



# **Educational Backwardness Of Muslims: A Case Study Of Muslims In Manipur**

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## **ARTICLE INFO    ABSTRACT**

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Sachar Committee Report was the first systematic study of the Muslim community in India 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. Report on Socio-economic survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) 2004 assessed the multifaceted aspects of the Muslim community in Manipur and enlightened 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. There are two explanations which are discussed in this paper to account for relative educational backwardness of Muslims. The analysis of this paper is mainly done to bring to the fore many points that are missing in the discourse of elementary education of Manipuri Muslims. This paper is an attempt to contribute to and enrich the existing literature on education of Muslim community in Manipur.

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## **Introduction**

Education is a powerful instrument of dismantling several forms of social inequalities and enabling individuals to acquire the rightful place in society and structure of opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Right to Education Act of India stated every child of the age of 6 to 14 years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbouring school till completion of elementary education. However, enrolment is the only area where the performance of the elementary schools in India appears to have been upto the mark. In spite of policy initiatives and programmes launched by the government after Sachar Committee Report to promote economic, social and educational upliftment of minority communities in India, the perception remains that Muslims still lag behind in terms of most of the human development indicators including education.

There are two explanations which are discussed in this paper to account for relative educational backwardness of Muslims. First view explains educational lag among Muslims by referring to Islamic theology. It has been argued that for Muslims, education has intrinsically been linked with religion as Islam lays emphasis on religious education. Second view accounts for educational deficits among Muslims by referring to policy of deliberate neglect of the community by the state. According to Muslim elites, Muslims are denied access to educational opportunities one way or the other. Because of the failure of the government schools, they believe Muslim parents are forced to send their children to *madrasas*, which not only preserves religio-cultural values but also meets educational and intellectual needs. But above two explanations have, by and large, remained unsubstantiated against ground realities.

## **Fall of Government Schools and Rise of Private Schools**

Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) 2011 has shown that Manipur has made remarkable progress in the enrolment of children in schools. However, the actual attendance rate of children in schools is not very impressive. ASER emphasised an urgent need to take measures to improve the quality of education given in government schools.

The rise of private schools is mainly due to the deteriorating quality of education in government schools. Parents have abandoned government schools since these schools have fallen well below their expectations. Non-implementation of major schemes, scholarship facilities for girls, free uniform, alongside the chaotic implementation of other schemes, an absence of an inspection system, lack of transparency, corruption, teachers' inertia and feminisation of teaching profession are cited as some of the silent features that continue to plague the functioning of government schools.<sup>2</sup> Jeebanlata observed that children of the government schools could not attain much functional literacy even after having completed basic education.<sup>3</sup> Government school

teachers do not even want their children to be in their own schools. They are in favour of private schools as they send their own children to private schools. Such a candid attitude of government school teachers are seen by many parents as a form of acceptance of failure of the government school teachers in performance and lost of faith in their own capabilities of delivery.<sup>4</sup> Parents who send their children to government schools blame their own destiny that they are unable to exercise their school choice for sending their children to a particular school. Despite their strong dissatisfaction, they continue sending their children to government schools without any future prospect.

Though all the Muslim villages are provided with free primary schools by the government, villagers are dissatisfied with the performance of government schools. There is a widespread feeling among Muslim parents that private schools provide better educational environment with English as the medium or language of instruction. They have a feeling that their children enrolled in private schools get tangible improvements in their academic performance. Private schools are better managed by school authorities unlike government schools. According to them, government schools hardly utilise the infrastructures given to them by the government.

Headmasters of government schools emphasized the similar problems faced by the government schools irrespective of their difference in location.<sup>5</sup> The state government neither sanctions money in time nor have sufficient amount of funds. For instance, the mid-day meal is one of the most important incentives to attract children to school enrolment, attendance and retention in school. However, there are widespread complaints against the delayed payment of cash for the mid-day meal programme. Textbooks supplied by the government do not reach the school before the academic session commences. Grant from the government for infrastructural development of the school is insufficient. The government has not sanctioned money for infrastructural development of the school for the current academic session. There are also pending amounts to be sanctioned by the government for the end months of the preceding academic session.

The overwhelming parental choice of private school over government school is due to the availability of 'whole package,' i.e., the feel-good factor of the school, discipline and morality, good habit formation, school uniforms, emphasis on English language learning, commitment of teachers, appropriate examination system, homework assignments, performance, accountability of management over school affairs, etc.<sup>6</sup> Parents are convinced that some amount of teaching and learning takes place in private schools as compared to government schools. Parents unanimously agree that sending children to private schools enables them to become functionally literate.<sup>7</sup> These parental observations cut across all economic strata and regions. Choosing a private school has become almost universal and unconscious choice of the parents.<sup>8</sup>

Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) 2011 has shown that private school enrolment is rising in most states of India. Highest enrolment in private school is seen in Manipur with 71.1 percent which is followed by Kerala with 60.8 percent. Socio-Economic Survey of *Meitei-Pangals* (Manipuri Muslims) 2004 shows that 54.3 per cent of Muslim students are enrolled in private schools while 45.7 per cent in government schools. A large number of Muslim children from the lower class group were found studying in private schools.<sup>9</sup> Even the poorest parents readily compromise their means of basic living such as food and other essentials for the sake of their children's education by sending them to relatively high fee charging private schools. They keep shifting their children from one private school to another and meet the educational expenses by choosing relatively inferior private schools where English is the medium of instruction. Despite economic hardship, they let their children to study in private schools only.

By sending their children to private schools, Muslim parents in villages also believe that they do not need to keep private tutors for their children as private schools give some kind of coaching for their students unlike government schools.<sup>10</sup> Many Muslim parents from villages send their academically oriented children to study in premium private schools in Imphal. They let their children stay in boarding/rented rooms or in a relative's house in Imphal. Some Muslim parents from villages of Thoubal district keep their children in Thoubal (main town) for schooling and other better facilities like boarding. Not all parents who send their children to private schools are happy and satisfied as private schools too fall short of parental expectations in terms of scholastic achievements and learning abilities of children.<sup>11</sup> Private schools are mainly concern with examinations and performance while neglecting other values to be installed in children. They are largely ill-equipped to socialise children to make education relevant to the large social context of their own lives.

### **Religious Education and Modern Education for Muslims**

There are many explanations to account for relative educational backwardness of Muslims. It is often believed that a large proportion of Muslim children study in *madrasas* because of their parents' preference for religious education. But, in actual reality, the number of Muslim students attending *madrasas* is much less than commonly believed. Earlier, religious education was not given much importance like modern education by the Muslim parents in Manipur.<sup>12</sup> In some families, one son out of many children was sent to study religious education outside Manipur. In those days, there was hardly any proper institution to give religious education to Muslims in Manipur. As a result, there are many elderly Muslims who cannot offer prayer (*namaz*) properly and read the *Quran* in the Arabic language.<sup>13</sup>

In the later years, the teaching of Arabic to learn the *Quran* was imparted in the *masjid* which used to have some attached rooms to teach the children of the locality. The Imam and senior pupils used to teach these children. These were informal Islamic institutions basically meant for providing religious education to the

Muslim villagers. But the problem was that each of these *Maktab*s had only one teacher locally called the *Moulavi*. Most of the learners of these institutions were irregular and often dropped-out without acquiring even the basic knowledge of Islam.<sup>14</sup> Some families used to keep private tutors to teach their children how to read the *Quran* and how to offer prayers. *Maktab*s with a *deeniyat* course became popular recently. *Deeniyat* course focuses on teaching of moral values and lessons of humanity to all mankind through the teaching of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

Unlike other communities, Muslims undergo a course of religious education before or along with secular education. But the fact that Muslims also attend *maktab*s for religious education before they begin formal schooling does not necessarily imply that a religious education is all they want, or what they prefer. Religious education is no alternative to a secular one. *Maktab*s are neighbouring schools, often attached to mosques that provide religious education to children who attend other schools to get mainstream education. Thus, *maktab*s provide part-time religious education and are complementary to the formal educational institutions. Muslim students study in both formal educational institutions and *maktab*s at the same time. Muslim parents usually do not have time and ability to teach the Holy *Quran* and to give *deen-i-talim* ('*deen*' means 'religion' and '*talim*' means 'education') to their children and so they either hire private tutors or admit their children to *maktab*s, in addition to secular schools.<sup>15</sup> Muslim children go to *maktab*s either in the morning before going to their regular schools or in the evening after coming back from schools.<sup>16</sup> Some of the children who attend *maktab*s are less than four years old and so they are not enrolled in school for general education yet.<sup>17</sup>

In *maktab*s, an Islamic foundational course is imparted to the children along with moral values based on Islamic teachings. Not only do they teach reading the *Quran* and offering prayers (*namaz*), they also teach the five moral principles to follow in daily life that is *Imaaniyaat* (faith), *Ibaadat* (acts of worship), *Mu'aamalat* (business dealings), *Mu'aashirat* (social life), *Akhlaaqiyaat* (good character and behaviour). Most of the well-to-do Muslim families keep a private/home tutor or *Maulvi* for imparting religious education. Unlike *maktab*s, such private tutors teach the children of the Muslim families only the *Ibaadat* part of the Islamic teaching. In *Maktab*, a person following Islamic faith is taught whatever he/she needs to know about the basic requirement in living a life from beginning to the end of his/her life on the basis of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. Such course also has techniques to make children more enthusiastic about learning and enable them to understand the Islamic value of their rights and duties.

There are some private schools in Imphal and Thoubal districts which provide elementary lessons in Arabic and Urdu (like the *deeniyat* course which are taught in *maktab*s) along with modern education. For Muslims, such private schools provided both religious and worldly education (*deeni* and *dunyawi talim*). Studying in this school served two purposes to the parents. Muslim parents do not have to send their children separately to a *Maktab* for religious education and also they get satisfaction that their children are studying at an institution comparable to a good English medium private school.<sup>18</sup>

Most families favour formal education over a *madrasa* education. There are more Muslim students in government and private schools than in *madrasas*. These days, sons and daughters of *maulvis/maulanas* and *Imams* are also studying modern education in private English-medium schools. Poor Muslims, who cannot afford secular education, are the ones who send their children to *madrasas* for education. Very often one finds that *madrasas* have indeed provided schooling to Muslim children where there is an acute shortage of formal educational institutions in Muslim-concentrated areas. *Madrasa Imdadul Islam* in Thoubal district, *Darul-Uloom* at Lilong, *Aziza Madrasa* (residential *madrasa* for Muslim girls) at Khumidok set good examples of such *madrasas* in Manipur. *Madrasas* have provided schooling to Muslim children where there is no school in the neighbourhood and thereby they acquire some level of literacy or education.<sup>19</sup> According to *Maulvi* of the *Jamia Mohammadia Madrasa* at Yairipok Singa, students of *madrasa* (where he is incharge) are sent to nearby primary schools for English education after completing their daily classes in the *madrasa*. On the request of the authority of the *madrasa*, the government gave *kurta-pyjama* as a school uniform for the primary school where this *madrasa* going students are studying so that the students can use this uniform both in *madrasa* and in school.<sup>20</sup> By understanding ground realities, the paper tried to emphasise that the study on Muslim community in Manipur should not lack analytical depth and discuss the problem in a theoretical vacuum. It also emphasised the necessity to substantiate theories with empirical work.

### Endnotes:

1Mohammad Sanjeer Alam, "Education and Exclusion of Muslims" in Zoya Hasan and Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *India Social Development Report 2012-Minorities at the Margins* (New Delhi: Oxford University press, 2013) p.208

2 Jeebanlata Salam, *State, Civil Society and Right to Education* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2013) p.228-229

3 *Ibid*, p.229

4 *Ibid*

5Feroja Syed, *Inequalities and Deprivation of Religious Minorities: A Study of the Manipuri Muslims in Urban and Rural Settings*, Ph.D Thesis (Unpublished), Gauhati University, Guwahati, 2018, p.105

6Jeebanlata Salam, *op.cit.*, p.228

7 *Ibid.*, p.101

8 Cited in *Ibid*, p.96

9Feroja Syed, *op.cit.*,

10*Ibid*

11 Jeebanlata Salam, *op.cit.*, p.230

12 Feroja Syed, *op.cit.*, p.112

13 *Ibid*

14 *Ibid*

15 *Ibid.*, p.113

16 *Ibid*

17 *Ibid*

18 *Ibid.*, p.117

19Sachar Committee Report, p.78

20 Cited in Feroja Syed, *op.cit.*, pp. 114-115