

RESERVATION OF MUSLIMS IN MANIPUR

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The report on the *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, popularly known as Sachar Committee Report was the first systematic study of the Muslim community in India done by the government in 2006 to look into the socio-economic and educational status of the Muslims in India. The report, tabled in the Parliament in 30 November 2006, presented the pitiable condition of the Muslims in India indicating rampant illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. The report has comprehensively documented the economic backwardness and deprivations of the Indian Muslims along most major indicators. The report shows that the status of Indian Muslims is below the conditions of SCs and STs. The report conclusively established that without affirmative action it would be impossible to harness India's social and economic potential and build an inclusive social order that respects diversity, plurality and equity.¹

Muslims of Manipur are no different in the socio-economic and educational conditions from Muslims of the other parts of the country. From the socio-economic and educational point of view, Manipuri Muslims are the most backward community in the state. They are not only marginalized; but also their basic demands for socio-economic development have been neglected by the government on one pretext or the other. The Muslims population constitute almost 9 per cent of the total state population.² Manipuri Muslims are the third largest religious community in the state, without any illegal immigrants from Bangladesh adding to its population like Assam and Tripura, and have a history of some 400 years of living in the state. They had settled in Manipur even earlier than many other communities. The number of Manipuri Muslims was about 1000 at the time of their first settlement in the state. In the 1870's, R. Brown calculated that there are about 900 families which means 4500 in number.³ Later, the number increased to 4881 in

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1881.⁴ According to the decennial census 1951-2001, the population of Manipuri Muslim in 1951 was 37,197, in 1961 – 48,588, in 1971 – 70,969, in 1981 – 99,327, in 1991 – 1,33,535 and in 2001 – 1,90,939, constituting 6.44, 6.23, 6.62, 6.99, 7.27 and 8.8 per cent of the total state population of Manipur respectively. As per the census enumeration of 2011, the population of Muslims in the state figures 2,39,836. Manipur is the only state in India where the percentage of Muslim population has decreased from 8.8 per cent in 2001 to 8.4 per cent in 2011.⁵

Manipuri Muslims are found in 4 districts of Manipur valley (Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur) and 2 districts of hill areas such as Churachandpur and Chandel.⁶ Out of all the Muslims inhabited districts, Imphal East and Thoubal districts are the two highest Muslim concentrated districts in Manipur. Muslims in Manipur are locally known as Pangal and officially (enlisted in the OBCs' list) as Meitei-Pangal. The dearth of the basic data due to lack of systematic research and disinclination on the part of the government to analyze economic data on religious communities act as a great deterrent to make any accurate and quantitative estimate of the conditions of the Muslims in the state.

In 2004, the Department of MOBC sponsored a socio-economic survey of all the Muslim inhabited areas of Manipur entitled, “Report on Socio-economic survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) 2004”. It was conducted by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Manipur in association with All Manipur Muslims (Meitei-Pangal) Welfare Association (AMPWA) to assess the socio-economic condition of the Muslims in Manipur. This survey is the first and only survey conducted for Muslims in Manipur on socio-economic life of the community. The report helps in making an assessment of the multifaceted aspects of the Muslim community and enlightens the field where specific attention is to be given in order to bring the community in the mainstream. The report highlighted the deplorable socio-economic conditions of the Muslims in Manipur.

Dr. Syed Ahmed, a prominent academician who has done extensive research in the field of social and educational aspects of Manipur Muslims, argues that efforts of educated elites and political leaders of the Muslim community resulted in coming up of many organizations in Manipur both governmental and non-governmental affiliated to national bodies, linking up the community with

their brethren outside which facilitated in their course of ongoing community consciousness and identity formation.⁷ Manipur Wakf Board in 1988, Manipur Haj Committee in 2003 and Manipur State Minorities Commission in 2004 were constituted to look into the various socio-cultural and religious needs of the Muslims in the state. Besides these governmental institutions, many bodies which voice the grievances and highlight the socio-economic and political issues concerning the Muslims are instituted by the educated Muslims over the recent years. All Manipur Muslim Student Organisation (AMMSO), All Manipur Muslim Organisations Co-ordinating Committee (AMMOCOC), All Manipur Muslims (Meitei Pangal) Welfare Association (AMPWA), Kangleipak Muslim Chanura Development Organisation (KMCDO), Minority Youths' Development Organisation (MYDO) and United Muslim Organisation (UMO) are some of the prominent ones in the state.

The idea of Muslim reservation was placed before the Alimuddin cabinet in 1977, but was deferred indefinitely and not brought back for discussion. Because of the efforts of the educated elites and political leaders of the Muslim community, there have been demands for reservations and safeguards for the Muslims especially after the Report on Socio-economic survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) 2004 which brought out the backwardness and deprivations of the Muslims of Manipur along most major indicators.

The Government of Manipur has been seized of the demand of different OBC communities to look into their complaints regarding under/non representation of some OBC communities in the admission in professional and technical courses as well as appointments in the State Government services. The State Government constituted the Manipur State Commission for Other Backward Classes for the Backward Classes other than the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the State of Manipur. The Commission was constituted to examine and determine suitable percentages of reservation of seats in educational institutions for admission to Professional and Technical Courses and for reservation of appointments to the posts/services under the State Government for each OBC communities notified by the Government in 1993. The commission also suggested measures for the upliftment of socially, economically and educationally backward sections among the OBCs and made recommendations on any other matter relating to other backward classes which may be referred to it by the Government from time to time.

There is an Act called the Manipur Reservation of Vacancies in Posts and Services (for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Act, 1976 which provides reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state. And so there are 2 per cent and 31 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively, in the state. Maintaining 50 per cent limit for reservation, the quota available for OBCs is 17 per cent. The Government of Manipur notified the following communities as 'OBCs' in respect of the State of Manipur (5 September, 1994). They are –

- Meitei/Meetei (including Meitei Brahmin, Meitei/Meetei Sanamahi/Meitei Rajkumar and Non-scheduled castes Lois)
- Meitei-Pangals
- Telis, who have been domiciled in Manipur for 10 years and their descendents
- Badi (Nepali); Damai (Nepali); Gainay (Nepali); Satki (Nepali) and Kami (Nepali) who have been living in Manipur as members of the domiciled community since 9 July 1947 and their descendents.⁸

Manipur State Commission for Other Backward Classes is of the view that identification of OBCs in these four groups would not mean classification or categorization of the different OBCs into backward and more backward class on the basis of their comparative backwardness. Rather all these backward classes are to be treated as equally backward. In the interim report, the Commission recommended reservation of different OBC communities in appointments or posts in State Services and also in selection for admission to professional and technical courses as:

1. Meiteis/Meeteis - 14 %
2. Meitei-Pangals - 2.50 %
3. Telis and Nepalis - 0.50 %

The share of the different OBC communities is on the basis of their respective population and slight adjustments that has been made to give adequate representation considering the number of Government employees and students in higher and technical education and also as required by peculiar situations.

Muhammad Hussain Choudhury, member of the Commission in a dissent note on the fixation of suitable percentages of Reservations for the different OBC communities of the State emphasizes that it would not be pragmatic to assume the socio-economic and educational status of the four communities are equal because they have been included in the OBC category. Therefore, to treat all the communities equally for the purpose of reservation is not socially justified. One important fact he puts forward is that unreserved seats have remained and shall remain the domain of the Meitei Community as they are more advanced socially, educationally, economically and politically than other communities in Manipur. For the last nine years (up to 2005) not a single student from the Meitei-Pangal and Nepali communities has been able to get selection in any of the Professional and Technical Courses like MBBS and Agriculture except for few in Veterinary and Engineering Courses. Since Meiteis are more advanced than the other three remaining communities belonging to OBC, some weightage should be given to the other OBC communities while allocating the quota of reservation to develop equally. Therefore, for the reservation of the four OBC communities, Hussain Choudhary recommended 12 per cent for Meiteis/Meeteis, 4.5 per cent for Meitei-Pangals, 0.5 per cent for Telis and Nepalis together.

It was the main demands of the organization, Manipur Minority Muslim Development Committee (MMMDC) on behalf of the Muslims of Manipur for a separate quota for the Muslims of the State in the field of education and employment, etc. In spite of commitment by the Chief Minister of Manipur (after the discussion with the Chairman of MMMDC on 19 July, 1996) to provide various programmes and schemes to benefit Manipuri Muslims, no further action were taken up. MMMDC demanded 8 per cent proportionate representation of minority Muslims in recruitment to State and Central Service including PSU/Corporation/Board etc and seats in Professional courses like Medical, Technical and Higher Education.

In memorandums submitted to the Chairman of Manipur State Commission for the Backward Classes, All Manipur Muslim Organisation Co-Ordinating Committee (AMMOCOC) and All Manipur Muslims (Meitei Pangal) Welfare Association (AMPWA) viewed the recognition of the Manipuri Muslims as OBC along with Meiteis giving the same treatment without any weightage to Muslim community is an improper treatment. Without making a reservation policy in proportion to their population it is difficult to uplift Manipuri Muslims (the most backward

community among the Minority Communities and other backward classes). So the Committees asked the Commission to grant a separate quota of reservation in favour of the Manipuri Muslims in proportion to their population.

In two separate memorandums submitted to the Chief Minister, the All Manipur Muslim Students Organisation (AMMSO) emphasized the worsening condition of the Manipur Muslims (Meitei-Pangal) which according to the Organisation is due to the lack of Quota System and noncompliance of Mandal Commission. It is the demand of the organization since 2002 to reserve 10 per cent for Backward and Minority Muslims in all educational institutions and in all the government jobs. With State Government's notification for conducting a Combined Competitive Examination by Manipur Public Service Commission, the organization intensified and urged the state to withhold the exam till their demand for 10 per cent reservation policy is not implemented. AMMSO called a 36 hours bandh before the ensuing preliminary examination for MCS, MPS examinations. Muhammad Anwar Hussain, general secretary of AMMSO said, "The bandh is being called as the Manipur Government has failed to hear the grievances of the minority communities...the agitation is being launched for the sake of future generations of the minority community."⁹

Manipur State Minorities commission recommended to the State Government to invoke Article 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution Clause (4) of Article 15 enables the States to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens. So reservation of seats in the educational institutions may be provided for Other Backward Classes (OBC) of citizens. Clause (4) Article 16 enables the States to make reservations in posts or appointment in favour of the backward classes of citizens which in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State. The provision made applicable for reservation of posts in the Government Services for the SCs, STs and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Thus the above two articles are necessary to introduce reservation policy for Muslims of Manipur (categorized as Meitei-Pangal in OBC list) as done in Kerala (10-12 per cent for Muslims), Karnataka (4 per cent for Muslims) and Andhra Pradesh (5 per cent for Muslims).

The Government of Manipur, to this effect, issued an order on December 27, 2006 for reservation of the OBCs in the State for appointment in Government posts/ services (including Government Societies/ Public Undertakings/ Boards/ Agencies) and also for admission in professional courses in professional Colleges/ Institutes such as Engineering/ Medical/ Polytechnic/ Veterinary & Animal Husbandry/ Agricultural Sciences/ Nursing/ Para Medical etc.

Sl. No.	Name of Community	Percentage of Reservation
1.	Meitei / Meiteis (including Meitei Brahmin, Meitei / Meetei sanamahi, Meitei Rajkumar).	12.5 %
2.	Meitei Pangal	4 %
3.	Telis who have been domiciled in Manipur for 10 years and their descendents.	0.50 %
4.	Badi (Nepali), Damai (Nepali), Gairey (Nepali), Satki (Nepali) and Kami (Nepali) who have been living in Manipur as members of the domiciled community since 09-07-1947 and their descendents.	
	TOTAL:	17 %

With new reservation policy, there is 4 per cent reservation of seats for Manipuri Muslims in admission in professional courses (professional colleges and institutes) such as Medicine, Engineering, Polytechnic, Veterinary & Animal Husbandary, Agricultural Sciences, Nursing, Para Medical etc. However, reservation for Manipuri Muslims in admissions is not available in all the educational institutions. The number of Muslims gets in professional courses like Medicine, Dental and Engineering has also increased to a considerable extent. Nowadays, there is good number of Muslims studying Medicine in RIMS and JNIMS medical college in Manipur. Over the last few years, we are seeing some appreciable improvement in the field of higher education among the Muslims. Many Muslim parents, mostly educated, are seriously concern about providing quality education to their children including daughters. Over the recent years, sons and daughters of these parents are showing good results in various competitive exams and

getting prestigious jobs. Ultimately, in last few years, Muslim representation has increased, which has been a result of Muslims' increasing access to education and the government's reservation policy. Today Muslims are fairly represented in higher category of government services. The number of MCS, MPS, MBBS, etc. has desirably increased. And their representation in teaching and state force has also significantly increased. Muslim women could be even seen donning police uniforms, news-readers in AIR or in sports that also in events like martial arts and power-lifting, etc. The reservation measure has led to a substantive rise in Muslim share in the state government services.

Resolutions of the National Seminar on Opportunities and Challenges of Muslims in Manipur organised by All Manipur Muslims (Meitei-Pangal) Welfare Association (AMPWA) under the aegis of Manipur State Minorities Commission on 9th December 2012 made several recommendations related to reservation of Manipuri Muslims.¹⁰

Some of the main recommendations:

- The Manipuri Muslims (Pangals) may be declared as Most Backward Class. Simple reservation could not help much as in many areas or sectors the principle of reservation does not apply.
- Even in the 4 per cent reservation made by State Government the first point of reservation for them is at serial no 25 whereas for SC, ST or OBC (Meiteis) these are at much higher spots. The state should have its own formula of reservation so that the Muslims get positions at least one in first ten, second position within 10-20 and rest below 20th position in the roaster.
- Reservation should not mean only for proportionate representation but also for upliftment to make up past deficiencies within a specified period.
- There is non-availability of the said reservation in admissions in educational institutions. There is need for appropriate steps to ensure that the benefits of reservation reach to the Muslim students.

The attempt to increase preference of marginalized groups in professional life by giving special consideration to them in educational institutions and public jobs raised several questions. Reservations may be provided on the basis of group membership but eventually they target the

individual within the community.¹¹ It is the argument of many that the redistribution has not spread evenly throughout the beneficiary groups or different regions. Only a few members of the marginalized groups made it to the economically advantageous and socially prestigious jobs. Reservation policy has helped disadvantaged Muslims in accessing jobs in the public sector, although their participation in proportion to their total workforce is still very low. As few economically and politically dominant Muslims have appropriated most of the benefits of the reservation policy, there is need to examine whether only the sub-groups within the reserved groups, the poorest and certain sections of Muslims, need to be included within the gamut of such policy.

The reduction of the entire concept of social justice to reservations means that it has become a substitute for meaningful provisioning of social goods such as health, education, shelter, and employment.¹² The reservation programme has become, to some extent a substitute for the failure of the development programme.¹³ The reservation of jobs and places is only a small component of the affirmative action programme, and its success is dependent, to a considerable extent, on the effective implementation of other development programmes and strategies of improving the condition for the group as a whole.¹⁴ Effort to supplement such affirmative policies of reserving seats and jobs with an improvement of basic facilities like primary schools, health facilities and training programmes are more to be emphasized.

References

¹ Zoya Hasan, *Politics of Inclusion- Castes, Minorities, and Affirmative Action* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 234.

² Based on the Report on Socio-Economic Survey of Meitei-Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), 2004.

³ R. Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2012), p. 15.

⁴ Md. Ahmed Ali Shah, A Brief Historical Study of Religion and Society of the Pangals of Manipur, *Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation*, Manipur University, Manipur, 1994, p. 21.

⁵ *Financial Express*, 22 January 2015.

⁶ By Manipur Government Order on 8th Decemeber 2016, Jiribam, Kakching, Tengnoupal, Pherzawl were created as new districts by bifurcating Imphal East, Thoubal, Chandel,

Churachandpur districts respectively. Senapati, Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts were also bifurcated by the same government order.

⁷ Syed Ahmed, Muslims in Manipur: Quest for an Identity, Seminar Paper Presented on Land Problems and Ethnic Crisis in North-East India, Organized by Maulana Kalam Azad Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata in collaboration with Manipur University, Manipur, 27-28 July 2005.

⁸ See, Interim Report of the Manipur State Commission for Other Backward Classes, Manipur, December 2006.

⁹ *Imphal Free Press*, 4 February 2006.

¹⁰ Secretary General's Report (2009-2013) of All Manipur Muslims (Meitei-Pangal) Welfare Association (AMPWA) released on 2nd March 2014 at Jama Masjid, Sadar Bazaar, Imphal.

¹¹ Gurpreet Mahajan, *Identities and Rights – Aspects of Liberal Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 145.

¹² Zoya Hasan, n. 1, p. 229.

¹³ Gurpreet Mahajan, n. 11, p. 144.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*