion with 41.29 percent, followed by Islam with 8.40 percent. The number of Manipuri Muslims residing in the rural areas is 1,56,420 while 83,416 reside in the urban areas. Muslims are sparsely distributed in the four valley districts of Manipur – Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur. There are around 60 Muslim villages which are scattered in the four valley districts. Their settlements are in general along the banks of the Imphal, Thoubal and Iril rivers which crisscrossed the valley of Manipur and in the peripheries of lakes.

Economic Status of Muslims in Manipur

In the pre-colonial and colonial period, Muslims were given a respectable status in the Manipur society and had led quite a self-sufficient life. They made significant contributions in the economic sphere. They enriched the arts and crafts by introducing new skills and techniques. They also introduced new methods in agriculture. Muslims, in spite of their small size, were hard-working and useful citizens of the kingdom of Manipur. In the post-colonial period, the socio-economic condition of Muslims saw a marked change. Muslims failed to grab the avenues that came their way with the democratic governmental set-up in the state. The participation of Muslims in the State's affairs was limited. A majority of the Muslims are still engaged in agriculture and other allied activities. One does not find much change in the Muslim's economic structure even after Independence.

By and large, Muslims' socio-economic setting in Manipur is remarkably rural-based, who subsist on age-old agro-oriented activities. Agriculture and its allied activities form the mainstay of more or less 80 per cent of the Muslims in the state. Thus, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of Muslims in Manipur. Production is geared to familial requirements and a few surpluses are sold. Cultivation of rice is the main agricultural activity for them. Muslims, at large, being subsistence farmers, have not been able to go for modern irrigation facilities. Over and above these, Muslims could not properly utilize the various latest programmes taken up by the Central and State governments like the introduction of various good agronomic practices, double cropping and multi-cropping, use of fertilizers, pesticides and high-yielding variety seeds, etc. They still adhere to the primitive agricultural techniques and implements. Thus, cultivation is more solvent and self-sufficient for Muslims.

To supplement family income, Muslims also engage in vegetable farming, animal husbandry, fish-farming and handicraft activities. Muslims in villages also manage vegetable-gardens, attached to their homesteads. Lilong and other Muslim-inhabited areas of Thoubal district, supply a large proportion of the vegetable and other cash crop products in *keithels* (markets) of Manipur. For Muslims who reside in and around lakes, fish-farming is an important source of incomes. Muslims engage themselves in fish-farming and pond fisheries as a source of income or to supplement family income. Muslims monopolise the poultry business in the state. A separate part of the main market at Imphal, known as Yen-Yonpham (poultry market) is managed by Muslims.

Muslims, even though have engaged themselves significantly in every sphere of economic activities, yet for various historical, social and political reasons remain backward. Except for a limited few, the general economic condition of Muslims is less than satisfactory and it has deteriorated and more pronounced upon over the years. Agriculture which serves as the largest sector of Muslim employment has not been able to adjust the increasing population. For the last few decades, rural Muslims have been undergoing migration towards urban areas. Over-crowding in cultivation of land and decline in per capita availability of arable land induced them to look out for alternative avenues of livelihood in the urban areas, especially in Imphal areas. In the urban areas these, mostly unskilled, Muslims take up different sorts of activities in the unorganized sector, like opening grocery shops and pan kiosk, slaughtering and selling meat, running small hotels, rickshaw/auto-rickshaw pulling, scavenging, manual labouring in construction works, small trade, etc. There are many newly emerged economic activities in the unorganized sector run by skilled Muslims, like flight ticketing, furniture industry, mobile outlets, CD parlours, small-scale industries in iron and steel works, automobile repairing workshops, selling iron, cement and other construction items, jewellery shops, etc.

A large number of Muslim workers are self-employed persons, who run their enterprises on their own account or with one or more partners without hiring any labourer. If we analyse the available economic data, compared to other communities in the State, Muslims have the lowest work-participation rate. As per the Census of 2011, the work participation of Muslims is 2,39,836 (male 1,20,404 and female 1,19,432). The total number of Muslim workers accounts 90,314 (male 54,902 and female 35,412), whereas the number of total non-worker population is 1,49,522 (male 65,502 and female 84,020). From the Socio-Economic Survey 2004, the overall economic status of Muslims is clearly reflected in the data of monthly household income. Most of the Muslim households fall in the low income group. A large section of Muslims in the state are living at a low level of subsistence. Most of the Muslims are performing low-profile economic activities of all sorts to make ends meet live below the poverty line.

There is also lack of proportional representation of Muslims in the government services. Muslim representation in the higher grades is extremely low. We can count the number of IAS, IPS, MCS, MPS or Doctors, Engineers, Professors employed under the State or Central government on our fingers. However, we

are seeing some appreciable improvement in the last few years in the field of education. Ultimately, in the last few years, Muslim representation has increased, which has been a result of Muslims' increasing access to education and the government's reservation policy. Today, Muslims are fairly represented in higher category of government services. Among the Manipuri Muslims, a newly emerging middle class based on income is growing in size. It consists of persons who had easy access to the administrative and political authority and black marketers dealing with drugs and small arms. Some of the migrated poor Muslims also have taken up business in drug trafficking.

Educational Status of Muslims in Manipur

For several decades, the people of Manipur in general and Muslims in particular were not aware of the values and importance of education. Muslims took to modern education as late as the 1970s and that too was limited to a few elite groups from Imphal. Even today a large section of the community fails to receive the desirable level of modern education. As a result, one finds a wide margin in literacy rate between the Muslims and other communities. Literacy rate in Manipur has always been above the all India average. Literacy rates in North Eastern States, including Manipur, have been above the national average since 1960s and 1970s. According to the latest Census report 2011, Manipur ranks fourth in terms of effective literacy rates among the North-Eastern States, after Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland. The literacy rate in Manipur is 76.94 per cent as per the 2011 population census. Of that, the male literacy rate stands at 83.58 per cent while female literacy is at 70.26 per cent. However, Muslims in the state has one of the lowest literacy rates. Besides, it also records the lowest rate of women in the state and high percentage of "not ever enrolled" and drop-out. As per the census enumeration of 2011, the literacy rate of Muslims in Manipur is 67.8 per cent (Male – 80.3 per cent and Female – 55.2 per cent). The number of Manipuri Muslim literates is 1,34,292 (79,474 male and 54,818 female).

The gap between Muslim and other communities becomes wider and is more pronounced when we move upwards i.e. from the lower to the higher levels of education. As per the Census enumeration of 2011, the maximum number of Manipuri Muslim students is found at the middle level to be 37,588 (22,084 male and 15,504 female). In the rural areas, there is a decrease in the number of Muslim students (both male and female) from below primary to primary level of education. While in urban areas, the number increases from below primary to primary level of education. After the middle level, dropout rates are considerably higher at the secondary and higher secondary levels in both urban and rural sectors. According to the findings of 2004 survey, the main reason for dropout of Muslim students is due to their full engagement in household economic activities. As many as 47 per cent of the Muslim students have dropped out of their studies due to one or other economic reasons.

Though Muslims are now aware of the importance of education as a tool of change and progress, poverty is the main problem faced by them in educating their children at the elementary level or in pursuing higher education. High dropout rates in the elementary and secondary stages of education led to fewer Muslim children entering higher education. The enrolment and retention rate of the Manipuri Muslims in general and Manipuri Muslim women in particular in higher education is extremely low. A great number of Muslim girls especially in the rural areas drop out before they reach secondary or higher stages of education. With increasing social demand for a specific kind of professional education (especially skill-oriented degrees) in the post-1991 phase, it is even more difficult for Manipuri Muslims to compete with others. Ultimately, professional education is either denied or almost impossible for the disadvantaged groups and especially Muslims from a poor and rural background. Therefore, Muslims have very low participation in new professional courses. Even though large number of students from the state is pursuing education at various levels outside the state, the percentage of Muslim students is very low.

Muslims today are aware of the changes and the demands of our time. Muslims feel that their status is constantly deteriorating in all aspects of life. There is an overall consensus that Muslims lag behind in education, particularly in technical and professional education, and that they have limited job opportunities. They want to partake in the progress and development achieved by other religious communities. They aspire to achieve equal status and empowerment by utilising the opportunities of education and employment made available to them. With the coming of the new reservation policy, there are 4 percent seats reserved for Manipuri Muslims in admission in professional courses (professional colleges and institutes) such as Medicine, Engineering, Polytechnic, Veterinary & Animal Husbandry, Agricultural Sciences, Nursing, Para-Medical etc. Nowadays, there is a good number of Muslims studying Medicine in RIMS and JNIMS medical colleges in Manipur. Over the last few years, the number of Muslims in higher education has increased. Manipuri Muslims from well-to-do and middle class families who are seriously concerned about quality education are even studying outside the state for higher education. Bright and energetic Muslim students are pursuing Medicine and Engineering courses from Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and neighbouring countries like Nepal, China, and Bangladesh etc.

With change in outlook of people because of the undergoing socialization process, majority of the Muslims are aware of the importance and inevitability of education as a tool of change and development. Education is

now considered as an economic investment at the family level and cornerstone of development at the societal level. Unsatisfactory economic condition of the Muslims overall, the intense economic competition among the ethnic groups and their standing vis-à-vis the other communities instilled the Muslims' mind a sense of being 'marginalized' or 'neglected'. With the emergence of educated elite and middle class among the Manipuri Muslims, there are formation of various organizations and entry into politics putting forward the grievances and demands of the Muslim community. They believed in regaining overall problems of Manipuri Muslims with modern education and through government's initiative and intervention. Therefore, there is need for comprehensive policy of inclusiveness in the field of education which will reduce disparities of any kind. The state can make available the scale of investment required for the universalization of education. State's intervention is required in improving economic condition of Muslims with anti-poverty programmes, increasing credit availability and policies regarding skill up-gradation to engage Muslims in growth-oriented sectors.

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