Chapter V

IMPACT OF MODERN EDUCATION ON THE CHANGING STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MANIPUR

The word education is a Latin word that means the act of teaching. The function of the teaching is to draw out rather than to put in. It was with this view that Addison wrote that education when it works upon a noble mind, draws out to view every latest virtue and perfection which without such helps are never able to make their appearance. According to another derivation, the word education is synonymous with the art of developing and cultivating the various physical mental and moral powers of the mind.

The Indian have many terms for education some important ones are ‘Sikha’ which comes from the Sanskrit word ‘Shas’ meaning ‘to discipline’, ‘to teach’, ‘to control’, ‘to instruct’ and ‘Vidya’ (knowledge) also derived from the another Sanskrit root word ‘Vid’ meaning ‘to know’. The Meitei word education is ‘Mahei’. Sometimes ‘Mahei Mashing’ is also used, ‘Mashing ‘ if taken to be derived from the word ‘Mashin’ meaning ‘skill, performance’ or trade reflects the importance of learning a particular skill in the Meitei society.

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3 Jamini, Education in Manipur, Published by Rai Pravina Brothers, Imphal, 1989 p. 4.
4 Jayshree, op. cit. p.2
The Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi said that “educate a man means you educate a man, but educate a woman means you educate a civilization”. A woman will educate her children, who will in turn raise educate families as well. This education sets off a chain reaction of improved livelihoods and opportunities for generations to come. The education of women is one of the most important ways to achieve sustainable development and benefit the entirety of a nation. Education for girls has also been seen as one of the most effective ways to lift families out of poverty. Education raises the level of consciousness by bringing change in the personality and attitude of a person and sensitizing individuals to the larger social needs and issues. To create an educated society the role of women and requirement of their education is well known. Islam attaches immense importance to the acquisition and extension of ‘ilm’ or knowledge. The Quran, the Ahadith and other sciences are the only road to the understanding of truth. The ‘Surah-i-Iqra’ opens with an injunction addressed to the Prophet to ‘Read’, and the place assigned to education in Islam can be best appreciated in the light of importance attached to ‘ink’, ‘pen’ and ‘paper’. The Prophet recommended education as meritorious in the eyes of the Almighty. He made learning compulsory for all the faithful. A Hadith of the Prophet reads: ‘People cannot do a greater good to their children, than to train and educate them properly’. And stressing the importance of properly educating girls, the Prophets say, ‘If a person has daughters or sisters and he treats them properly, and arranges their marriage after they grow up, Allah will reward him with Paradise’. The most important duty of parents is to impart education to their offspring.\(^5\)

teachings of Islam are universal. Muhammad, the Prophet recommended education as meritorious in the eyes of the Almighty and invited all to acquire it. He emphasized the acquisition of learning and made it compulsory for all the faithful men as well as women. Thus, education was a compulsory obligation for all the Muslims.

The term education has a broad implication that it is almost next to impossible to give its precise meaning. In fact it is rightly stated that definitions and interpretations of the term ‘Education’ have differed from time to time, place to place, person to person, from society to society to conform to the needs, direction and aspirations of the contemporary society.\(^6\)

In the Vedic period, girls were mainly educated at their homes but there are ample proofs that there were Rishis or female Rishis who received their education in hermitages.\(^7\) Gradually a women’s status began to decline, they were declared unfit to study Vedic literature but literary education continued to be given to them. Special effort was made like appointing tutors to give them a good grounding in domestic and culinary art and fine arts like music, dancing, painting, and household decorations etc. Like the higher-class Hetaerae women of Greece, the higher-class courtesans of ancient India were highly educated. Vitsayayana in his ‘Kamasutra’ lays down that they should be trained in 64 arts and crafts.\(^8\)

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\(^{6}\) Ngangom Jayshree Devi, op. cit., p. 3
\(^{7}\) Padma Ramchandra and Vasantha Ramachandra, Education in India, National book Trust, Noida, 2005, p. 16.
\(^{8}\) Jayshree, op. cit. p. 3 Cit N. L. gupta, Women Education Through The Age, concept Publishing company, New Delhi, 2000, p. 35.
During the Medieval period, the invading Muslims defeated majority of the Hindu rulers. During the period of Muslim dominace, female literacy received a further setback. Many old and rich traditional Indian families of the earlier ruling section were ruined and they were no more in a position to make special arrangements to educate their daughters at home. Among the Muslims, it was confined to the rich and aristocratic families only. Princesses along with Princes were exposed to higher levels of education which included law and administrative subjects\(^9\).

The Muslim educational system largely being theologially inclined instilled moral values into students. But on the other hand it changed the attitude of the Meitei Pangals in their degree of social participation in traditional customs and rituals of the Meitei, as for example, ‘Thabal chongba’ (Holi dance), Khubak-i-sei (song), dance drama (sumang lila) etc\(^10\). Earlier Muslims actively participated in such events, but from the twentieth century, when more emphasis was placed on strictly following Quranic injunctions, participation of Muslims fell dramatically\(^11\).

Before the establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi, the Muslims had already developed a system of Education in Islamic countries of Central and Western Asia. Baghdad under the Abbasids was the most important centre of

\(^9\) Ngangom Jayshree Devi, op. cit. p. 11
\(^10\) Salam Irene op. cit., p.66, Cit. Mahmodah Khaanam, The System of Education prevalent among the Muslim of Manipur, Unpublished dissertation Manipur University, 1990 op.cit, p.87
\(^11\) Ibid.
Islamic learning and had developed certain traditions which became the basis of the Muslim educational system in India\textsuperscript{12}.

During the Mughal period, girls received their education at home or in the house of some teachers living in close proximity. There were special arrangements for the education of the ladies of the royal household and some of the princesses were distinguished scholars having their own ateliers. Occasional education was imparted through a system of apprenticeship either in the house of Ustads (teachers) or in Karkhanas (manufacturing centers).

Muslim education endeavored to achieve two basic aims- religious and secular. The religious aim of education included the study of the Quran as a source or basis of knowledge, and the study of sectarian, moral and spiritual disciplines including the basic articles of faith. Secular aims included the synthesis of secular knowledge and religious belief, the conception and extensive practice of equal educational opportunities and the establishment of teacher guides and authorities in the forms of knowledge, based upon revelation or direct injunction. In fact, it was the practical aims of Muslim secular education which was responsible for application of technological expertise to the development of irrigation system, textile manufacture, iron and steel products etc\textsuperscript{13}.

Men’s education remained a priority, especially as women were confined to domestic chores, agricultural duties and other profit making activities.

\textsuperscript{12} P.N. chopra, B.N. Puri, M.N. Das, A Social Cultural and Economic History of India, ol II (Medieval India), Mac Millan India Ltd. 1974, Delhi. p. 152
Education of girls was limited to the recitation of the Holy Quran, learning how to become a dutiful wife and responsible mother, and being conscientious with reference to religious obligations\textsuperscript{14}. Before the introduction of modern system of education, Manipur had her own indigenous system of education, which emphasized all around development of a person, rather than imparting literacy; most of the knowledge was transmitted orally form one generation to the next before the art of writing and printing were introduced. Parents were mainly responsible for imparting knowledge to the children, and family was the main agency of education\textsuperscript{15}.

The British for their own interest desired to introduce some form of basic modern education in Manipur. But the Manipuris either did not realize the necessity or usefulness of such education or were indifferent or hostile to such initiatives. This is why Dun made the remark: ‘In 1872 a vernacular school was established in Manipur at the suggestion of the late Political Agent, Major General W.F. Nuthall, and the Government of Bengal presented books and maps & c., to the value of Rs. 400 or 500 but for want of encouragement on the part of the authorities, it has been nearly closed, some few boys attend occasionally. The Manipuri preferred remaining ignorant. So illiterate are they, that some of the highest officials can neither read nor write, and are not a whit ashamed for their want of knowledge’\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 60
\textsuperscript{16}E.W. Dun, Gazeteer of Manipur, Akansha Publishing House New Delhi, 2013, p. 28
The form of women’s education prior to the advent of the British in Manipur was very different. The emphasis was on how to efficiently manage a household, and technical skill was provided in crafts like weaving and cooking, and for women of the elite martial arts was also included.

In the context of the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur Western education was introduced with the coming of colonial rule. If one goes by available secondary sources, prior to the introduction of western education literacy was limited to few males; literate women were almost negligible. Prior to the advent of Hinduism as well as after its advent, education for women irrespective of hill or valley was mainly limited to learning the household chores and different types of skills, which helped her in earning a livelihood. Many types of skills were prevalent, different from one place to another, but one special skill whose knowledge was regarded to be mandatory for all girls, irrespective of where she lived or the group she belonged to, was weaving. These societies also had certain institutions, which helped in educating the girls at certain stages of life. In the household of royal and upper class families, military and administrative education was also imparted to some of the women. The British colonial officials introduced modern education and women began to take part in it.

Before the coming of the British in Manipur, education was largely informal in nature consisting mainly of learning vocational skills and the ways of life of the community. The study of history of women’s education in Manipur

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thus has to be taken up with the above factors as a backdrop. Inculturation formed an important aspect of education in pre-literate society. The parents and the nearby relatives carried out the act of teaching. In the sphere of women’s education, the emphasis was on vocational training, the areas of education were training them in various skills and crafts like agricultural activities, weaving and art of wine making besides the usual household chores.

In the Meiteis traditional belief the teacher occupies an important position, they are given the status of ‘Lai-Guru’ (Lai=God; Guru=teacher) and they are the elements for imparting education and advice the importance of Lai Gurus was so great that they were regarded as persons who could lead on to the path of virtue, then to heaven. When one comes to women’s education only the Ningollakpa (person who controls the unmarried women) and the Ningollakpis were directly involved. The Muslim women may also have had the same Ningollakpa or Ningollakpis, as they were the citizens of the Kingdom and lived in the same Leikais.

King Loyumba (1074-1112) stated that Education was mainly decided by the occupation assigned to a family, including the type of specialized skill that a woman learns. The role of women covers almost the entire sphere of life—domestic, socio-economic, cultural political, religious etc. The life of the women

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18 Ibid. pp24-25  
19 Ibid. pp. 31-32  
may be divided into childhood, adolescence, marriage and old age. Though there were widows and divorcees, they were allowed to remarry or lead a life of their own. As a society of the early period, where the art of reading and writing was limited to a few persons the main aim of education for girls of this stage was to mould them to the kind of women the society regarded as ideal. For this, all-round development in physical, mental, spiritual, social, moral aesthetic sphere, etc. were aimed at. Many aspects of their education were universal. The primary concern of any society is to educate the child to control her bodily functions and to modify the instinctive behavior, as well as to encourage linguistic communication. With growth and development, there is relative development and growth on their cognitive and motor domain.

The education of women cannot be said to have made equal progress, although it was hoped, not without reason, that, in a country like Manipur where women hold such an important position in the economic activity of the State, the efforts to establish a good school for the daughters of the higher classes would have been attended with more success than has actually been the case. The failure is not improbably due to the remorse, started by malignity and disseminated by stupidity, that as soon as the girls had been satisfactorily taught to read, write, and speak English, they were to be shipped off to England, where there was said to be a scarcity of marriageable women. The basis for this untoward myth lay in the fact that at that time among all the officers of the Government, Civil and Military, then serving in Manipur, not one was married. Such rumours are constantly

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22 Jayshree, op.cit p. 45
arising in Manipur, and derived there wide circulation through the agency of the bazaars, where time hangs so heavy that such gossip is eagerly retailed and received too often ready acceptance.\textsuperscript{23}

The education of women was not neglected in ancient Manipur. Parents were mostly responsible for imparting education to their daughters. Young girls were trained in etiquette, court language, administration and even martial arts. Mothers imparted training to their daughters in embroidery, weaving and domestic matters. The girls attended Sinaipham, where groups of girls did spinning, embroidery and weaving. It was a school for girls in a sense. Beside the particular skill/art, the girls learnt manners, customs and etiquette. Every attempt was made to infuse the spirit of piety in the mind of both boys and girls\textsuperscript{24}. The Muslims in Manipur emulated the Meiteis in imparting skill in embroidery and weaving, and knowledge of religion, to their daughters\textsuperscript{25}.

In the seventeenth century, the Meitei Pangals might have learnt Meiteilon, writing it in the Bengali script, from persons such as Muhamaad Sani, Syed Ambiya, Syed Abdullah, Syed Huissein, Sheikh Zunneid/Chuleiya, Safir Muhammad Sheikh Seijanat, Syed Siliman (Suleiman), Syed Ngangba, Sheikh Noori. There was a Lairikyembam clan (learned in writing and reading) among the Meitei-Pangal. Some learned wrote Tawaz (notation in Arabic/Urdu for a patient). The Muslims believed that the learning of English would defile the purity of their creed. So it came about, that education among the Muslims was

\textsuperscript{25} Salam Irene, op.cit. p. 58.
confined in the initial stages to Arabic, Urdu and the knowledge of the Quran. They received education from Madrassahs. The Muslim pupils were taught in Arabic, Urdu and Farsi to facilitate knowledge and understanding of the importance of Kalima, Namaz, Roza, Haz and Zakat26.

The need of women’s education was not felt as the man was the head of the family and it was his duty to provide for all. Women never agitated or were even aware of the necessity of education. They were more focused of domestic and economic duties and responsibilities. Only after Manipur’s Merger some enlightened Muslims realized the benefits of education. But the transition from theological to secular learning took time, and it was even more for women who knew less of Islamic theology.

After the Anglo Manipuri War of 1891 the British encouraged the western Christian missionaries to evangelize the indigenous hill communities of the kingdom. The missionaries taught the Nagas and Kukis who very soon converted to Christianity the modern system of education and gave a script to their dialects. The Meiteis were however suspicious of the British colonialists, a couple of whom made unsuccessful attempts to establish English schools But they changed their attitude when Manipur merged with India and also participated in the modern system of education. But the tribals had a head start and some of them like Major Bob Khathing and Mr. Tonsing were inducted into the civil services. But even after Manipur became a part of India (1949) the Pangals failed to understand the importance of modern secular learning. The result was that they

26 Ibid, pp. 59-60
were reduced to the most backward community in Manipur and this adversely impacted Pangal women's status. The women lost their confidence and became isolated and self-conscious because of their lack of learning. They continued to be economically active but lacked knowledge as also upgradation of skills. Only in the last two decades of the 20th century some Muslim girls joined modern schools, usually government schools, as education was inexpensive at such institutions. Most of the Muslim families even if they were fairly affluent, would not even have thought of enrolling in the private schools which at the time were run by Christian Missionaries. They did not even understand the object of Christian education. But it was a Herculean task to bring them to the level of education of other indigenous communities of Manipur. They were still at the bottom of the educational ladder at the end of the 20th century.

When the Muslims made their entry into Manipur, Manipur had her own indigenous system of education, which emphasized all round development rather than imparting literacy. Learning was confined mainly to the traditional priestly class and the Brahmans. For learning scriptures the pupils had to go to the houses of the scholars.²⁷

The position of female education during the 19th century was practically non-existent. ‘It was when the mass of people were steeped in complete

²⁷ W. Yumjao Singh, Lesson in Islam (5 parts combining the books of Islam), Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, pp. 30-39.
illiteracy. Education was restricted even among boys only to a small section. Education among girls was still more meagre.28

The Meitei Pangals never realized the necessity for educating their women and girls till the closing decades of the 20th century. There were of course some exceptions, but by and large Muslim women and girls were extremely backward in education, and even today are reluctant to speak with confidence to most people especially researchers and interviewers.

The Meitei Pangals are far behind the other communities in the field of education. Modern education was introduced into Manipur in the 19th century first by the British administrators and later by the Christian Missionaries. The Muslims however initially concentrated on religious studies and learning was confined to the male population. It was only after Manipur was merged with India that the scope of education expanded to include secular learning. And very slowly women’s education took root. Even today women’s literacy is far behind compared with that of their male counterpart.29

There is no specific mention that Muslim youth participated in education, but in all probability they must have participated, and benefited from the education imparted. The Muslims continue to study Arabic, Persian and Urdu. The Bengali script was commonly taught in the early stage as that was the medium of education. The Muslim continued to attend “Munshee and Moulvi.”

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28 Shindhu Phadke, Women’s Status in North East India, Decent Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 334.
courses at various places outside Manipur like Dhaka, Sylhet etc. and when they returned to Manipur they tried to impart this knowledge to the menfolk but not the women\textsuperscript{30}.

Before the introduction of the formal education in the Madrassas, the first Maulvis Ebadullah had begun to teach children at his home free of cost. Children from distant as also neighboring places came to study. With the appearance of the Maulvi, education among the Manipuri Muslims was given a fresh impetus, opening a new chapter in the history of Muslim education in the state. With the establishment of Madrassas children went to these formal centers of learning for purposes of study and Muslim education took on a new dimension, becoming more official and systematic in approach\textsuperscript{31}.

With the passage of time, and after Manipur’s merger with India (1949), the Muslims usually understood the significant benefits of modern education, and children were encouraged to go to schools and colleges. In the initial phase, only males could attend Educational institutions, with only a few girls, mainly the daughters of the educated parents\textsuperscript{32}. However this caused an unfortunate reaction in the Muslim community which banned educated parents who educated their daughters, from attending the Friday prayers and gatherings at the mosque\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{31} Mahmodah Khaanam, op. cit., P. 33
\textsuperscript{32} Salam Irene, Op.cit. p. 60.
\textsuperscript{33} Interview with Bogimayum Parijan, Lillong Haoreibi Turen Ahanba, 56 years, Staff Lillong Haoreibi Collage. 25/6/2017
A new Madrassa (Lower Primary School) was established in 1907-1908 at Lilong. It is the first Lower Primary School established for the Muslims in Manipur. Again a new Madrassa was opened at Khergao, raising the number from two to three in 1909-1910.\textsuperscript{34}

Before the merger of Manipur with India (1949), Muslims did not give much importance to education. However after Manipur joined the Indian Union, it became necessary for people in the state to cast off old prejudices and superstitions which stood in the way of learning and adopt modern education so as to take their rightful place in society and state and joined the mainstream of Indian life and culture. This necessity naturally also operated upon the Muslim community, who now were forced to strive to keep pace with their counterparts in other parts of the country and for this, education became as essential priority. And after India gained independence the Muslims reacted to this by starting women’s education in the year 1949-50. This was a significant event in the history of the education of women among the Muslim community of Manipur\textsuperscript{35,36} Nevertheless, the number remained negligible in comparison to that of other communities in the state.

However in 1961 some junior high schools were established such as Lilong Muslim Junior High School and Azad junior High School\textsuperscript{37}. For the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Muhamoodah Khaanam, op.cit., p. 28-29
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 67. 
\item \textsuperscript{36} This fact has not been corroborated by any other person, and it is doubtful that, just because Manipur merged with Indian, Meitei Pangals gave up their conservative attitude towards women’s education and allowed them to immediately enroll in the western system of education. 
\item \textsuperscript{37} Government of Manipur, Department of Education Administrative Report of 1961. 
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
progress of education in the Muslim community, especially women, junior high schools play an important role. After the completion of studies at Madrassas, the children were admitted in the Junior high schools.

The changing attitude of the community towards education is evident from the increasing number of school and college going students, both male and female, not only within but also outside the state. Of the total persons staying outside the state for education of male and female students the ratio is 86.36% and 13.64% respectively\(^\text{38}\). The table of literacy rate of Muslims according to the 2001 census is- in rural areas male literacy 72.1, and female literacy 37.7, in urban areas, male literacy 82.2 and female 51.0.

The number of literates and literacy rate of Muslim population and the state as a whole according to the 2001 census is presented in Table No. 5.

Table No. 5: Number of literate and literacy Rate of Muslim and State population in Manipur, 2001 Census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of Literates</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rural</td>
<td>36,619</td>
<td>20,138</td>
<td>59,757</td>
<td>5,33,038</td>
<td>3,80,344</td>
<td>9,13,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Urban</td>
<td>18,570</td>
<td>11,280</td>
<td>29,850</td>
<td>2,20,428</td>
<td>1,76,824</td>
<td>3,97,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total</td>
<td>58,189</td>
<td>31,418</td>
<td>89,607</td>
<td>7,53,466</td>
<td>5,56,068</td>
<td>13,10,534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{38}\) Salam Irene, op.cit. p. 61.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Literacy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rural</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Urban</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source, Report on Socio-Economic Survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipur Muslims) 2004\(^{39}\))

This may be contrasted with the results of 1981; the pass percentage of the Muslim students at the High School Leaving Examination stood at only 1.66% and 0.73% at the Higher Secondary level in 1989\(^{40}\). The idea of mass education was not felt even after Independence. In old days, education was regarded as a restricted activity of the male folks. Female education was not encouraged for a number of decades\(^{41}\). The reason for low percentage is because the Muslim girls could not understand what was taught in schools.

Table No.6 given below indicate the literacy status of Meitei Pangals both male and females as on the 1\(^{st}\) March 2004.

\(^{39}\) Report on Socio-Economic Survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipur Muslims) 2004, p. 41
\(^{40}\) Salam Irene, op.cit., 61. Cit. Board of Secondary Education Manipur, 1981.
\(^{41}\) Report on Socio-Economic Survey op. cit. p. 50
Table 6 Distribution of persons by illiterate, literacy status and sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35899</td>
<td>66067</td>
<td>101966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59449</td>
<td>40940</td>
<td>100389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>95348</td>
<td>107007</td>
<td>202355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source, Report on Socio-Economic Survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipur Muslims) 200442)

Details of distribution of persons by level of education are presented in the portion statistic tables. It will however be seen from the above table that taking the whole population in to consideration, the male literacy rate is worked out to be 64.79% as against the female literacy rate of 40.78% where the literacy rate stood at 52.88%. These rates however cannot be compared with those given in table no.1 as figures presented in table no.1 exclude the child population of the age group 0-6 years as per the concept followed in census 200143. The following table no.3 gives distribution of persons aged 7 years and above by status of literacy and sex.

42Ibid, p. 51
43 Ibid, p. 52
Table no. 7: Distribution of persons aged 7 years and above by status of literacy and sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>20477</td>
<td>60394</td>
<td>60394</td>
<td>80871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40629</td>
<td>38,357</td>
<td>38357</td>
<td>78986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>61106</td>
<td>98,751</td>
<td>98751</td>
<td>159857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female literacy rate excluding the child population of age-group 0-6 years is worked out for the community as a whole as 48.56% as against the literacy rate of 74.68% for males. The overall literacy rate stood at 61.77% as against the State’s literacy rate of 70.50% in the 2001 census\(^4^4\). The total number of Muslim women, perusing post graduates courses, M. Phil. And Ph. D. was 49 as per 1981-2008 academic record\(^4^5\).

Education is a significant instrument in improving the status of Muslims and particularly women. There is a close connection between education and development. No society can prosper without making women educated and empowered. Education can create awareness on current and even past issues, raise a woman’s worth in her family and community. It is widely believed that women’s education leads to reduction in family size and greater attention is

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Theipingla Chithung, op. cit., p. 58 Cit. Manipur University Academic Section Enrollments from 1990-2008.
given by mothers to character of formation children\textsuperscript{46}. But Meitei Pangals generally do not believe in family planning and education has not changed the large size of their family. Education is the most important agency for bringing desirable changes in the life of mankind. It is more important than his invention of tools, machines, space, craft, medicines, weapons and even language because language too was the product of his/her education\textsuperscript{47}.

Education has changed and improved the quality of the Muslim women’s economic contribution because of better access to information, knowledge, and upgradation of skills. However it is only in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century that even poor Muslim women understand the necessity of educating the girl child. Many Muslim women’s organizations have been set up in both urban and rural areas of the state. They take loans and grants from the central government and state government and give economic help to the poor and backward through micro-finance schemes which the latter were not aware of or were unable to access.

Many women’s organizations are unique examples of women collectives in the informal sphere fighting oppression. The condition of Muslim women of Manipur is not favorable to achieving sustainable livelihood. Very few Muslim women have had opportunities to explore their talents and take advantage of opportunities in various spheres. Only the few educated are able to carve a place for themselves in the male dominant society. Education or lack of it does have a


great impact on the life of Muslim women in Manipur. With the passage of time, the condition of Muslim women in Manipur improved albeit slowly and their lifestyle changed in all spheres, besides education, illustrated by their participation in the 2nd Nupi Lan in the economy\textsuperscript{48}.

After India’s Independence many schools were established in Manipur many in Muslim inhabited areas, however, only a few Muslims initially enrolled in the schools. Some reasons for the slow progress of Muslims women’s education in the post colonial period are as follows:

1. Education of Muslim girls, women were practically non-existent before Manipur’s Merger with India.

2. Early marriage of girls and objection to co-education.

3. It is believed traditionally that the male members are responsible for earning money by means of getting proper education. (yet the men expected their women to contribute to the family kitty)

4. Poor economic condition of the parents also was a major hindrance for girls to get education. Most of the Muslims were dependent on agriculture for a livelihood. Parents required their daughters to contribute both at home and in cultivation\textsuperscript{49}.

Historically, there has always been a gap between the education of boys and girls in India. This is because of traditional thinking, that the natal family

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. pp. 75-75.
\textsuperscript{49} Mohamoodah Khaanam, op. cit. pp. 28-29
will not benefit from their daughter’s education as she will get married and became part of a new family. Dowry also could have played a part. In the case of Muslims in Manipur, the gap has been a yawning chasm. Unfortunately, majority of the first Muslim students were first generation learners and so they failed to get any help from their illiterate guardians. There has been a higher incidence of drop-out among the children at primary level, because the majority of the Muslims did not understand the significance of modern education.\(^\text{50}\)

Currently both Muslim men and women have realized the importance of education, but not to the same extent. They no longer confine children to Madrassahs, but enroll them not only in government institutions, but Christian Missionary schools and other private establishments. The students follow the curriculum of either state or central government (CBSE) institutions. As an incentive to the ‘Girl Child’, scholarships are provided to poor Muslim girls, though the Wakf Board\(^\text{51}\). ‘The State Wakf Board Manipur’ was established on the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) July, 1987 under the instruction of Central Wakf Council Act, 1954, and Manipur Wakf Rule was made in 1989 \(^\text{52}\).

From the analysis of 2004 Report regarding drop outs of students aged 5-14 years, it was observed that as many as 26% of the students discontinued because of the necessity to contribute partly or wholly to household activities and 21% of them could not continue their studies for economic reasons.\(^\text{53}\)

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\(^{50}\) Feroja Syed, Muslim Women in Manipuri society: Changes And Challenges, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, Vol. 7 Issue 11, November 2017

\(^{51}\) Salam Irene, op. cit. pp. 64-65.


\(^{53}\) Survey Report, 2004
occupational structure of the majority of Muslims earlier was in occupations like agriculture, poultry farming etc. But not in the new entrepreneurial enterprises which require both knowledge skill, and also high levels of education, Muslims are predominantly self-employed. Education is accessed by that section of the social strata that are desirous of becoming professionals in different disciplines or are seeking entry in to government services. Among Muslims, such individuals are extremely limited. The educational and occupational status of the parents has greatly influenced the pattern of enrolment and nature of drop-out among Muslim children. The appeal and benefit of education has not reached all sections of the Muslim community. Such differences create a widening gap among Muslim students based on residence and economic status. As a result, the education of Muslim women is severely hampered. It is a common belief that a high proportion of Muslim children study in Madarsas. But in reality, Muslim students study in both formal educational institutions and Maktabs.

A) Maktabs are neighborhood schools, often attached to mosques that provide religious education to children who attend other schools to get ‘mainstream’ education. Thus Maktabs provide part time religious education and are complimentary to the formal educational institutions.

B) Madrassas have indeed provided schooling to Muslim children where there is acute shortage of formal educational institutions in Muslim concentrated areas. Madrassa Imdadul Islam in Thoubal district, Darul-Uloom at Lilong, Aziza Madrassa (residential madrassa for girls) at Khumidok are good examples of such Madrassas in Manipur.
The madrassas are funded by the Muslim community; a household donation is taken out annually at the time of ‘Jalsha’. Schooling is generally not free, but a few madrasaahs provide free education to girls. The State Waqf Board and Central Waqf Council also fund madrassas. A few non-formal adult literacy programmes have been set up, but their performance needs improvement even though some non-governmental organizations are doing exemplary work in the field. Limited programmes on the issues of forced marriages, legal rights etc. are held by organizations like the Islamic Social Educational Cultural Development Organisation (Bishnupur District) and Rural Society and Educational Development Association (Mayang Imphal). Many children go to Madarsas and thereby acquire some level of education when there is no school in the neighborhood. No middle class Muslim sends his children to madrasas. It is only poor Muslims who cannot afford secular education whose children are sent to madrassas. There are more Muslims students in government and private schools than in madrassas. Most families favour formal education over madrassa education.

Although Meitei pangal women may not have been greatly enthused about pursuing technical and professional education, the Meitei Pangal community gradually becomes aware that they were lagging behind in the sphere of education. Moreover modern education was the key to Sustainable Development although few Muslims grasped this concept in its entirety, especially the women, even the educated ones. Moreover because of their late

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54 Salam Irene, op.Cit, p. 65.
start in education, most of the Muslims especially the women could not attain fluency either in speaking or writing. The tribals in contrast learnt English very fast through the agency of the Christian missionaries and forged ahead in their chosen professions. Even today very few Muslim women have the confidence to converse in English- which means that when they go out of the state they have problems in communication as the lingua franca – Meiteilon is confined to Manipur state. So it would be difficult in another part of India or abroad for a Muslim women to ask a simple question: ‘where is the washroom’?

Women of Manipur have through all periods of history enjoyed status, privileges as also responsibilities. As the first Muslim women of Manipur were Meiteis they too enjoyed and exercised this legacy. The difference was that in the 20th century when Meitei women enrolled for modern education, Meitei Pangal women did not. As a result their perspective grew more limited and insular, and from enjoying a high status in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries in the 20th century, their status was on a downward spiral because of lack of education, information and knowledge.

The 21st century has however ushered in changes in the thinking of the Muslim community. They realized their lack of education was retarding their progress in every field and it was becoming difficult to eke out a sustainable livelihood. So towards the end of the 20th century, more Muslim girls/women were admitted to the Pre-University undergraduate, post graduate level, and very few to the M.Phil level.
With modern education came the realization that early marriage hinders a women’s empowerment, and a new trend which emphasized a larger period of secular learning commenced. This accelerated in the 21st century. A prominent Muslim women leader stated that educated men preferred educated wives and were also not averse to their wives pursuing education even after marriage. Many husbands gave active encouragement to women to realize their dreams, and even assisted them by providing easier access to education, government scholarships minority schemes etc. Some married women who are school dropouts stated that their husbands had no objection to their restarting or continuing their education but it was the women who preferred not to do so, maybe because of embarrassment, sitting in a class with young girls. But the women leaders added a word of caution- the tradition of early marriage cannot disappear overnight; it is better to follow a slower but steady course.

Although the advantage of education is that it opens up possibilities of a better livelihood, greater career opportunities raises the standard and quality of living, all of which impacts every family member in a very positive way. “Educated women spend a greater proportion of their resources on the health and education of their families”. The education of women is a crucial element for the development of a nation, as well as poverty alleviation. Education can open up opportunities and improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of entire communities.

Emergence of Muslim Women’s Organizations was one of the important after effects of education of Muslim women. Women now realized the necessity

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55 Interview Shitara Begum (57) Kshetrigao, President All Manipur Muslim Women Development Organization (AMMDO), Vice President, AMKIL; UCM-Community Affair Secretary. 27/7/2017.
of breaking their isolation and uniting together in collective strength to gain control over self, to claim their due share of resources and power within their families, communities, market place and government organizations\textsuperscript{56}. Women’s organization exposed women not only to the world outside the home but also helped in analyzing their own problems and finding possible solutions. Women’s organizations in Manipur had long been a vanguard to protect society especially and were specifically concerned with social reformation society, anti drug programmes, integration, atrocities by armed personnel, anti people policies of the state government, etc. Manipur Muslim women gradually mobilized and fought often on the same platform for the same issues, but also raised issues, problems associated with their community and their status as Muslim women. The first Muslim women’s organization was Kshetrigao Women’s Meira Paibi, at Kshetrigao Awang Leikai, established on 1995 by Aribam Sitara Begum. Other prominent organizations of Manipuri Muslim women were Kangleipak Muslim Chanura Deveploment Organization, Association of Muslim Organization, and All Manipur Muslim Women Development Organization (AMMDO). The active women leaders were Aribam Sitara, Anwari Nurjahan, Jano, Amubi and Mumtaz\textsuperscript{57}.

These women’s organizations mostly focused on education related issues of the community especially of the women. It was because of efforts of Anwari Nurjaha and the Muslim organization that the 4\% reservation in the education

\textsuperscript{57} Interview with Aribam Sitara, op.cit.
was given to Muslims in 2005\textsuperscript{58}. The organizations also provided the skill training for income generation activities which was the need of the hour. Many Muslim women received training in the making of detergent and soap, in knitting, tailoring, weaving, embroidery, etc. For example the All Manipur Muslim Women’s Development Association (AMMWDA) provides awareness on government programmes in collaboration with Social Welfare Board and Department, Environment and Ecology Section of Porompat, Manipur Renewable Energy Development Agency, the last in relation to the use of smokeless Chula and use of solar lamps. Nehru Yuva Kendra (Health Section) provides information and assistance on Family Planning. Women are trained in groups and once they complete the training they can put it into practical use and bring about changes in their lives. However it is important to note that these organizations only sprang up at the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, so the effect is apparent only now\textsuperscript{59}.

Some organizations dealt with specific issues such as domestic violence need for arbitration in domestic quarrels and disputes, pressurizing perpetrators to stop violence counseling, and access to legal aid and providing moral and motivational support to victims\textsuperscript{60}.

Muslims of Manipur are by and large averse to education for their women. Non-Muslim women of the state took to modern education, and new professions and disciplines and started progressing, while the Muslims continued

\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Anwari Nurjahan, President, All Manipur Muslim Women Development Organisation, Kairang Awang Leikai. Age 57 years.
\textsuperscript{59} Interview with Aribam Sitara op.cit.
\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Anwari Nurjahan, op. cit.
with traditional small time enterprises. Till quite recently, modern education was seen to be in contravention to religious law. They thus resisted modern education for a long period and encouraged only religious education (dinitalim), besides, more emphasis was given on inculcating such virtues which would make them humble, religious, and dutiful wives. It was also generally perceived that it is the males who have the responsibility to earn for the family and to arrange suitable marriages for their daughters. Moreover, agriculture, the main source of livelihood required much labour and left little or no time for education. Even the few who got education could not progress beyond the high school level\textsuperscript{61}.

Demographic and social changes with reference to women in the state seem to have influenced the Manipuri Muslim society in recent years. Muslims in particular are wakening up to the fact that they lag behind vis-à-vis other communities. Muslim men, in recent years, are also aware of the necessity of education for their women. Providing their children quality education is one of the thoughts that flash across their minds once they get married and have children. In the view of the paucity of good educational institutions of their own and dismal state of affairs in the government institutions, they are willing to place their daughters in missionary schools even outside the state for further studies. Some parents are now supportive toward the desires and ambitious of their

\textsuperscript{61} Rita Kamei, Historical Study of Muslim Women in Manipur, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, 2011, pp. 71-72
daughters facilitating and encouraging them to take up demanding jobs, thereby liberating them from the assigned homebound roles\textsuperscript{62}.

Bright and energetic educated young women from urban middle class are motivated to curve a niche for themselves, take up paid employment and opt for late marriage and even-marriage as it no longer evokes social disapproval, which reflects a change in the attitude of women\textsuperscript{63}. So from the beginning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, till the close of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, women’s status changed from high to low, primarily because of their lack of education.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. P. 72
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, Cit. Salam Irene, op.cit pp. 102-103