

## **Pangal Women: Social Challenges and Education**

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**Abstract:** *Pangal is a tiny Muslim community in Manipur, a border state of India's northeast. Its women folk are deprived of education as against the women of other ethnic communities. The women of this community are in a deplorable state in its societal milieu. They are engaged in various daily household chores rather than educating themselves. Older women folk engage themselves in petty economic activities. The institution of family and marriages played a great role in determining their livelihood. They also suffer from every violence and intolerance in the society. The paper examines the institutions of the family marriages and other social systems of the community. It further scrutinizes the government initiatives, social challenges, level of education and factors affecting education of women in the community.*

**Keywords-** *education, ethnic, family, institution, marriages, Pangal*

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### **I. Introduction**

The Muslim community in Manipur is locally known as *Pangals* or *Meitei Pangals*. The community is said to have migrated in different phases of the history. The Royal Chronicle of Manipur *Cheitharol Kumbaba* points to 1606 AD, the reign of King khagemba on the mass arrival of Muslims in Manipur. This was followed after the invasion of Manipur by the combined forces of the then King of Cachhar and the King of Taraf (Sylhet) under the instigation of Shanongba, the youngest brother of King Khagemba over an issue of boat wreckage. Those migrated Muslims were given Meitei women which ultimately led to the establishment of *Pangal* family. In due course of time process of assimilation took place with the Meitei community and its culture. Thus this was the first step towards permanent settlement and formation of *Pangal* society in Manipur.

### **II. Pangal Women under established social institution**

Woman constitutes approximately half of its total population in the *Pangal* community. As per the Report on Socio- Economic Survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) 2004, the total population of Manipuri Muslims stands at 2,02,355, of which 1,00,389 are female and 1,01,966 persons are male. Women play an important role in establishing the institution of family and marriage is one of the most fundamental ancient social institutions. Its forms, nature and process vary from society to society. Manipuri Muslims have its own forms of marriage system which are as proscribed by the Islamic law. Endogamy is not common among the *Pangals* whereas clan exogamy is a prevalent form. Girls are found to be married in early age. The girl child is generally allowed to get married after attaining the age of puberty. Marriage among Muslim is a social contract and is not sacrosanct. It is preceded with the religious ritual of "*Nikaah*". The essential elements of marriage proposal among Muslims are: proposal made by or on behalf of the concerned parties, acceptance of the proposal by the would-be bride in the presence of two or more male witnesses (*Gawah*) for the proposed *Nikaah*. The settlement of '*Mahr*' is usually concluded by both parties ahead of "*Nikah*" ritual. In practice, three *Mohor* (10 Dirham each *Mohor*) of gold is generally paid by the groom to the bride as '*Mahr*'. This is a trend of marriage amongst the Manipuri Muslim.

Indian Muslims commonly use the Arabic word *jahez* for dowry and very often, justify the practice in terms of *jahez-e-fatimi*. Islamists classify *jahez* into two categories. The first comprises some essential articles for the outfit of the bride as well as for conjugal life. The other is made up of valuable goods, clothes, an amount of money settled on after bargaining, and lavish food and hospitality for the *barat*. However, the practice of *jahez* has not been voluntary but coercive among Indian Muslims for a long time. Among Manipuri Muslims bride's parents arrange household equipments which are locally known as *Aaunnpot* (gift). The basic concept of *Aaunnpot* is to present household materials as a gift to their daughter on establishing a new family but these days the system

is fast changing. Parents of the bride arrange heavy *aaunpot* almost similar to the concept of dowry. They prepare gold ornaments, modern decorated furniture, sofa set, television set, dining table, fridge, vehicles including motor bike, four wheeler etc. Although there are some regional and local variations, it has become the main fashion of the day. There are competitions on mobilizing maximum *aaunpot* amongst the households in the Manipuri Muslim society. This has become a burden to the girl child bearing parents at large. There are divorce cases among the Pangal women and the number of unmarried girls is found to be increasing because of sheer *aunnpot*.

Pangal women in certain cases bear the brunt of polygamy. Pangals like any other Muslims are permitted to have four wives at a time provided they are treated equal. As such polygamy has to be practiced by only the wealthy and powerful persons but it has been abused and misused for nefarious ends, shattering the moral and social structures of the society. Some of the Pangal male resort to having more than one wife. The system of keeping wives in different known and unknown stations is prevalent among wealthy, employed and even lower income labour groups. This caused distress to the family member which ultimately led to family problems thereby affecting the education of children. Divorce is another social problem faced by the women. There are sizeable cases of divorce among the young Pangal couple which remain largely unreported. Manipuri Muslim follows the Islamic law of divorce. Divorce occurs on different grounds. Immoral Pangal members have proved to be disastrous to sound social order causing misery to many innocent without any fault on their part.

Socio- economic needs of a family are shared by its members. These needs have special reference to childbearing and rearing. A Pangal women starts the day- early morning as she wakes up from the bed, she is filled with a lot of household chores. She sweeps, cleans the utensils, set her child to read, cook food and other untold activities. Aabled daughters follow and assist the mother in her activities. Not unexceptional, daughters after the age of eight years or so joined their mother at work or cooked and cleaned at home. Boys rarely helped and it was not usual to see sons playing while their younger sisters were at work, either at home or with their mothers. She has internalized the dominance of the homemaker role. She appeared convinced that men had a right to better lives, but she rarely had such thought for herself. She is assigned with certain set of roles and status. She has to play the role of a wife, a mother, a housekeeper, a cook, a neighbor an employer, an employee and so on.

In order to fulfill the socio-economic needs of the family women use to venture in the unorganized sectors to earn as domestic servant, Jugali (labourer) in construction sector or runs petty business, if male partner is a daily wage earner and if he is unable to feed his family members. In rural areas, the Pangal women take up domestic works such as vegetable cultivation, fishing, weaving etc. It is also found that 14.54% of the Pangal women are employed in economic activity such as account worker in an own household enterprise, wage employee, casual wage labour, employer or unpaid helper. Nonetheless women are engaged in non- economic activities such as maintenance of kitchen garden, poultry rearing, free collection of firewood, collection of food grain, water, washing, cooking etc.

Maximum numbers of Pangal family belong to the lower income group. 41.23% of Manipuri Muslim household is below 2000 rupees monthly income as against 3.06% of higher income household of 10,000 rupees. As per the report, 71.17% of the total populations of Pangals are found to be out of the labour force while 28.83% are in the labour force of which 24.41% are employed and 4.69% are self employed. According to distribution of persons by principal usual activity status, 90.12% of the female are outside the labour force. One of the main reasons could be illiteracy, however possibility of concealing the reality due to prestige biasness may not be ruled out.

The structures of residential buildings of most of the Pangals are *katchha* of which 61.93% are built on mud, bamboo and thatch. Only 6.86% of the families live in pucca houses. The type of residential homes also determines the standard of leaving. Inequality of income amongst the household expresses social inequality amongst families. This leads to unequal distribution of social rewards and statuses. The power, prestige and wealth of the society are limited and hence others remain deprived. 'Economic Development Programme' and 'Skill Development Programme' in various trades like tailoring, carpentry, embroidery, crafts, mobile repairing initiated and implemented

by the State government is projected to improve the economy of the family but these needs evaluation.

### **III. Pangal Women: Education against Social Challenges**

Education is the most fundamental instrument for human resource development. Emile Durkheim writes "Society can survive only if there exist among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity, education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands". Like Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, a renowned sociologist argue that the school represents society in miniature. Education emerges out of the needs of the society. He argues that after primary socialization within the family, the school takes over as the focal socializing agency. Education of women, therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures. However education is constrained by the socio-economic conditions of the people, their attitude, values and culture.

The Muslims of Manipur paid attention to the study of Persian books in the early days by sending their children to the house of scholars or teachers as there were no formal education systems in Manipur. Modern education system was brought to Manipur during the British paramount. The education of women was neglected since the inhabitation of the Muslims in Manipur. Parents were mainly responsible for imparting education to their daughters. Mothers imparted training to their daughters in embroidery, weaving and domestic works. The people of Manipur in general and Meetei Pangals in particular were not aware of the values and importance of education. The idea of mass education was not felt even after independence. In the earlier days education was regarded as the restricted activity of the male folks. Female education was not encouraged for a number of decades.

Female literacy rate excluding the child population of the age group 0-6 years worked out for the community as a whole as 48.56% as against the literacy rate of 74.68% male. The overall literacy stood at 61.77% as against the state literacy rate of 70.50% of 2001 census. Of the total Manipuri Muslims staying outside the state for education 86.36% are male and 13.64% are female.

### **IV. Factors Affecting Female Enrolment**

Girls' enrolment and adult education of women is much lower than that of men in the Manipuri Muslim society. There were a total of 52,727 children in the age group of 5-14 years; of this children never enrolled constitute 32.55% of the total child population. Of the enrolled child population of 39,780, the dropout rate is 9.68% and as such the children not attending school can be worked out to be 42.23%. Dropout rates are expected to be much higher among the Manipuri Muslim female student which needs further empirical research. The main reasons for dropout are cited as household economic activities and domestic chores. 59.22% of the Pangal women are illiterate and amongst those literate the level of education is very low. Level of education among the Pangal women is mainly concentrated within primary to secondary level with 5.43% pre-primary, 13.98% primary, 10.04% middle and 7.08% secondary education. Level of higher education and technical education is very low. It is found that only 1.08% and 0.08% of the women obtain a graduate and master degree respectively. Technical graduates and masters remain negligible.

Factors affecting enrolment and retention of female students in the educational institutes are of due to various familial and social factors. Women's education has been affected by various non-familial factors also, especially by the structure and the delivery system of education. In a family where families impose restrictions on girls, particularly after a certain age, easy accessibility to school is essential. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidilaya Scheme under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Madarsa Modernisation Programme of Prime Minister fifteen point programme may address this issue. The issues of co-education versus single sex schools involve certain specific pedagogic principles. Insufficient numbers of teachers, insufficient incentives such as scholarships, mid day meals, free books are factors affecting the girl's education. Programmes like Pre-matric, Post-matric, Merit cum Means based scholarship, coaching for the professional and remedial courses for the minority students, implemented by the government in the state is expected to increase the status of education in the coming years among the Manipuri Muslim and Pangal women in particular.

## V. Conclusion

Manipuri Muslim women face social hardships. Pangal women are caught in lot of social obligation right from the hour they wake up from bed. Pangal society is a male dominated society. Female are given less opportunity in terms of education, health and decision making. A boy is always considered important than a girl child. In a family where the income level is low the female child is hardly sent to the schools. Even in the higher income group there is always a trend of giving male child the best education. Pangal household of 41.23% are below the lower income level. Even the parents of this income group resort to sending their son and not daughters in the good private schools. There is high percentage of children never enrolled for school. There are high dropouts among the Manipuri Muslims and the rate of drop out among the female child is expected to be much higher.

Pangal women got the brunt of social challenges like dowry, polygamy, divorce which ultimately disturbs the ongoing family processes. Such social problems are high especially in the lower income group. Traditional concept of dowry is fast picking up in the present Muslim society. Polygamy among Pangals is mainly misused and abused. There are cases of wives kept at different locations by the husband. Divorce trend though minimal is likely to distress the family. As such social challenges affect the Pangal women, family, education and over all development of girl child who are the future women of the community.

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