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The State of Affairs of *Pangal*¹ Women: A Feminist Perspective



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Abstract

The *Pangal* community is one of the indigenous communities in Manipur state which lies at the north eastern corner of India. The representation of *Pangal* women and their condition in terms of polity, society and economy through the lens of feminist perspective in Manipur is minimal and extended to the village/local level only. The paper tries to answer in an integrated way some of the pertinent questions in respect of *Pangal* women. In this context, an attempt has been made to explore the historical background of the origin of *Pangal* in Manipur. This paper has also attempted to critically examine the economic, political and social conditions of *Pangal* women in the light of feminist point of view from the medieval to the post-colonial periods.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Women of Manipur have a glorious tradition of shouldering great responsibilities - social, economic or political, whenever it becomes necessary for them to do so. It is evident in the myths and legends of the people, and also in the socio-political history of the state. The early political history of Manipur is cherished with episodes where one finds women of Manipur playing an important role in the socio-political and economic life of the society since the early period. The tradition continued during the British period and post-independence as well. This is particularly evident in two very significant events- the First Nupi Lan (1904) and the Second Nupi Lan (1939). They also participated in the socio-religious and political reform movements during the 1930s and mid-1940s. They have also been participating in the electoral politics of the state since 1948 (under the then Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947). After the state's merger into India, they started participating in the Lok Sabha, Territorial Council,

Territorial Assembly, State Assembly and local self-governing body elections. But the number of women candidates and their successful venture in the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections remain negligible so far though they did better in the last few state assembly elections. However, women's reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has resulted in greater entry of women in these institutions. Their role played with the important socio-political issues which affect the interests of Manipur and people living inside the state during the post-merger period can also be clearly seen from the active role they played during the statehood movement, and the *Meira Paibi* Movement, Inner Line Permit (ILP) movement, Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) movement (which is no more a state issue with the introduction of ILP in the state) and the present ongoing movement against the alcoholism, drug abuse, violence against women and also other forms of ill treatment of the society.

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The high rate of participation of women at a rapid pace is considered to be the good indicator of society moving upward. The participation of women in economic activity speaks about their condition in the society. For example, the nature of crop grown has a direct relation with female participation rates in rural area i.e. women workers are found much higher in rice cultivation and in wheat cultivation, male workers are more dominant due to masculine skills (Gulati, 1975). The persistent gender based division of labor in rural areas is very much associated with both economic factors and socio-cultural factors (Hossain *et al.*, 2004).

The question of ‘representation’ of *Pangal* women in Manipur and their condition in terms of polity, society and economy through the lens of feminist perspective is not new but the question gained its momentum in the recent years. It is not extended to a wider scale but either village or local level only. Their conditions and representations are poor particularly their participation is negligibly absent in the political affairs of the state. It is possibly true to say that no scholar has attempted so far to deal with the roles of *Pangal* women in polity, society and economy in the light of feminist outlook but attempted to study some pertinent portions of the thematic topic. Some of the relevant questions are given as: What was the historical background of *Pangal* in Manipur? What were the social, political and economic statuses of *Pangal* women since their settlement into the state of Manipur? Why were the *Pangal* women nil while considering their political representation in the state during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods? Is there a reasonably male domination over the *Pangal* women? What are the crucial aspects that get in their way into the political participation in the state? There might have been some community obstruction while considering their socio-political representations as the man is the decision maker which needs to be critically examined here. They are socially, economically and politically backward while comparing with the counterpart majority communities.

Data on socio-economic and educational status of *Pangal* women are least available. However, Directorate of Economics and Statistics with the Directorate of Minorities and Other Backward Classes (MOBC), Government of Manipur conducted a very specific survey on the socio-economic conditions of *Meitei Pangal* (Manipuri Muslims) in Manipur. As per the report of the survey (here referred to as SES-MP, 2004), Muslims lag far behind other communities in all the indicators of socio-economic status. As per 2011 Census, Muslims formed around 8.4% of the total population in the state. The literacy rate of the state average was 76.94% (male 83.58% and female 70.26%) while the average literacy rate of Muslims in the state were 67.76% (male being 80.33% and female being 55.22%) only. Percentage of *Pangal* who pursues higher education even today is quite low. One of the reasons of low percentage of *Pangal* in the higher education is high

dropout rate mainly because of bad economic condition among the community (Shah, 2009).

2 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is mainly based on secondary sources of data such as books, journals, local *puyas*², chronicles, British archival texts and other archival sources to trace the historical facts and also the Census of India Reports, National Sample Survey Reports, District Census Hand Books, Statistical Abstract of Manipur etc. for demographic, political, economic facts and to come to a conclusion of their social status based on the above facts. No such statistical tools are used with the exception of percentage method to identify their proportions in either of the variables. Since the present study is confined only to *Pangal* which is part of larger Other Backward Classes (OBC) group in the state, there may have some differences between the Muslim population of Manipur and *Pangal* population as there are some non-*Pangal* but Muslims in the state. Since we don't have separate *Pangal* enumeration with the exception SES-MP, 2004, the Muslim population of Manipur is taken for consideration in this paper. *Pangal* population is estimated to be around 8.26% of the state total population as on 1st March, 2004 (SES-MP, 2004).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 *Pangal*: Tracing Historical Background

There are two assumptions regarding the matter of the origin of the Muslim community in Manipur (Khan, 2014a; Khan, 2015a; Khan, 2016). The historical background of the settlement of *Pangal* community in the state of Manipur is that ‘the first Muhammadans, the *Aribam* family, came to Manipur during the time of Naophangba’ (Parratt, 1998).³ N. Devendra and the Muslim Panchayat Lilong Report (1932) claimed that ‘two persons, Sadir Para Koirang and Kutuwan Khan, were the real ancestors of the *Aribam* clan’ (Irene, 2010). According to *Maichous* (Meitei Pandit Scholars), Manipuri Muslim clan formation began with the ‘*Aribam sagei*’ during the reign of King Naophangba (590-680 AD). This *Pangal* population that was found in 930 AD was ‘adept in preparing salt dug from wells since their Muslim co-religionists used to collect salt from the Bengal Sea’ (Irene, 2010). However, some sources of Sanskrit, Vaishnavite and chronicles indicated the Muslims as ‘*Turushka*’⁴ during the 14th century.⁵ It is clearly evident from one of the pioneering books, *Mussalman-e-Manipuri*, written by Maulana Rahimuddin in Urdu language that ‘three Muslims namely Seikh Ruba, Gora Khan and Ashiq Shah came to Manipur to manufacture muskets for the king Mungyamba (1562-1597 AD)’ (Irene, 2010). This kind of historical analysis and explanation with regard to the appearance of *Pangals* and their conformation of clans such as *Aribam* clan in the reign of king Naophangba was also supported by some experts including J.C. Higgins after relying on the facts provided by Pandit Achouba in 1933 (Singh, 1985; Shah, 2008). Despite having narratives

about the Aribam clan, which was believed to have landed to Manipur for the purpose of manufacturing guns, recent studies on the subject has rebuffed such claims as there were no 'official' recognition of giving clans to those *Pangals* who were made them settlement before the seventeenth century. It appeared that they might have landed for scouring other assignments because no substantive text and copious information on this account were available and moreover, extensive inter-regional trade was extremely slender.

However, the year 1606 was considered as the other significant landmark and a very firm benchmark period as this was the year when the settlement of Manipuri Muslims began, and hence this was the first step in the realization of the manifest destiny of Muslim community in Manipur (Kamei, 1991; Kamei, 2006). It was '*Sanongba Higaiwa*' (*Higaiwa* means false instigation) which made the way for their settlement in Manipur. It was the significant episodic incident of taking a boat for the *hiyang tannaba* (Boat Race) between the younger brothers of reigning king Khagemba (1597-1652 AD) in 1604 AD namely Chingsomba and his younger brother Sanongba. Unfortunately, Chingsomba's boat had broken down due to a collision at Leishangkhong. King Khagemba made an instruction to Sanongba to take the pleas of Chingsomba to choose either the repaired or the new one, however the point that Sanongba kept insisting to retain his original boat on account of provocation made by his own mother Luwang Changbambi that made them to run off to Cachar. He made a request to the king of Cachar Pratap Singh to attack Manipur to make him the king of the state as a tributary ruler under Cachar. He entered into a combined invasion of Cachari and Muslim coercions under the generalship of Yakharek, Bhimbal (Acharya, 1984) and Prasena (a leader of the Muslim mercenaries of a locality known as Taraf (Nathan, 1936; Habib, 1982) in Sylhet, south-west portion of the district of Sylhet, about 10 miles from

Habigunj in the south eastern direction). Regarding the geographical plight and soldierly skillful of the reigning King Khagemba, the Cachari King after having a discussion with Sanongba, made a decision to take the support of the Nawab of Taraf, Muhammad Najira, who agreed their request and extended his confederation in carrying the war against the state of Manipur by providing 1000 soldiers under the military commander of Muhammad Sani (the general of the Muslim forces), Shah Kusum, Sheikh Juned, Kourif Sheikh (his younger brothers), Akon, Alup, Shuleiya, Nampha, Phaitong, Tumiya, Khamya, Aman, Khela, Aqya, Khamba, Punom, Kashra, Munon Khan, etc. (Singh and Khan, 1973).

War broke out between the two sides. At last, a legal treaty of three points was signed between the Maharaja Khagemba, the then King of Manipur and the Qazi Muhammad Sani, commander-in-chief of the Muslim army troupe to end the war and to decorate those Muslim soldiers' peaceful settlement permanently in Manipur. Those conditions of three points legal treaty signed between two sides played a pivotal role in the habitation of Muslims in Manipur (Rafayattullah, 1997). After these three conditions agreed, the Muslims started settling in Manipur peacefully and cordially with the local communities till today.

Lots of migration took place from the neighboring areas like Sylhet (modern Bangladesh), Cachar, Assam, Gujarat, Tripura, Burma, etc. during the later periods. The Muslims have played a crucial role in the social, cultural, political, economic and administrative affairs of the state since day one they took settlement till today.

3.2 Demography of *Pangal* in Manipur

The *Pangal* lives primarily on the fertile river banks in rural areas of Manipur. According to SES-MP, 2004, the Manipuri Muslims (*Pangal*) inhabited in 95 hamlets/villages/sub-blocks.

Table 1. District-wise distribution of Muslims (*Pangal*)

Districts	1991		2001		2011	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
Senapati	79	0.06	637	0.33	1649	0.69
Tamenglong	149	0.11	1431	0.75	589	0.25
Churachandpur	1248	0.93	2573	1.35	2886	1.20
Chandel	1414	1.06	2318	1.21	3086	1.29
Ukhrul	286	0.21	881	0.46	1115	0.46
Total Hill	3176	2.38	7840	4.11	9325	3.89
Imphal East	62152*	46.54*	62932	32.96	80199	33.44
Imphal West	*	*	19124	10.02	24298	10.13
Bishnupur	11024	8.26	14194	7.43	18691	7.79
Thoubal	57183	42.82	86849	45.49	107323	44.75
Total Valley	130359	97.62	183099	95.89	230511	96.11
Total	133535	100	190939	100.00	239836	100.00

*Undivided Imphal District; Source: Office of the Registrar General of India.

According to 2011 census, the total population of Manipuri Muslim was recorded to be 2,39,836 persons out of state's total population of 28,55,794. It constitutes 8.4% of the total state population of Manipur. Table 1 shows that out of the total Muslim population, 44.75% lived in Thoubal district as against the 33.44% in Imphal East district followed by Imphal West and Bishnupur districts with 10.13% and 7.79%, respectively. *Pangal* population is mainly inhabited in the valley districts but also in the hill districts in less numbers. Nearly 3.89% of the total population of *Pangal* is in the hill districts.

Table 2 shows almost the same number of Muslim population of both male and female in Manipur. Male Muslims account 50.20% and female Muslims 49.80% of the total Muslim population. If we round up by taking out the decimals, the figure comes around 50% for each category. The high percentage of female among *Pangal* may be considered to be a good sign and it is to be rightly claimed that preference of male child above female child is gradually decreasing among the Muslim parents.

3.3 Work Force and Economic Condition of *Pangal* Women in Manipur

According to Census 2011, the number of Muslim workers to the total Muslim population was recorded at 37.66%. Percentage of Muslim female workers out of total Muslim female population was found to be little less than 30% (Table 3). Out of the total female Muslim work force i.e., 35,412 (29.65 % of the total Muslim

women population), around 40.34% were main workers and 59.66% were marginal workers. According to SES-MP 2004, 71.17% of the total population is found to be out of the labor force while 28.83% are in the labor force of which 24.14% are employed and 4.69% are unemployed. The same survey showed that 90.12% of the females are outside the labor force. The percentage share of male workers belonging to *Pangal* community is much higher than the female workers with 85.46% male workers as against the 14.54% female workers. The main reason could be illiteracy. However possibility of concealing the reality due to prestige question may not be ruled out.

Out of the total Muslim workers, 60.79% were male workers while 39.21% were female workers (Table 3). Similar findings were also observed in SES-MP 2004. Among the employed persons, the percentage of males is much higher than the females. From these findings it is more clearly indicated that male dominates over female among Manipuri Muslims in terms of economy. However, women are responsibly taking care in a number of non-economic activities which are actually benefiting economically in the household. Some of the activities are maintenance of kitchen garden, household poultry rearing, collection of fish, collection of firewood, grinding of food grains, cooking, washing, sewing, collection of water, etc. If these activities are converted to economic values and also counted, the work participation rate for females would be considerably high.

Table 2. District wise Muslim (*Pangal*) Population by Sex in Manipur

Districts	Population	Male		Female	
		Persons	%	Persons	%
Bishnupur	18691	9350	50.02	9341	49.98
Thoubal	107323	53819	50.15	53504	49.85
Imphal West	24298	12114	49.86	12184	50.14
Imphal East	80199	40023	49.90	40176	50.10
Total Valley	230511	115306	50.02	115205	49.98
Ukhrul	1115	629	56.41	486	43.59
Chandel	3086	1739	56.35	1347	43.65
Senapati	1649	907	55.00	742	45.00
Tamenglong	589	320	54.33	269	45.67
Churachandpur	2886	1503	52.08	1383	47.92
Total Hill	9325	5098	54.67	4227	45.33
Total Manipur	239836	120404	50.20	119432	49.80

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Table 3. District wise Muslim workers in Manipur

Districts	Population	Workers		Female population	Female workers		
		Persons	% of Muslim population		Persons	% of the total female population	% of the total Muslim workers
Bishnupur	18691	7164	38.33	9341	2981	31.91	41.61
Thoubal	107323	41117	38.31	53504	17754	33.18	43.18
Imphal West	24298	9447	38.88	12184	3754	30.81	39.74
Imphal East	80199	28388	35.40	40176	9502	23.65	33.47
Total Valley	230511	86116	37.36	115205	33991	29.50	39.47
Ukhrul	1115	652	58.48	486	250	51.44	38.34
Chandel	3086	1136	36.81	1347	257	19.08	22.62
Senapati	1649	876	53.12	742	345	46.50	39.38
Tamenglong	589	295	50.08	269	113	42.01	38.31
Churachandpur	2886	1239	42.93	1383	456	32.97	36.80
Total Hill	9325	4198	45.02	4227	1421	33.62	33.85
Total Manipur	239836	90314	37.66	119432	35412	29.65	39.21

Source: Census of India, 2011.

The economic condition of *Pangal* women is not as good as we expect since they are totally dependent on primary activities. Some scholars pointed out that the *Pangal* has agrarian based economy. It is estimated that 2.27% of the *Pangal* population is in tertiary sector mainly in white color jobs (Irene, 2010) but others are in the activities of unorganized sector such as low profile, informal and unorganized economic activities such as hotel industry, rickshaw pulling, repairing and assembling of bicycles, tricycles, and motor vehicles since the early period of twentieth century. Their economy has been in bad shape as they depend their life to their spouses. There had been handicap of *purdah* system in the beginning of seventeenth century which continued till the middle of nineteenth century but of late, *Pangal* girls and also women for that matter started pursuing education with or without the strict *purdah* system. Nowadays, there are substantial increasing numbers of Muslim girls in general colleges and also in Universities in and outside Manipur.

With the passage of time, the economic condition of *Pangal* women has worsened, compelling women and children in labor force and other activities because of their livelihood besides household management. All Muslims including women are industrious in nature (Dun, 1992). Moreover, there is no historical record of inclusion of *Pangal* women in the department of *Pacha*⁶ despite having of other community women in it. There is no separate market for *Pangal* women in Imphal city though they are settling in the state as an indigenous community for more than four centuries and also

contributing services in the state affairs and interests. Vast chunk of *Pangal* women are still under Below Poverty Line (BPL) not only in the rural but also in urban areas. It is possibly said that there is not much knowledge of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) among the *Pangal* women in rural areas as there is lack of awareness of it among them. It is no denial of the fact that there is a male domination in the economy also. Some scholars opined that *Pangal* women play a vital role in the economy of the state.

3.4 Literacy and Educational Level of *Pangal* Women in Manipur

The *Pangal* women's educational status in Manipur was by and large lagging behind that of men. In 1998, there were only four Muslim women post-graduates (Irene, 2010). The appearance of the concept of *mangba-sengba* (impurity and purity) in the reign of *Pamheiba* (popularly known as Garib Nawaz-Benefactor of the Poor) which at one point of time made hindrances the relationship of not only *Pangal* community but also the Hill people. So, their participation in the socio-cultural task of the state was negligibly absent due to the backwardness of education. However, the condition has been now going better and better after the implementation of 4% reservation for *Pangal* on state services and professional courses on 27th December 2006 during the regime of Congress led government under the Chief Ministership of O. Ibobi Singh which is quite noticeable from the increased numbers of *Pangals* in various service sectors as compared to the condition before 2006. However, the conditions of *Pangal* women

are still far behind. In 1955, only two Muslim girls passed matric exam. The first M. A. Degree holder among them emerged in 1963. By 1979-80, more than twenty girls completed their masters and graduations. There are not enough girls' educational schools and institutions in the *Pangal* dominated areas like Irong Chesabam, Sangaiyumpham, Kwakta, Mayang Imphal, Pora, Sora, Santhel, Keirak, Hangoon, Phabakchaou, etc. For example, Sangaiyumpham area has a population of around 11,000 *Pangal*. Very few of them enrolled themselves into higher education. Vast chunk of the Muslim population in this village are not even literate⁷ and most of them chose the different forms of profession in primary sector in their early age for livelihood. The available data shows that this area has only two research scholars as on date.

With the establishment of local private English schools, a new momentum has gained to general education for the *Pangal* community. Few *Pangal* girls used to go to urban areas like Imphal and its nearby areas for accessing the higher education. There is not enough facility to access the higher education in the *Pangal* dominated areas except Lilong area where there is one college namely Lilong Haoreibi college. The reason for establishing of this college at Lilong area was to give higher education among the *Pangal* women (Devi, 2014). As compared to Meitei community, their drop-out rate is visibly high on account of socio-religious factor, lack of awareness, lack of qualified, influential and experienced leaders who can lead the community forward apart from economically weak.

According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), 2017-18, the share of Muslim enrollment in higher education has increased during 2012-13 and 2013-14 but it remained almost similar in

the next three years before jumping to 4.17% in 2017-18. Similar trend was observed among Muslim male and female also. Both male and female witnessed similar trend in enrolment. Surprisingly, the share of Muslims in total enrolment in higher education was higher than other minorities in 2012-13 but it had reversed from next year onwards. The main concern of *Pangal* in the state is their underrepresentation in higher education. They constitute 8.4% of the total population of the state according to 2011 census but their share in total enrolment in higher education is 4.17% only which is close to half of their share in population as per AISHE, 2017-18. Furthermore, it is opined that it is seemingly the lack of inapplicability of 4% reservation policy implemented by the state government towards the *Pangal* in Manipur in different general colleges (Khan, 2020).

According to AISHE, 2018-19, a total of 5,601 Muslim students enrolled for higher studies in the state, of which 3,047 were male and 2,554 were female students. The survey on higher education tried to collect data of Muslim separately among minorities and as per response received during the survey, 5.23% students belonged to Muslim minority and 2.32% were from other minority communities. Muslim minority had more male students than female whereas other minority had more female than male (AISHE, 2018-19).

As per SES-MP, 2004, huge gap was recorded between boys and girls staying outside Manipur for education among *Pangal* with 86.36% boys as against the 13.64% girls of the total. From the same study, the drop outs of students aged 5-14 years was recorded as many as 26% due to heavy pressure of household activities and 21% of them could not continue their education for economic reasons.

Table 4. Literacy rate of Muslims in Manipur (2011)

Districts	Population				Male population				Female population			
	Persons	Above 06 years	Literacy		Persons	Above 06 years	Literacy		Persons	Above 06 years	Literacy	
			Persons	%			Persons	%			Persons	%
Bishnupur	18691	15066	8567	57	9350	7496	5368	72	9341	7570	3199	42
Thoubal	107323	88336	61017	69	53819	43966	36385	83	53504	44370	24632	56
Imphal West	24298	20026	14256	71	12114	9973	8296	83	12184	10053	5960	59
Imphal East	80199	66718	44892	67	40023	33050	25993	79	40176	33668	18899	56
Total Valley	230511	190146	128732	68	115306	94485	76042	80	115205	95661	52690	55
Ukhrul	1115	991	798	81	629	560	481	86	486	431	317	74
Chandel	3086	2634	1793	68	1739	1508	1214	81	1347	1126	579	51
Senapati	1649	1442	944	65	907	790	553	70	742	652	391	60
Tamenglong	589	512	381	74	320	277	224	81	269	235	157	67
Churachandpur	2886	2473	1644	67	1503	1311	960	73	1383	1162	684	59
Total Hill	9325	8052	5560	69	5098	4446	3432	77	4227	3606	2128	59
Total Manipur	239836	198198	134292	68	120404	98931	79474	80	119432	99267	54818	55

Source: Census of India, 2011.

A perusal of [table 4](#) shows that out of the total Muslim population in the state i.e., 2,39,836 (8.4% of the total population of the state) in 2011, around 1.98 lakh are above the age group of 0-6 years. The age group of 0-6 years is taken out from the total population to calculate the literacy rate. Out of 1.98 lakh above the age group of 0-6 years, 1.34 lakh are literate, of which 7.94 thousand and 5.48 thousand are male and female literates respectively. On an average around 67.76% are literate among Muslims in the state. Out of 98,931 male Muslim population above the age group of 0-6 years, 80.33% are literate and out of 99,267 female Muslim population, again in the age group of 0-6 years in the same year, 55.22% are literate. If we compare these figures with the literacy rate of other communities in the state, the figures are still low with the exception of percentage of male literates which is surprisingly touched the 80% mark and quite close with state average.

One point here is to be noted that there is obviously a gap between the number of male and female literates among Muslims in Manipur i.e., out of 1.34 lakh Muslim literates in the state, nearly 7.94 thousand (i.e., 59.18%) and 5.48 thousand (i.e., 40.82%) are male and female literates respectively. But if we compare the percentage of Muslim male and female who pursue higher education out of the literate male and female, figure surprisingly comes close with male and female being 2.53% and 2.14% respectively which may be considered to be almost equal. Only about 2-3% of the literate population pursuing for higher education among males and females is disheartening but percentage of male and female pursuing higher education among Muslims which is almost in equal percentage, is quite encouraging.

3.5 Political participation of Pangal Women in Manipur

There is not much data regarding the participation of *Pangal* women in the political and administrative affairs of the state. There are some documented instances found in *Nongsamei Puya* and *Pangal Thorakpa* that *Pangal* women helped men by providing one instrument namely shuttler (locally known as *Tem* in Manipuri language) during the time of war ([Singh and Khan, 1973](#); [Singh, 1985](#)).

But it is true to the fact that there is vacuum of *Pangal* women in the political space of Manipur since the beginning of the seventeenth century till the post-colonial period. Against the British policy of exporting rice with the help of some Marwari businessmen to other states that led to inflation in the entire state locally known as *chaktangba*, more than 30 *Pangal* women took part in the “Nupi Lan” conflict of 1939 (Women’s Uprising, 12th December 1939) along with Meitei women.⁸ Their names are given as Shara Bibi, Shajaobi Bibi, Tombi Bibi, Gulzan, Bodon Tombi, Sanabi Bibi, Noor Jahan, Safarjan, etc. from Kshetri Mayai Leikai, Khergao, Khergao Sabal Leikai, Kshetri Awang Leikai,

Keikhu ([Irene, 2010](#)) and possibly many more from other parts of the state. Except this, there are no historical proof of participation and representation of *Pangal* women in the state’s political affairs till 1947 ([Khan, 2017](#)). It shows to a certain extent that their participation signifies some sort of political consciousness in the psyche of *Pangal* women though it is not illustrated widely in the least developed *Pangal* society.

There was no Muslim woman representative in the Territorial Council (later known as Territorial Legislative Assembly) in 1963, despite having three Muslim men. In the second Manipur Territorial Assembly in 1967-69, two Muslim men were present though there was not a single representative from Muslim women ([Irene, 2010](#)). In the new Manipur Legislative Assembly, after Manipur became statehood on 21st January, 1973, 60 members were elected, out of which 5 were from the *Pangal* community. The first Chief Minister (CM) of Manipur when Manipur became a full-fledged state was from the Muslim community namely Md. Alimuddin from Lilong Assembly Constituency. Likewise, in the second Manipur Legislative Assembly in the year 1974-80, there were seven Muslim Member of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) elected. In the third and fourth Manipur Legislative Assemblies during 1980-84 and 1984-90, three Muslim MLAs were elected each. In the following Legislative Assemblies too, at least 2/3 Muslim male MLAs were there either from one Assembly Constituency or other elected. In 1990-95, two Muslim MLAs, in 1995-2000, four Muslim MLAs, in 2000-2002, one Muslim MLA, in 2002-2007, three Muslim MLAs, in 2007-12, two Muslim MLAs, in 2012-17, three Muslim MLAs and in the latest Legislative Assembly of 2017-21, three Muslim MLAs were elected. Never in the history of Manipur, *Pangal* women were elected and served at that level which is flimsy knot for the *Pangal* community. [Table 5](#) shows the historical trajectory of Muslim elected MLAs in State Legislative Assembly election since Manipur became a full-fledged state where even a single *Pangal* woman candidate winning the Assembly Election is nowhere mentioned.

There is lack of political awareness among *Pangal* community for sure and so under-representation of *Pangal* minority community in Manipur. It is to be mentioned here that ‘The Manipur Constitution Act 1947’ reserved 5.9% seats for “Mahamadans” in Manipur (The Manipur Constitution Act 1947, Chapter IV: The State Assembly). Absence of women representatives from Muslim community in Manipur Legislative Assembly for long is something we cannot ignore anymore. There has been *Pangal* women participation in Panchayat and Urban Municipalities election but only after 2012. Some of the *Pangal* women got elected as Pradhan (Panchayat) or Counsellor (Urban Municipality) and some others as members (Panchayat/Nagar Panchayat/Municipality).

Table 5. Number of Muslim elected MLAs in Manipur Legislative Assembly

Legislative Assembly	Duration	Male Muslim MLAs	Female Muslim MLAs
1 st	1972-1974	5	Nil
2 nd	1974-1980	7	Nil
3 rd	1980-1984	3	Nil
4 th	1984-1990	3	Nil
5 th	1990-1995	2	Nil
6 th	1995-2000	4	Nil
7 th	2000-2002	1	Nil
8 th	2002-2007	3	Nil
9 th	2007-2012	2	Nil
10 th	2012-2017	3	Nil
11 th	2017-2021	3	Nil

Source: www.elections.in and [Salam \(2006\)](#), Political Participation of Muslims in Manipur, (1948-2000)

Pangal women started formation of community organizations (CSOs) only after Nupi Lan, 1939 such as Muslim Chanura Development Organization, Kangleipak Muslim Chanura Marup, Ushoipokpi Tharaurok Women Development Organization, United Muslim Women Development Organisation (UMWDO) etc. Participation of *Pangal* women in the communal harmony rally of May 1993 showed developing stage of political awareness among them. They also took responsible roles to fight the drug trafficking and to counsel and rehabilitate drug users in association with other community organisations. They also formed *Meira Paibis* (torch bearers) like their counterpart Meitei community. Recently, in the 11th General Assembly Election, one *Pangal* woman namely Mrs. Najima contested from the Wabagai Assembly Constituency of Thoubal District. She became the first Muslim woman in the state who contested the General Election though she lost. She faced a lot of obstacles in her political career⁹. The reason why *Pangal* women are not participating in the electoral politics is not because of their lack of political awareness only but also because of prevailing *Pangal* society where women participation in outdoor activities including politics is considered to be bad for the society considering their religious bindings and beliefs.

3.6 Social Condition of *Pangal* Women in Manipur

It is a fact that the number of *Pangal* girls who enroll in the schools and colleges are increasing day by day but far behind other communities. Majority chunk of *Pangal* girls even today are out of the school education because of not having any good school to go in and around their village. Their parents could not afford the private schools which are comparatively costly. Few government/added/semi-government schools are in few Muslim villages which are not working properly. Due to lack of good facility of learning leads the parents to opt early marriage for their daughters. Apart from that, parents preferably use their girl children on home duties more while their boys are given more education. Least safety and security of girls are also another factor which prompted the parents to discontinue their girl children's

education in the early age ([Shah, 2009](#)).

Many *Pangal* women engage in various primary activities in unorganized sector. They work as paid laborers in such sectors. They are, by condition, forced to go to market, selling vegetables, fishes and other daily uses. In a changing paradigm shift, women folk of the *Pangal* community alarmingly overtook labor works which can be seen as the worst indicator of their socio-economic conditions. Where there is any construction, there are some *Pangal* women, if not many, working as laborers. Wife with or without her spouse works in such unorganized sector which might be circumstantially imposed to their life as a means of livelihood but may lead to high exposure to the risk of certain immoral activities, leading to the risk of HIV and AIDS along with certain other issues. This trend of evolving new labor class among the *Pangal* women is the worst indicator of their social status. There is a need to check this trend immediately for a better society at large ([Shah, 2009](#)).

The *Pangal* women took different roles in the family and even in the community itself. They performed many economic related activities like cultivation and weaving ([Khan, 2017](#)). The *Pangal* society is being considered as a male-dominated one despite having the point that theoretically there is equal status with men based on *Shariah*. Even there is gender bias in some sections of the *Pangal* society. It is true that the sole responsibility of any task for *Pangal* society is the man who is the head of the family and wives have to consult every matter with the husband as she is under the guidance of husband ([Irene, 2010](#)). Some of the scholars strongly felt that the *Pangal* women were socially handicap as their society is in the existence of rigid patriarchy and other social evil characters like restriction on free movement, restriction on freedom of education, early marriage and sometimes misuse of personal laws particularly during divorce¹⁰ ([Shahni, 2018](#)). Such factors not only delayed the social empowerment of *Pangal* women but also made earth-shattering clog for the development of this community in Manipur ([Irene, 2010](#)). The *Pangal* women run the house on the earning of its spouse and also helped the

family with her own home based economic activities (Shah, 2007).

4 CONCLUSION

Absence of participation of *Pangal* women in decision making inside and outside the home is the main cause of their ill-fated life. Change of lives of the *Pangal* women can only be expected when women have a voice in the decision-making process. There are some imperative factors of why the *Pangal* women are imperceptible in the socio-political activities of the state. The pivotal reasons are lack of awareness in the community itself, full of discernible apologists, lack of skillful, knowledgeable and competent leaders among the *Pangal* men and women. Generally speaking, there were some social delusions in the psyche of *Pangal* men and women like the learning of English education as impure. It hindered not only the growth of educational status among the *Pangal* men and women but also the socio-political participations in the state. This was possibly the same dilemma faced by the local community but this was categorically and phenomenally lapsed with the passage of time. They are participating and representing like the Meitei women nowadays but certain sections of *Pangal* society is still hanging around traditional system of early marriage and the thought of patriarchal mindset of domination like the giving of higher education to girls as inefficacious and ineffectual which should be removed from their minds so as to enable them to have at par with men. By and large, it can be arguable that the *Pangal* women's educational backwardness is far lagging behind the other communities. Modernization of Madrasas should be done in the *Pangal* society all in all. We should inclusively encourage giving basic education to *Pangal* girls and women (Khan et al., 2015b). There should have uprooted the patriarchy from the *Pangal* society. It can be safely concluded that from the points of economic, education, political and social conditions of *Pangal* women in Manipur in the light of feminist perspective are not sufficiently illustrated in the available literature. It is clearly witnessed from the facts and finding of this paper that the conditions of *Pangal* women are not as good as compared with the counterpart other communities.

NOTES

1. Muslim of Manipur is locally known as "Pangal". They are believed to have come through military invasion in 1606 AD and later on migrated from different parts of Bengal and its neighboring areas in different reigning periods. The word "Pangal" comes from the word "Bangal" (Parratt, 2005). But, officially, they are recognized as "Meitei-Pangal" by listing this community in both central and state list of OBC categories.
2. The term '*puya*' mentioned here means the stories of the forefather. It explains the traditional knowledge of recording the past or the written records handed down from generation to generation, which was brought out by *Pandits* (locally known as *maichous*) who were the royal scribes in the *loishang* (institution of scribes). Though myths, legends, folklore and genealogies are all inextricably mixed up, these *puyas* can be considered as the treasure of the traditional Manipuri historiography. For details, see in Gangmumei Kamei, *On History and Historiography of Manipur*, Akansha Publishing, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 23-24; *Historians and Historiography of Northeast India*, ed., J. B. Bhattacharjee, Akansha Publishing, New Delhi, 2012, p. 105.
3. There is a huge debate regarding the dating of king Naophangba. In the royal chronicle, it is stated that king Naophangba ruled Manipur in 428-518 AD. The date of his reign is still problematic and inconclusive.
4. This term appeared to be used after the discontinuance of the term 'Tajikas' after the tenth century. The term 'Turuska' has led to a number of historical debates and connotations. How is it originated in the Indian contexts is clearly mentioned by some historians such as P. Prasad, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, etc. in their works 'The Turuska or Turks in Late Ancient Indian Documents', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 55th Session, Aligarh, 1994, pp. 170-175; *Representing the Other: Eighth to Fourteenth Century*, Primus Books, (Reprinted), Delhi, 2017, pp. 22-24; 28-9; 34-36 respectively.
5. The editor, Bhagya Singh Yengkhoiba, of the book *Leithak-Leikharon* published in 1956, has been quoted mistakenly out of context as far as the meaning of the term Turuska is concerned. It does not have sense of the term of what the editor conveys in the book. It is clearly seen in the Chattopadhyaya's path-breaking work, *Representing the Other: Eighth to Fourteenth Century*, pp. 22-24; 28-9; 34-36.
6. It is a special *loishang* (department) dealing with women affairs only. It had encompassed of eleven members mainly headed by the King's Mother in association with women members of the royal family. It talks of social matters such as adultery, divorce, wife-beating, assault and other important issues of women. This department took decisions in connection with type of punishment it used to give. But there is no record of substantial information where *Pangal* women participated in it. For details, see in Manjusri Chaki Sircar, *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, Vikas Publishing House, Uttar Pradesh, 1984, p. 29.
7. <https://thecompanion.in/educational-status-of-pangal-community-a-field-study-from-manipur/>
8. <http://twocircles.net/2014dec14/1418564759.html>
9. <https://thewire.in/gender/meet-najima-bibi-first-muslim-woman-fight-manipur-elections>
10. In few occasions, the male *Pangal* may have misused the Islamic provision of *talaq*. Theoretically, a Muslim woman is entitled to the provisions and maintenance but in practical, divorced women hardly get these benefits. They even fail to get back the *mehar* promised in the *nikah nama*. Reasons behind the divorce of Muslim women are infidelity, violence against women, incompatibility and inability to satisfy dowry demand, chronic illness and infertility, lack of understanding between the husband and wife, barrenness and lack of good relationship with the mother-in-laws.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AISHE: All India Survey on Higher Education; **BPL**: Below Poverty Line; **CAB**: Citizenship Amendment Bill; **CM**: Chief Minister; **CSO**: Civil Society Organization; **ILP**: Inner Line Permit; **MLA**: Member of Legislative Assembly; **MOBC**: Minorities and Other Backward Classes; **OBC**: Other Backward Classes; **SES-MP**: Report on Socio-economic Survey of Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) 2004; **SHG**: Self-Help Group; **UMWDO**: United Muslim Women Development Organization.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This co-authored paper has no conflict of interest.

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