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Status of education among the Muslims of Manipur: prospects and challenges

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Abstract

Education is one of the most instrumental tools of sustainable development of any society, individual and community. It can channelize the rural areas to a higher priority basis and platform. To become a knowledge society and community is to develop the essence of higher education explicitly. It is important to remember the words of B. R. Ambedkar, "Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone. My final word to you 'Educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself'." In an under-developed state like Manipur, there are many problems faced by the people particularly the Muslim community on a large scale. How this obstacle can be removed is only through explicit higher education. In this seminal piece, an attempt has been made to explore analytically the historical juncture of educational status among the Muslim community of Manipur. Another attempt is being made to examine the problems and challenges faced by the Muslim community in getting higher education in Manipur. Does the state have an 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' policy in the promotion and developmental works of higher educational institutes belonging to the marginalized communities with special reference to Muslim community? There is much essential to be focused on the roles of state in the promotion of higher educational institute among the marginalized communities particularly the Muslim community in the state. All these fundamental issues with regard to the status of education along with their problems and prospects need to be explored and examined as objectively as possible here.

Keywords: 1.Manipur, 2.Muslim, 3.Meitei, 4.Higher Education, 5.Educational 6.Institutes, and Quota.

1. Introduction

Manipur is situated at the easternmost border of India which is surrounded mostly by the hills and mountains. Around ninety two percent of the total state area is under the coverage of hills. The other remaining eight percent is covered by the valley areas. It is a land populated and lodged by different ethnic groups such as Meiteis (local community who are typically and practically Hinduised professed community), Muslims (locally known as Meitei-Pangal), Tribals (Kukis and Nagas), and Non-Manipuris like *Mayangs*. It means that it is a land comprising of multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic state. They started staying in Manipur since time immemorial except the *Mayangs*.

Education is the fundamental instrumental tool of sustainable development of any community, society and individual. It reflects someone's identity and changes from one status to another at the medium of social hierarchy.¹ In this context, the former President APJ Abdul Kalam said that "the primary purpose of education in

a country such as India is to develop and enhance the potential of our human resources and progressively transform it into a knowledge society. Such a society will generate products and services that are rich in both explicit and tacit knowledge. In fact, the true capital of such a knowledge society lies in its knowledge workers." Further, he told that "our educational system should, therefore, re-align itself at the earliest to meet the needs of these challenges and gear itself to participate in this process of social transformation. The networking of universities is the first step towards creating knowledge centers that can meet the demands of an age that was born out of the convergence of technologies. Therefore, it is only natural that human minds should also converge in the knowledge era." Thus basic education becomes the pillar of higher education of any community which is so essential among the Muslims of Manipur nowadays.

Considering the educational status among the Muslims of Manipur since their habitation in Manipur from the beginning of the seventeenth century, it is pointed out that their educational status needs to be addressed and investigated as much critically as possible. In this present study, there has been an attempt of the roles of the state for the promotion of Higher Educational Institutes particularly adhering to the Muslim community which I try to focus it emphatically here. No doubt, the state has been giving different facilities for the welfare and well-being of the community like the reservation-cum-quota system introduced recently in the state which is briefly described below. Last but not the least, it is essential to analyze the prospects and problems or challenges faced by the Muslim community in getting higher education unlike other ethnic communities in Manipur. Why are they having bottlenecks in tackling all these possible problems? Does the state follow an 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' policy towards the marginalized communities peculiarly to the Muslim community? A close examination focusing on all these elemental issues and problems need to be taken into account considerably here.

2. Historical status of muslim's education

The Muslims started their settlement in Manipur in the beginning of seventeenth century during the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652 AD). In the *Cheitharol Kumpapa*, the royal chronicle of Manipur, *Meitinggu* (king) Mungyampa gave lessons on warfare to his royal son *Yipungo* (male) Khagemba. It is further explained in the *Cheitharol Kumpapa* that "Khagemba ordered (them) to produce (more) Meetei books and reading and writing began to be taught on a wider scale in 1616 AD". Moreover, it is pointed out that *Yipungo Aahan* Khongjomba began to learn reading and writing. No prohibition was being made with regard to the learning and teaching process during the seventeenth century. The art of writing in Bengali script was introduced with the coming of Muslims in Manipur as noted by J.C. Higgins.

After the settlements of Muslims in Manipur in the beginning of the seventeenth century, king Khagemba permitted Mohammad Sani, the *qazi* and the *Shanglakpa* (post related to the politico-religious affairs), to attend the court. Since Muhammad Sani spoke Bengali and Urdu, he was given the job of translating messages from Taraf into Meiteilon. Notwithstanding this, they did not pay serious attention to education, let alone western education.

The Muslims in Manipur might have learnt the Meiteilon written in Bengali script from the persons such as Muhammad Sani, Syed Ambiya, Syed Abdulla, Syed Kalka Hussain, Sheikh Junaid/Chunalia, Sheikh Siliman (Suleiman), Sifar Muhammad, Sheikh Seijanat, Syed Ngangba, Sheikh Ngangba in the early period of the seventeenth century. There was a *Lairikyengbam* (learned in writing and reading) clan among the Muslims. It was believed by the Muslims of Manipur that English education would destroy the purity of their creed. It is possible that in the initial stage, the Muslims in Manipur restricted themselves to learning Arabic, Urdu, and the knowledge of the Qur'an.

There is no evidence of formal religious and secular institutions of education of Muslims in Manipur during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This might be due to their lack of interest in education. On the other hand, some scholars have suggested that having come from Sylhet, they used to teach their children the Persian language at home. Such practice continued from the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652) to king Gaurashyam Maramba (1752-1753). But, the period between 1754 and 1891 with regard to their educational status was disappointing. It is because of the fact that no substantial information pertaining to the educational status of Muslims in Manipur was available during this period. Indeed, they started learning theological education in the latter part of the nineteenth century as was evident from the fact that the first Maulana namely Maulana Ibadullah (1840-1921) at Irong Chesaba Mayai Leikai (Thoubal District) appeared and started imparting theological education. Maulana Kiramat Ali and Maulana Abdul Jalil are reported to be the earliest persons who went outside Manipur to study Islamic theology during the reigns of king Chandrakirti (1850-1886) and king Surchandra (1886-1890) after Maulana Ibadullah came back from Sylhet to Manipur in 1871. Moreover, the first *madrassa* namely the Madrasa Muhammadiya later on known as Madrasa Mazharul Uloom in the early part of the twentieth century was instituted at Mayang Imphal Bengoon (Imphal West District) whose principal was Maulana Abdul Halim of Wangmayum clan, a student of Maulana Ibadullah. There seems to be some truth in Allen's statement that Manipuri Muslims "are said to be fairly well acquainted with the doctrines of their religion". And the first *haji* among the Muslims of Manipur was Amuraba during the rule of King Gambhir Singh (1825-1834). The basis and relevance of this statement is that Amuraba along with others mentioned above played a crucial role in the expansion of theological education among the Muslims of Manipur like the teaching of rituals among the male and female, etc.

With the establishment of some *madarsas* and LP Schools in and around Lilong in the early part of the twentieth century, we find that the priority has been given to the men's education rather than girls' education by confining the latter within the corner of domestic work and agricultural activities. With the passage of time, and after the merger of Manipur with India in 1949, Manipuri Muslims started their modern education by sending their children to schools and colleges, which means that they changed their attitude towards modern English education. Out of the total persons staying outside the state for education of male and female students, the ratio is 86.36 percent and 13.64 percent respectively. The Muslims male literacy rate in the rural areas of Manipur according to 2001 census is 72.1 percent but female literacy rate is 37.7 percent. In the urban areas literacy rate is 82.2 percent among the Muslim male persons yet among the female Muslims it is around 51.0 percent. In contrast with the repercussions of 1981, the pass percentage of HSLC of Muslim students was 1.66 percent and 0.73 percent at the Higher Secondary level in 1989.

Further, till the year 1998, there were only four Muslim women post-graduates. Up to 1995, there were only 5704 matriculates, 1822 graduates and 86 technical and professional graduates. In 1955, only two girls passed matriculation and attended college. One female student completed her graduation in 1959. The first M.A. Degree Holder appeared only in 1963. In 1979-80, more than twenty girls had completed their masters and graduates. Unluckily, there were no Muslims girl's schools and secondary, colleges and universities in the Muslim dominated sectors like Kairang, Kshtrigao, Hatta, and other places but there were government higher secondary schools at Irong, Yairipok, Lilong Haoreibi, Moijing. Presently, both Muslims men and women started sending their children not only to the *Madrasas*, government schools but also to the Christian Missionary schools and private establishment schools after realizing the pinnacle of modern English education in employment facilities. Contrary to the Meitei community, this is quite low. For bringing a balanced task of all these loopholes, political leaders, social workers, teachers, and guardians should try to work out together shoulder by shoulder.

3. Role of the state: prospects of reservation system

The roles of the state towards the minority community especially Muslim community in Manipur are to some extent small quantitatively because of the data available with regard to the health, educational sector, employment and other relevant public service sectors. Serious attention needs to be channelized from the government side for the welfare of the community's pathetic and deplorable condition. Numbers of first class officers, second class officers and third class officers can be easily counted at finger points. The root cause of such backwardness of Muslim community in Manipur was due to the result of negligence of government and spontaneous mass leadership among the Muslim community in Manipur. Despite being the largest Minority community in Manipur, their status are very deplorable. There is no significant improvement on the educational conditions of Muslims.

Further little intervention of the state can be viewed from the reservation-cum-quota system in jobs given by it in December 2006 during the chief minister ship of Okram Ibobi Singh who said that "announcing this, Singh said though the community comprised seven percent of the total population of the state, but it represented only 2.57 percent in the government's grade I and II jobs." It is evident from the fact that the twenty-nine officially recognized tribal groups have 20-seats exclusively reserved for them in the 60-member Manipur state assembly and up to 31 percent reservation in all government jobs. But by contrast Muslims have been forced to recoil in their own ghettos without any kind of help from the government. In this context, Sajjad Hassan claims that states like Manipur and Andhra Pradesh recently have taken affirmative action legislations for Muslims specifically, through creating sub-quotas for Muslim OBCs within the OBC quota for reservations in jobs and educational institutions, arguing that the entire OBC Muslim section was socially and educationally backward, and hence eligible for affirmative action under Art 15 (4) of the constitution and it provides a political settlement thus enabling access to entitlements for Muslims and state legitimacy in the future scenario. He further said that these states have the aft of Sachar Committee Report.

But this unenthusiastic announcement hasn't carried passable impacts as is evident from the fact that though it gave some remedial measures for the improvement of this minority and marginalized community to some extent, this community is still at the initial and primitive stage in the employment scale and is lagging behind the other religious communities in Manipur. For example, for the last four hundred years from the seventeenth century onwards, Muslims have been staying in Manipur peacefully with the local community except one fateful event in May 1993. Till now only three persons cleared UPSC with a gap of five years namely Noor Rahman Sheikh IFS (2002) who is now the Deputy Director Hajj Consulate General India, Altab Hussain IRS (2007), and Yumkhaibam Sabir IFS (2012). In the state PCS Exam, only a handful of persons such as Halim Chaudhury, A. Rahman, I. G. Rahman, Samim, Samad, Sheikh Abdul Hakim, Farook Khutheibam, and other persons cleared it recently. Then numbers of professors in the Muslim community of Manipur are easily accountable. Frankly speaking, only one Muslim male Assistant Professor namely Md. Hamidur Rahaman is there in the Biotech Department of Manipur University. The number of Muslim boys and girls, who are doing M. Phil and Ph. D in Manipur University and other outside Universities like DU, AMU, JNU, etc., is relatively less. Something is substantial development rather than nothing after this reservation policy. But it could not cover the expected and satisfied ramifications of this minority community which the government pays serious attention for the improvement, development and stability of this community along with other communities for making the state a balanced developmental state in future perspective.

4. Higher educational institutes belonging to marginalized communities particularly the muslim community and its historical roles of spreading higher education among them:

There are shortages of Higher Educational Institutes in Manipur belonging to marginalized communities with special reference to Muslim community since the establishment of their settlement from the seventeenth

century onwards. Historically speaking, being an ethnic-based centric state, higher education has spread to and fro in the corners of the different ethnic groups in the course of the centuries in Manipur in respect of the number of institutions and enrolment of students. There was only one college-Dhanamanjuri College (DM) in 1946-47 which marked a sustainable venture in the task of higher education in Manipur.ⁱⁱ Nowadays, higher educational institutes' numbers increased over the years in Manipur as is evident from the available documentation such as two Central Universities namely Manipur University (MU) and Central Agricultural University (CAU) and sixty eight colleges encompassing thirty four Government Colleges, eight Government Aided Colleges, eighteenth Permanently Affiliated Private Colleges and thirteenth Private Affiliated Colleges.ⁱⁱⁱ There are around seven women colleges in Manipur. In the case of number of students enrolled in the colleges, there have been tremendous changes in the spread of higher education. From only 60 students in 1947-48, it rose to 35,424 in 2001-2002. The share of girl students to the total enrolment has also increased considerably, from only 2.01 percent in 1950-51 to 44.3 percent in 2001-2002.

It is clearly evident from the Lilong Haoreibi College, the lone college belonging to Muslim dominated area called Lilong Haoreibi (Thoubal District) and Muslims was set up in 1976 AD. It was affiliated to Manipur University (A Central University). Prior to 1976, almost all the Muslim boys and girls were dispersed in different colleges for seeking higher education and boosting up the Muslim community in Manipur. It would be in vain if we have not paid attention the spearheading, calculative and historical task and contribution of the life of late Founder Principal of the college itself, Md. Abdul Wahab. On his to and fro long journey from his home Haoreibi Mayai Leikai, Lilong to Dhanamanjuri College (DM College), being a senior Lecturer, he used to think of establishing a College for the Muslims' higher education particularly Muslim's girls higher education after realizing and seeing a lot of gruesome outlooks where Muslims girls left seeking higher education after Tenth Class in and around his home area on account of being unavailability of a college. A considerable number of Muslim selfless dignitaries of Lilong area held several meetings with the hope of establishment a Co-Educational Institute in the local area by reason of Muslim community's future generation. It is pointed out that a spacious land area of Lilong Ushoipokpi which is referred to as *Sanpham* (grazing place of cows and bulls in Meiteilon) and used by Sir Churachand Singh Maharaj of Manipur (1891-1941 AD) after driving out the cows and bulls from the nearby "Sangom Sang"-milking shed still used the name by the local people, was consistently kept as reserved place by the Muslim leaders for The Lilong Haoreibi College, Lilong. They have done donations with firm and effort. Through their willful effort and by the grace of God, they got thousand of rupees from different sections of people regardless of areas, caste and creed, and religion. Its appointment of the four LDC posts was determined by the local people of the area, which is never accountable in this modern democratic and scientific cosmos. Within a few years the number of girl students belonging to both Muslims and non- Muslim sections accelerated breakthrough. The governing body members including the Principal had great pleasure to see the girls and boys coming from near and far areas of Manipur. For the time being, the governing body had structured the good college building completely and other necessary equipments chiefly through the agency of donations.

Moreover, it is late Md. Alimuddin, the first Chief Minister of Statehood Manipur, the role model of the state in educational field, and a renowned politician from the Lilong Constituency itself, who took a responsible portrayal in painting the actual picture of the Lilong Haoreibi College, Government of Manipur. It came into existence in 1980. To cite his contribution towards the educational field in Manipur briefly, he laid the foundation of Manipur University which is now the Central University in 1970s at Canchipur (Imphal) and RIMS (The Regional Institute of Medical Sciences) on 22nd May 1972 at Imphal. During the tenure of his Chief Minister-ship, he established the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur in 1972 along with the conduct of the first High School Leaving Certificate Examination. The 300 bedded general Hospital at Lamphelpat (Imphal) was one of the referred hospitals in the Northeast Regions. The Post Graduate Centre of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Imphal was boosted up by adding three new courses such as Manipuri Language and Literature, Political

Science and Applied Biology. Manipur Public Service Commission (MPSC) for conducting higher education examinations was being introduced by him. Many other socio-economic activities like the establishment of Khansari Sugar Mill on 4th March, 1973, in Wangbal (Thoubal District) with the capacity of producing sixty tones per day sugar canes crushing capacity, etc., were being established by him. Though he did a lot of beneficial and sacrificing works for the welfare of the state, but he did not do any sustainable developmental task of the Muslim community which will impact and create a long lasting expertise for his community except this Lilong Haoreibi College. This is one of the hollow pictures of our leaders towards the development of this community. He is still regarded as a pioneer in the history of Manipur particularly in the educational and political affairs irrespective of religious communities.

After this year, the orthodox rural people came to know that female children are also able to learn and feed their parents as their brothers do. Along with the increase of boy's students, the number of female students coming to the college increases year after years. Apart from this, different *madarsas* were set up in several local areas of Manipur. This college especially for the Manipuri Muslims boys and girls gave a distinctive place for seeking higher education on a much large scale. Without having such a higher Institute for the Muslim community in Manipur, the extant situation which the community appeals for learning and pursuing higher education would be in bad shape. Due to the establishment of such a higher institute, it is pointed out that there is a continual radical swift by carrying a stepping outlook through the educational realization among the Muslim Community of Manipur.

The progressive ideological mindset of the Founder Principal Md. Abdul Wahab was shortened by his untimely death on a road accident on Friday , the 26th November 1982 afternoon on his way from his Lilong Haoreibi College, Lilong to the Director of Education (U), Government of Manipur, Imphal for consultation with the then Director himself for bringing betterment of the College. His premature death provided a remarkable chapter to the mindset of Muslim community especially to all members of Lilong Haoreibi College and all the people of Lilong praying for the peace of his soul and uttering the words "The Dawn of Muslim Women Education is firmly planted on the rocky soil of Lilong by a weak physique and high personality using his own patience as drizzle". Some Muslim leaders formed a College Governing Body (CGB) and visited Guwahati University, Assam several times for getting College affiliation (Manipur University comes only in 1980). Finally the affiliation was permitted by the University on Minority ground. The governing body members personally seek female teachers possessing the recruitment rules of college, particularly for encouraging Women's education in the area. They made different rules especially for the recruitment of female teachers. It can give easy path to the functioning of the college. In 1977, at the initial stage of the college, there were only two Muslim girls in the twelfth Class namely Miss Laliyan Begum and Miss Rasijan Begum. In the succeeding period, their numbers increased in that class. Though the numbers of boys were satisfied, the governing body members wanted to increase the numbers of girls' students coming to the college after passing H.S.LC Examination or Matriculation. They thought how to instigate the orthodox Muslim people of the locality to send them female children to school. Ultimately, they brought out many changes by recruiting many staffs emphasising on female staffs for LDC Posts. Actually why they did so is to morally and educationally boost up the Muslims ladies for the development of the society. Though they tried their best to bring out the changes at the social and educational levels, obstacles and hardships still exist in the social and educational tasks of Muslim community in the rural areas of Manipur. Alert and awakening of Muslim educated men and women are hence necessary in the society to bring more active part in the modern social scenario.

Despite having such institute for seeking higher education, many gaps and lapses are there in the set-up of Higher Educational Institutes for the Muslim community in Manipur because of lack of finance, government policies, religious reasons, political, mass media, well-experienced and qualified leaders. This institute could not cover all the areas except the Lilong area. There is a single Press (Print Media) of this

community recently. Why the Muslim community is lagging behind other communities particularly the educational expertise, the pillar of sustainable development of any community can be understood clearly from the above mentioned factors which can be discussed below. How can a community stay and sustain as a full-fledged development community in the field of education in this state of pathetic and uncertain condition? The information about the state following exclusive approach of education and employment towards the marginalized communities' especially Muslim community in Manipur has not been exposed openly. There is a need of government inclusive policies. This needs to be tackled seriously and attentively so much so that their condition is at par with the other communities staying in Manipur educationally. On the other hand, a large number of Higher Secondary Schools were set up in different parts of Manipur. As compared to other communities, Muslims higher secondary schools are less and in decline shape.

5. Challenges and Remedial measures: A critical framework

Like the other Indian State's Muslims, Muslims in Manipur faced several challenges and problems mostly with regard to the educational, social, cultural and political affairs. Considering the challenges of the status of education among the Muslims of Manipur, misconception about religion was the first and foremost challenge faced by them in Manipur but nowadays it seems to be in the recovered stage. That is why, they are educationally backward which made them lagging behind other religious communities. Further, they are ignorance of the advancement of education through constitutional provision. Their educational backwardness is a long term process.

Several reasons are being highlighted here as to why the Manipuri Muslims are educationally backward:

1. One of the important reasons of it was due to their low socio-economic conditions. Actually, they are very poor as is evident from their standard living condition. They are mostly staying in the river banks and rural areas which make them financially constraints and unable to pursue higher education. Their vision is blurring towards education because majority of Muslim parents are illiterate, they are unaware about the importance of modern education. They live in large family size and give greater importance to early marriages.

2. Religious misconception is also one factor which gives serious contributing impacts to the backwardness of the status of education among the Muslims of Manipur. It is because of the fact that English education is impure thought by the Muslims in the early period of their settlement in Manipur. Such misconception created a strong mechanism to the retardation of the development of education which is still retained in some sections of Muslim community in Manipur.

3. Another important factor of it is that a higher rate of dropouts after high schools without pursuing higher secondary education and other degrees happened among the Muslims of Manipur.

4. There is absent of vocation education to improve their image to develop through education. There is negative attitude towards girl's education among Muslims.

5. There is strong misconception about the 'purity' of girls if they have studied in the higher educational institutes like universities or abroad.

6. Almost all the schools are traditional which make them redundant in employment facilities.

7. There are no systematic arrangements of modern education in the theological studies like Maktabas and Madrasas which are going through based on the traditional medium. They do not have the computer and commerce subjects which are important as a basic of modern education.

8. There is a lack of fully dedicated and qualified leaders among the Muslims of Manipur at the political, social, economic, and educational levels in this modern dynamic and scientific age.

Remedial measures

A fully equipped platform and institute for Muslims in Manipur for higher education is the need of the hour and to be established by the Government of Manipur to bring their educational status at par with the other communities. The existence of many premier higher educational institutes of Minorities in other states like Jamia Millia Islamia (Delhi), AMU, Darul Uloom Deoband (UP), Osmania University (Hyderabad), etc., have sharply brought out some improvements towards the status of education among the Muslims of India, but it is little to do with the Muslims of Manipur. Consciousness of the significance of modern education along with employment scopes and self-employment schemes should be increased at a rapid pace among the Muslims of Manipur. Government scholarships and incentives are necessary for the deprived and poor Muslims in Manipur. Reforms should be done to the Madarsas on the line of modern education by adding different courses like computer and vocational education without leaving religious injunctions. Strong organization should be formed and updated by the Government of Manipur for the uplift of the conditions of primary, secondary and higher educational learning. Change of attitude of Muslim parents towards the girls for higher education should be at any cost performed. They should be morally and intellectually guided. Last but not the least, a dedicated and veritable Muslim leaders having a heart and soul commitment towards the task of higher education is indispensable in the society.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the status of education among the Muslims of Manipur after studying their challenges and prospects is pathetic and deplorable. There was little improvement about it. Still it needs to be shaped in modernistic trend out of traditional pattern. Their educational backwardness is far worse than other religious communities. An awareness-cum-alert making professional programs are necessary to be conducted among the Muslims of Manipur. Madarsas need to be modernized on a large scale by adding substantial vocational and professional courses which at least gives some significant momentum to the spirit of educational status among the Muslims of Manipur. There is less number of works about the condition of education and nobody has touched and treated it painstakingly as to why the Muslims are educationally backwardness in Manipur. To give basic education to the females is the need of the hour. Patriarchal mindset should be at any cost left for the improvement of the society. Apart from this, the roles of the Government of Manipur should be more active and sharp in giving educationally related funds and incentives for the marginalized communities with special reference to Muslims of Manipur. The roles of genuine Muslim leaders with dedicated heart and soul for the development of society are necessary. Hence, it can be safely concluded that the status of education among the Muslims of Manipur is far lagging behind the other communities staying in Manipur and extremely deplorable.

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