Status of Muslim Women in Higher Education in the Thoubal District of Manipur

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Abstract

This study focuses on the higher education of Muslim (Meitei Pangal) women in the Thoubal District of Manipur. The primary objective is to identify the challenges faced by Muslim women pursuing higher education in this specific district. The research employed a descriptive survey methodology, selecting a total of 45 Muslim women for interview from various higher educational institutions in the district through Simple Random sampling. The researcher utilized self-developed questionnaires for data collection, gathering information from both primary and secondary sources. The collected data underwent analysis using statistical techniques to derive percentages. The study's findings revealed that 85% of the respondents encountered financial difficulties. Additionally, 92% of the participants expressed that the distance to various educational institutions from their residences was considerable. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the status of Muslim women in higher education within this particular district of Manipur. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will catalyze positive qualitative changes in the realm of education, particularly benefitting Muslim women in the district.

Keywords*: Higher Education, Meitei Pangal Women, Financial Problem, Distance to educational Institution, Manipur.*

I. Introduction

Educated women can play a crucial role in addressing women-related issues. They can combat social problems such as female foeticide, child marriage, dowry, and addictions, while also challenging societal discrimination and biases against women. Highly educated women can contribute to enhancing working conditions, promoting gender equality, and advancing women's welfare. They can empower other women to achieve self-sufficiency

and self-confidence, offering guidance on career choices, employment opportunities, business ventures, as well as matters concerning nutrition and childcare.

It's a known fact that women are lagging behind in various aspects within our society compared to men. Women's education serves as a means of liberation, not just for women themselves, but for Indian society as a whole. Education stands as a pivotal tool for human resource development, with women's education taking precedence among the measures aimed at elevating women's status in India.The role of women holds significance both within families and society, as progress becomes intertwined with the education of women. When women are educated, they evolve into valuable assets for society.

Furthermore, educated women engaged in various professions contribute significantly to the economic development of the country. Through education, women have consistently fulfilled their crucial roles in advancing the nation. Genuine societal transformation occurs when women receive education; the education of women is indispensable for the enlightenment of society as a whole.A society cannot be truly educated unless its women are educated. "The educational attainment of women stands as a pivotal determinant in assessing the current and prospective status of women within a nation. A well-educated mother is instrumental in nurturing capable offspring. The advancement of a nation is intricately linked to the moral fiber of its citizens, a character that is predominantly shaped by mothers. Consequently, it becomes the responsibility of a nation to ensure quality education for women.

Numerous studies have investigated the status of women in education, revealing a multitude of issues and challenges. Among these researchers, Kantamma (1990), Nisha (2010), Bhat (2015), and Suguna (2011) stand out, as their studies shed light on decision-making and the evolution of progressive viewpoints across various matters. Their research demonstrates the unequal access that women experienced in education compared to men, with observable advancements in girls' enrollment across different educational levels.

N. Pandey and T. Haokip (2014) conducted a study on the status of women in higher education in Manipur and identified a significant rise in women's literacy rates. However, the study also unveiled that Muslim women's enrollment was notably lower at 0.75% compared to tribal women which stands at 1.77%. Borgohain (1995) critically examined women's higher education in the Sibsagar district of Assam. The findings indicated that 88.1% of female students chose Arts, 1.33% opted for Commerce, and 10.6% pursued Science.

II. Background and Context of the Study

Manipur, a northeastern hill state with a total population of 28.6 lakhs according to the 2011 Census, is home to multiple ethnic groups, including Hindus, Christians, Meitei Pangal (Manipuri Muslims), Buddhists, Sikhs, and

Jains. According to the 2011 Census report, the state boasts a literacy rate of 76.94%, ranking it 5th among the northeastern states, surpassing the national average of 74.04%. However, when it comes to female literacy rates, Manipur stands as the third lowest among northeastern states, with a rate of 70.26%. The Meitei Pangal community constitutes approximately 8.4% of Manipur's total population as per the 2011 Census, making them the second largest minority group after Christians, who make up 41.29% of the population. Meanwhile, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains represent only 0.25%, 0.005%, and 0.006% of the population, respectively. It's worth noting that the Muslim community in Manipur has the lowest literacy rate. Additionally, the Thoubal district boasts the largest concentration of Meitei Pangal communities at 44.7% compared to other districts in Manipur.

The State Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) based on the AISHE 2020-21 report is 37.8, with females at 38.6, surpassing males at 36.9. Notably, the female GER exceeds the national average GER. However, out of the total 138,499 individuals enrolled in higher educational institutions, Meitei Pangal represent only 3.19%, accounting for 4,430 students. Remarkably, Meitei Pangal women have a stronger presence in higher education compared to their male counterparts, constituting 3.63% of the total number of enrolled Manipuri women. However, according to the 2011 census, Thoubal district recorded a literacy rate of 74.4%, which is the second-lowest after Senapati district with 63.6%. More than half of the female population in this district is illiterate. Moreover, approximately 62% of the total illiterate Meitei Pangal population in the state is comprised of females.

The current study addresses the higher education of Muslim women in the Thoubal district of Manipur. It's noteworthy that Muslim women in this specific district face educational disparities compared to women from other communities. The majority of schools, colleges, universities, and higher educational institutions are situated far from their localities, presenting challenges in accessing quality education. Numerous socio-cultural factors serve as obstacles to the advancement of women's education within the district. A range of customs and taboos restrict Muslim women, often confining them to their homes. Furthermore, protective parents often hinder their pursuit of higher education, a constraint not typically encountered by males.

Based on the preceding discussion, there emerges a clear necessity for conducting a study that enhances awareness across all domains regarding the socio-economic and developmental potential of Muslim women. Thus, the researcher recognizes the significance of undertaking this study to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by Muslim women in accessing higher education. A thorough examination of existing literature further reveals the absence of a comprehensive study centered on Muslim women in the Thoubal District of Manipur. The outcomes of this research endeavor are poised to offer

a comprehensive portrayal of the status of Muslim women in higher education. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the conclusions drawn from this study will catalyze positive transformations within the education sector and society at large.

II. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study are as follows:

1. To ascertain the courses chosen by Muslim women in higher education within the district.
2. To examine the challenges encountered by Muslim women pursuing higher education.
3. To provide recommendations for enhancing women's education in the district.

III. Methodology

The current study employed the Descriptive Survey method. A sample of 45 Muslim women was chosen for interviews from 4 colleges within the district, using the Simple Random Sampling technique. The selected colleges for this study are (a). Thoubal College, (b). LilongHaoreibi College, (c). Y.K. College and (d). Waikhom Mani Girl's College. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, and subsequently analyzed using the statistical technique to derived percentages.

IV. Findings of the study

As mentioned earlier, the Meitei Pangal population in the state is estimated to be around 2.4 lakh, with approximately 1.1 lakh individuals being illiterate. The total number of illiterate persons in the state is approximately 9.4 lakhs, and of this figure, 58% are female. Table 1(a) provides a breakdown of illiteracy rates among different communities in Manipur.

Table 1(a): State total illiterate person of all religion and gender.

Percentage of illiterate person, sex, and religion as per Census 2011				
Religion	Illiterate persons	Male %	Female %	Overall illiteracy rate of the total share of population
Hindu	331508	39.4%	60.6%	28%
Muslim	105544	38.8%	61.2%	44%
Christian	436003	45.3%	54.8%	37%

Sikh	298	45%	54%	19.5%
Buddhist	2364	44.2%	55.8%	33.3%
Jain	334	48%	52%	19.7%
Others Religion	67257	39.5%	60.4%	28.8%

Source: Compiled from the Census 2011 report, available at https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/11383

Based on the provided data, Meitei Pangal (Muslims) exhibit the highest illiteracy rate among all religious groups in the state. Furthermore, Muslim women also have the highest illiteracy rate among females from various communities. Notably, Thoubal district, which has the largest Muslim population, ranks as the fourth-lowest in terms of literacy rates among the districts with significant Muslim populations in the state. The district-wise literacy rates are as follows: Imphal West (86.08%), Senapati (63.6%), Imphal East (81.95%), Thoubal (74.47%), Churachandpur (82.78%), Bishnupur (75.85%), Ukhrul (81.35%), Chandel (71.11%), and Tamenglong (70.05%).

Moreover, the representation of Meitei Pangal (Muslim) individuals in higher educational institutions is comparatively low when compared to the percentage of individuals in the eligible age group of 18-23 years. In the academic year 2020-2021 (AISHE, 2020-21), their total enrollment in higher educational institutions was 4,430. Notably, it's interesting to observe that female enrollment exceeded that of males, with 2,526 female enrollees. The table below provides a summary of enrollment rates among various social group from the academic years 2016-2017 to 2020-21.

Table 1(b): Enrolment in different higher educational institution among different social group during the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21 as par the AISHE 2020-21 report.

Years	All	ST	OBC	SC	Muslim	OM
2016-17	1,01,062	31,127	31,878	5,692	3,529	5,515
2017-18	1,04,680	33,736	36,487	6,638	4,884	6,172
2018-19	1,10,377	35,773	35,706	6,348	5,601	3,119
2019-20	1,24,538	35,993	40,128	6,612	6,479	4,386
2020-21	1,38,499	37,649	40,886	9,338	4,430	5,149
Average	115,831.20	34,855.60	35,543	6925.6	4984.6	4868.2

Source: Compiled from AISHE 2020-2021, available at https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/AISHE_Report_2020_21.pdf

The average enrollment of Muslims in higher education institutions was 4,984.6 for the period spanning from 2016-17 to 2020-2021. It's noteworthy that the academic year 2020-21 experienced a decrease in enrollment compared to the previous academic year. This decline could be attributed to the pandemic; however, it's important to highlight that the pandemic did not have a similar impact on the enrollment of other communities in the state. According to the Manipur University registrar office, there is 39 Muslim (Meitei Pangal) women enrolled in different post graduate course, whereas 2902 enrolled in undergraduate in 2019-20 session.

In Thoubal district, as per the Census 2011 data, there are 25,281 individuals who hold graduate and higher qualifications. However, out of this number, only 8,308 are female, despite there being a significant eligible population in the age group of 20-24 years. The district is home to a total of 38,265 individuals in the 20-24 age bracket, with 24,538 residing in rural areas. Notably, the rural female population in this age group surpasses that of males, with 12,611 out of the total 24,535 individuals. In the rural areas of this district, where the Muslim (Meitei Pangal) community is more concentrated, there are only 11,506 graduates, including 3,364 females.

Focusing on the initial objective of the study, which explores the course preferences of Muslim women in higher education, the findings unveil that 95% of the respondents had chosen the science field, while the remaining 5% opted for Arts. Consequently, the majority of respondents favored the science stream. Additionally, the study identified that 65% of the participants were either currently preparing for or had prepared for the NEET competition—a crucial entrance exam for MBBS course admission.

Furthermore, the research also shed light on the challenges faced by these Muslim women in relation to their chosen courses within their respective colleges.

With respect to the second objectives of the study, which delves into the challenges encountered by Muslim women in higher education, the findings are outlined below:

1. The study's outcomes disclosed that 85% of the respondents grappled with financial issues. As members of a marginalized community, their economic status posed difficulties in pursuing higher education. Additionally, a significant majority of respondents confirmed that government scholarships were consistently delayed by over two years.
2. An overwhelming 92% of the participants indicated that educational institutions were distant from their residences. The geographical distance between educational facilities and their homes presented a significant hindrance, contradicting the ideal of convenient access to education, thereby acting as a barrier to women's education.

3. The investigation revealed that 75% of respondents faced challenges related to syllabus complexity and a lack of study materials in their respective colleges. They expressed that the curriculum was burdensome, impeding their pursuit of higher education. As a result, respondents struggled to manage their coursework.
4. Approximately 65% of the participants disclosed inadequate study time at home. Domestic responsibilities, coupled with familial duties, left them with limited time for personal study. The demanding workload at home hampered their ability to focus on their studies.
5. A notable 80% of the respondents lacked proper guidance and support from their families regarding their studies. Parental education levels were often insufficient, and time constraints prevented parents from providing adequate guidance to their daughters.
6. Many respondents faced significant familial issues that affected their educational pursuits. Factors such as parental health problems and the family's precarious economic circumstances were identified as obstacles to their education.
7. The study brought to light another challenge that is inadequate transportation. Around 55% of the respondents reported irregular class attendance due to transportation issues, especially prominent among students residing in remote areas.

V. Suggestion :

Based on the third objective of this study, the researchers put forth the following suggestions for enhancing the higher education of Muslim women.

1. Adequate attention must be given to advancing women's education in the rural and remote areas of the district, fostering an environment that encourages women to pursue higher education. Guardians, educators, NGOs, and governmental bodies should collaboratively initiate measures to bolster women's empowerment.
2. The provision of girls' hostels should be made available across all educational stages, accompanied by subsidized transportation services in remote and rural regions.
3. The government should ensure the timely disbursement of scholarships, providing relief from financial burdens for students with limited incomes.
4. Women's reservation should be upheld in all domains, including education and employment opportunities.
5. Active encouragement of women's political involvement can be achieved through extending reservations, empowering them to contribute to societal betterment.

6. Comprehensive awareness programs should be conducted among women in village areas to sensitize them about the contemporary advancements in science and technology, enabling them to break free from superstitious beliefs.

VI. Conclusion

This study shed light on the higher education status of Muslim women in the Thoubal district of Manipur. The findings have brought to the forefront various challenges and barriers faced by these women in their pursuit of higher education. Financial constraints, geographical distance from educational institutions, lack of proper study materials, and domestic responsibilities were identified as prominent obstacles.

To address these issues and promote the empowerment of Muslim women in higher education, several recommendations have been put forth. Initiatives such as the establishment of girls' hostels at all education levels, subsidized transport options in remote areas, and timely scholarship disbursement were suggested to alleviate the challenges faced by these women. Moreover, the study highlights the significance of maintaining women's reservations in various domains, including education and employment opportunities.

Overall, this study underscores the urgent need for collaborative efforts from educational institutions, government bodies, NGOs, and the community to create an environment conducive to the advancement of Muslim women's higher education. Through these concerted efforts, we can strive for a more inclusive and empowered educational landscape that benefits not only the individual women but also contributes to the progress of society as a whole.

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