Fertility Differentials in Manipur : A Study on the Meiteis and The Muslims

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ABSTRACT Fertility and related factors of the Meiteis and the Muslims of Manipur have been examined. The Meitei women show higher mean age at marriage and higher mean age at first delivery. 40.89 % of the Meitei and 74.35 % of the Muslim women are found to get married before 18 years of age. The age specific fertility of the Meitei women are lower than those of the Muslim women. The Meitei women with completed fertility also show lower average fertility than their Muslim counterparts. Fertility is found to be inversely related with the educational and occupational status of the couples in the both the communities. Fertility is also found to be higher in joint families than in nuclear families.

INTRODUCTION

Fertility of women in any society is affected by various socio-cultural factors though it is a biological phenomenon. The study of fertility differentials is not possible without considering these factors. It is fully realized now that there are urgent needs and necessities to examine the levels of fertility patterns in every society and the related influencing factors. Intensive micro level studies in this field have been recognized as useful identifying these factors. However, despite many years of painstaking work, we are yet to know much about the determinants of fertility (Freedman, 1986). In the present paper an attempt is made to examine the variation of fertility among two different ethnic groups of Manipur, namely, the Meiteis and the Muslims, who live under similar physical and geographical environments, each leading different cultural and religious lives.

1. Mrs. Devi was a research scholar attached to the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University who expired in 1994. The paper was prepared prior to her sad demise.

The Meiteis form a dominant group in the central valley of Manipur. The main economy of the Meiteis is agriculture and cottage industry. Nearly 70% of the working population is directly or indirectly employed in agriculture. Rice is the single and the most important and leading crop. Fishing also plays an important role in the economy of the Meities. Loktak lake, the river streams and smaller lakes namely Waithou, Kharungpat, Lousipat etc. provide ample opportunities for fishing. Both men and women are found engaged in fishing.

The Meitei women are not confined only to the household work. They are also found to take equal part with their husbands in earning the bread for the family. There are many daily markets in Imphal attended only by women among which "Khwairamband Bazar" is the biggest. The Meitei women are good weavers. They weave clothes or knit for their family use and also for sale. Educated employed women, despite their jobs outside home, also bear the entire responsibilities for the management of the family.

The Muslims of Manipur, known as Pangals to other ethnic groups of the state, are living mostly along the fertile tract on the banks of rivers, such as the Imphal, Iril, Thoubal and also on the peripheries of lakes, such as the Loktak, Ikop, Kharunpat, Waithou, Poiroupat, Lansipat etc. The present day Muslims of Manipur are the descendents of the Bengali immigrants as well as war captives chiefly from Sylhet and Cachar, who came to Manipur during the reign of Khgemba Maharaja (1597-1652), (Singh and Khan, 1973; Constantine, 1981). Among them all are not originally Bengali. It is further stated that among them there are Pathans and Mu-

ghals as well (Singh, 1965, 1985). Agriculture is their main economy. They are also found to be engaged in other occupations like rickshaw pulling, driving, tailoring, carpentry etc. The literacy rate among them is relatively lower than that of the other ethnic groups of the state.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A total of 276 Meitei and 290 Muslim households were surveyed for the demographic studies. In those households 269 Meitei and 265 Muslim women could be interviewd. Since 9 Meitei and 5 Muslim women were found to be either permanently sterile or widow, they were excluded from the fertility studies. The data on the Meiteis were collected from two villages, *viz.*, Changangei and Malon situated at the distances of about 6 kms and 8 kms, respectively from Imphal on the Tiddim Road, an important state Highway which runs towards the southwest leading to Churachandpur, the Headquarters of Manipur South District. Data on the Muslim population were collected from the villages Kshetrigao, situated on the bank of Iril river at a distance of about 7 km from Imphal to the east and two other neighbouring villages, namely, Golapati and Hafiz Hatta situated on the bank of Imphal river in the eastern part of Imphal town. The distance of these two villages from the Imphal town is 3 km.

The data were collected using personal interview method from the couples who belong to different age groups. The data relating to demographic structure, fertility and mortality were recorded in two separately prepared schedules following the retrospective method. For the collection of data on age at marriage, age at delivery and the age at menopause also retrospective method was followed. The women were asked to recall their age at menarche, age at delivery and age at menopause. But this method has some limitations also which were tried to overcome. Some old ladies could not recall their age at menarche or age at menopause easily; for them indirect method of deter-

mining the age was followed. They remembered the age of their children. They were asked to recall how many years before the birth of their first child they got married and how many years before their marriage they attained menarche. In the same way they were also asked to recall after how many years of the birth of their last child they stopped menstruating. This method in the present field was proved to be very useful.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the various factors which can affect fertility, the age at marriage is one. The average age at marriage of women of a population indicates the possible fertility trend, as delayed marriages tend to delay pregnancies.

The age at marriage of the Meitei and the

Table 1 : Distribution of women according to age at marriage

Age at marriage (yrs)	Meities		Muslims	
	No.	%	No.	%
11	-	-	4	1.51
12	1	0.37	13	4.91
13	8	2.97	26	9.81
14	13	4.83	29	10.94
15	21	7.81	51	19.25
16	29	10.78	43	16.23
17	38	14.13	31	11.70
18	35	13.01	23	8.68
19	24	8.92	7	2.64
20	19	7.06	13	4.91
21	20	7.43	7	2.64
22	11	4.09	7	2.64
23	14	5.20	2	0.75
24	12	4.46	1	0.38
25	6	2.23	6	2.26
26	2	0.74	0	-
27	3	1.12	1	0.38
28	4	1.49	1	0.38
29	2	0.74	-	-
30	2	0.74	-	-
31	1	0.37	-	-
32	2	0.74	-	-
33	2	0.74	-	-
Total	269	100.00	265	100.00

Mean age at marriage   19.09 years,   16.40 years,
$t = 29.89$, d.f. $= \propto$, $P < .001$

Muslim women ranges from 12 to 33 years and 11 to 28 years, respectively. Though the Govt. of India in 1976 fixed the minimum age at marriage for girls at 18 years, 40.89% of the Meitei and 74.35% of the Muslim women are found to get married below that age (Table 1). It also appears that the age at marriage of the Muslim women is much lower than that of Meitei women, the mean being 16.40 years and 19.09 years respectively. With a higher mean age at marriage the Meitei differ significantly from the Muslim. The age specific mean age at marriage of the Meitei women is also found to be much higher than that of the Muslim women (Table 2). Higher educational status and higher rate of employment may be the possible causes for the marriage at a higher ages among the Meitei women.

Table 2 : Age sepcific mean age at marriage of women

Present Age	Meities		Muslims	
(yrs)	No.	Mean age at marriage	No.	Mean age a marriage
15-19	5	15.80	44	14.36
20.24	25	19.26	51	16.51
25-29	33	19.09	63	16.49
30-34	32	20.25	29	18.14
35-39	46	19.80	38	17.18
40-44	42	19.29	12	15.42
45-49	22	19.91	12	15.00
50-54	19	16.47	9	15.11
55-59	16	18.88	4	16.50
60-64	11	17.18	1	18.00
65 +	20	18.65	2	15.00
Total	269	19.09	265	16.40

The range of the age at menopause varies between 39 and 51 years among the Meiteis and 40 and 51 years among the Muslims, the average being 44.95 years and 45.08 years, respectively. The difference between the two communities in this respect is not statistically significant (Table 3).

The age at first child birth of the Meitei women ranges from 14 to 35 years and that of Muslim women from 12 to 31 years (Table 4). The mean age at first child birth of the Meiteis

Table 3 : Distribution of women according to age at menopause

Age at menopause	Meiteis		Muslims	
(yrs)	No.	%	No.	%
39	2	3.12	-	-
40	7	10.94	3	12.00
41	7	10.94	3	12.00
42	4	6.25	1	4.00
43	-	-	1	4.00
44	10	15.62	3	12.00
45	10	15.62	2	8.00
46	4	6.25	3	12.00
47	1	1.56	2	8.00
48	2	3.12	2	8.00
49	6	9.37	2	8.00
50	8	12.50	2	8.00
51	3	4.69	1	4.00
Total	64	100.00	25	100.00

Mean age at menopause   44.95 years 45.08 years
$t = 0.8112$, d.f. $= 87$, $.50 > p > .40$

Table 4 : Distribution of women according to age at first delivery

Age at first delivery	Meiteis		Muslims	
(yrs)	No.	%	No.	%
12	-	-	3	1.15
13	-	-	2	1.15
14	1	0.38	17	6.54
15	4	1.54	31	11.92
16	5	1.92	41	15.77
17	12	4.62	49	18.85
18	16	6.15	29	11.15
19	34	13.08	18	6.92
20	40	15.38	21	8.08
21	23	8.85	8	3.08
22	24	9.23	14	5.38
23	22	8.46	6	2.31
24	24	9.23	3	1.15
25	11	4.23	8	3.08
26	9	3.46	6	2.31
27	11	4.23	-	-
28	3	1.15	1	0.38
29	7	2.69	-	-
30	3	1.15	-	-
31	3	1.15	2	0.77
32	3	1.15	-	-
33	1	0.38	-	-
34	2	0.77	-	-
35	2	0.77	-	-
Total	260	100.00	260	100.00

Mean age at first delivery   22.03 yrs   18.01 yrs
$t = 12.56$, d.f. $= \infty$, $p < .001$

Table 5 : Age specific mean age at first delivery

Present age	Meiteis		Muslims	
(yrs)	No.	Mean age at first delivery	No.	Mean age at first delivery
15-19	5	17.00	43	15.98
20-24	23	20.56	50	18.12
25-29	32	21.96	62	18.35
30-34	32	22.72	28	20.57
35-39	46	23.39	38	17.63
40-44	40	22.53	12	19.58
45-49	21	22.59	12	17.75
50-54	20	19.35	10	18.10
55-59	15	24.53	3	17.00
60-64	11	20.36	-	-
65 +	15	21.33	2	15.00
Total	260	22.03	260	18.01

Table 6 : Distribution of women according to number of live-births.

No. of live-births	Meiteis		Muslims	
	No.	%	No.	%
0	3	1.15	6	2.31
1	33	12.69	44	16.92
2	24	9.23	39	15.00
3	37	14.23	46	17.69
4	30	11.54	35	13.46
5	35	13.46	31	11.92
6	37	14.23	15	5.77
7	21	8.08	13	5.00
8	25	9.62	10	3.85
9	6	2.31	5	1.92
10	6	2.31	8	3.08
11	3	1.15	2	0.77
12	-	-	2	0.77
13	-	-	2	0.77
14	-	-	1	0.38
15	-	-	1	0.38
Average number of live-births		4.63		4.01

t = 2.58, d.f. = ∞, .01 > p > .001

(22.03 years) is significantly higher than that of the Muslims (18.01 years). The higher age at first child birth of the Meiteis corresponds with their higher age at marriage.

The mean age at first child birth of the Meitei women is almost the same as that of the Zemi Nagas (22.44 years) as observed by Bhowmick et al. (1971). Das et al. (1989) observed that the mean age at first child birth of the Assamese

Muslim is 18.37 years. The Muslims of Manipur show a similar trend (Table 5).

It appears from table 6 that the Meitei women have given birth to a maximum of eleven children whereas Muslim women have given birth to a maximum of fifteen. However, the mean fertility of the Meiteis (4.63) is significantly higher than that of the Muslims (4.01). This phenomenon at the moment remains unexplained. It may be because of the fact that there are only 25 Muslim women with completed fertility against 64 of the Meities. The present finding of the Meiteis is closer to the findings of Bhowmick et al. (1971) among the Zemi Nagas which is 4.5 and that of Nag (1965) among the Khasis of Meghalaya which is also 4.5. The Muslim women of Manipur, however, show a lower fertility than that of the Assamese Muslim women which is 4.68 (Das and Das, 1992).

The age specific fertility of the Meitei and the Muslim women (Table 7) show that the mean fertility increases with the increase in age in both the groups. The reason for this trend is that the women of younger age groups have experienced just a few years of married life and have not completed their fertile period. On the other hand, those women who have experienced a comparatively longer duration of married life have had the opportunity to bear a larger number of children. Moreover, younger women are exposed more to the modern family planning devices which were not made available to the older women in the past. The age specific fertility also shows another interesting picture. Though the Meitei women have the higher mean fertility than the Muslim women, the age specific fertility of the Muslims is higher than those of the Meiteis at all ages. This clearly indicates that the higher mean fertility of the Meiteis is only due to their relatively higher numbers at the higher age groups : otherwise the Muslims would have higher fertility than the Meiteis. This is also reflected when the average number of live-births among the Meitei and the Muslim women with completed fertility is ex-

Table 7 : Age specific fertility

Age groups (yrs)	No. of women	Meiteis			Age specific fertility	No. of women	Muslims			Age specific fertility
		No. of live births					No. of live-births			
		Males	Females	Total			Males	Females	Total	
15-19	5	4	2	6	1.20	43	26	53	79	1.84
20-24	23	17	24	41	0.74	50	69	50	119	2.38
25-29	32	47	33	80	2.50	62	106	103	209	3.37
30-34	32	59	55	114	3.56	28	70	57	127	4.54
35-39	46	132	104	236	5.13	38	118	97	215	5.66
40-44	40	116	102	218	5.45	12	46	42	88	7.33
45-49	21	67	61	128	6.10	12	43	44	87	7.25
50 +	61	188	192	380	6.23	15	53	65	118	7.87
Total	260	630	573	1203	4.63	260	531	511	1042	4.01

Table 8 : Distribution of women with completed fertility according to number of live-births

No. of live-births	Meiteis		Muslims	
	No.	%	No.	%
1	5	7.81	-	-
2	3	4.69	1	4.00
3	-	-	1	4.00
4	5	7.81	1	4.00
5	10	15.63	3	12.00
6	10	15.63	2	8.00
7	7	10.94	4	16.00
8	16	25.00	3	12.00
9	5	7.81	2	8.00
10	2	3.13	5	20.00
11	1	1.56	-	-
12	-	-	1	4.00
13	-	-	1	4.00
14	-	-	-	-
15	-	-	1	4.00
Total	64	100.00	25	100.00
Average number of live-births	6.16		7.84	

$t = 2.51$, d.f. = 89, $.02 > p > .01$

amined. It is 6.16 for the Meiteis and 7.84 for the Muslims (Table 8). The difference between the two communities is found to be statistically significant. Das and Das (1992) found the mean fertility of the Assamese Hindu women with completed fertility ranging from 5.50 to 6.61. On the basis of different studies conducted in India, Bhende and Kanitkar (1992) observed that the completed fertility of the Indian women is between five and seven. The present findings of the completed fertility of the Meitei women is in agreement with that of the Assamese Hindu and also with that of Indian women. However, the average number of live-births of the Muslim women of Manipur with completed fertility is higher than that of the Meiteis and also than that of the Indian average.

The present study shows a definite inverse relation between education of couples and fertility among the Meiteis (Table 9). The illiterate couples show the highest (6.27) average number of livebirths whereas postgraduate couples show the lowest (2.50) average number of live-births. The Muslim couples of the present study, however, do not show any such clear-cut relationship (Table 10). When the education of husbands and the wives are considered separately, it is found that education of Muslim women has very little effect on their fertility. The fertility of the women is, however, found to decrease with the increase of the educational status of the husbands. This perhaps reflects the male dominance among the Muslims in decision making. Moreover, there are only 21 couples among the Muslims having wives with educational status above class X. Dandekar and Dandekar (1953) also could not find any consistent relationship between fertility and variation in the level of literacy in Pune.

An examination of the relationship between occupational status and fertility reveals that women with cultivator husbands have the highest number of live-births in both the Meiteis and

Table 9 : Distribution of Meitei couples by educational status and number of live-births

Husbands' educational status	Wives' educational status										Total	
	Illiterate		Nursery to Class V		Class VI to Class X		Class XI to Graduate		Post Graduate		No. of couple	Av. No. of live births
	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births		
Illiterate	52	6.27	3	5.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	55	6.20
Nursery to Class V	49	5.33	12	3.75	2	3.00	-	-	-	-	63	4.95
Class VI to Class X	38	4.89	25	2.96	16	3.50	3	3.67	-	-	82	3.99
Class XI To Graduate	10	5.00	9	4.89	14	3.43	24	3.04	-	-	57	3.77
Post Graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.00	2	2.5	3	2.67
Total	149	5.52	49	3.6	32	3.44	28	3.11	2	2.50	260	4.63

Table 10 : Distribution of Muslim couples by educational status and number of live-births

Husbands' educational status	Wives' educational status										Total	
	Illiterate		Nursery to Class V		Class VI to Class X		Class XI to Graduate		Post Graduate		No. of couple	Av. No. of live births
	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births		
Illiterate	66	4.36	1	1.00	1	6.00	-	-	-	-	68	4.34
Nursery to Class V	41	4.46	3	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	4.23
Class VI to Class X	51	5.08	5	3.80	23	3.04	5	1.80	2	3.00	86	4.21
Class XI To Graduate	17	4.29	3	2.33	25	3.24	12	2.17	1	4.00	58	3.29
Post Graduate	2	2.50	-	-	1	2.00	1	1.00	-	-	4	2.00
Total	177	4.56	12	2.50	50	3.18	18	2.00	-	-	260	4.01

Table 11 : Distribution of Meitei couples by occupational status and number of live-births

Husbands occupational status	Wives' occupational status										Total	
	Non-workers		Cultivators		Business persons		Office workers		Others		No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births
	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births		
Non-workers	2	5.50	-	-	-	-	1	3.00	-	-	3	4.67
Cultivators	7	6.00	20	5.60	25	5.32	5	4.20	2	4.50	59	5.37
Business persons	7	5.57	16	3.63	4	5.00	3	3.33	-	-	30	4.23
Office workers	14	4.86	32	4.41	25	4.32	19	3.58	5	5.20	95	4.33
Rickshaw pullers	2	0.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.50
Others	14	5.29	28	4.68	21	4.43	4	4.50	4	4.25	71	4.69
Total	46	5.11	96	4.60	75	4.72	32	3.75	11	4.73	260	4.63

Table 12 : Distribution of Muslim couples by occupational status and number of live-births

| Husbands | Wives' occupational status | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
| | Non-workers | | Cultivators | | Business persons | | Office workers | | Others | | No. of | Av. No. |
occupational status	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births	No. of couple	Av. No. of live-births	couple	of live-births
Non-workers	3	5.00	1	5.00	-	-	1	2.00	-	-	5	4.40
Cultivators	10	4.00	13	5.92	9	4.33	-	-	-	-	32	4.88
Rickshaw pullers	61	3.33	3	4.67	2	3.00	-	-	2	5.30	68	3.44
Business persons	29	4.28	18	3.72	-	-	-	-	2	6.50	49	4.16
Office workers	52	3.63	9	5.56	8	5.13	2	-	1	2.00	72	3.92
Others	21	3.76	6	4.83	2	4.50	-	-	5	5.40	34	4.24
Total	176	3.69	50	4.84	21	4.52	3	0.67	10	5.30	260	4.01

Table 13 : Distribution of Meitei women by age, family types and number of live-births

| Present age of the women (yrs) | Nuclear families | | | Joint families | | | Total | | |
| | No. of women | Live-births | | No. of women | Live-births | | No. of women | Live-births | |
		No.	Average		No.	Average		No.	Average
15 - 19	4	5	1.25	1	1	1.00	5	6	1.20
20 - 24	15	27	1.80	8	14	1.75	23	41	1.78
25 - 29	27	68	2.50	5	12	2.40	32	80	2.50
30 - 34	29	105	3.62	3	9	3.00	32	114	3.56
35 - 39	41	204	4.98	5	32	6.40	46	236	5.13
40 - 44	38	206	5.42	2	12	6.00	40	218	5.45
45 - 49	13	74	5.69	8	54	6.75	21	128	6.09
50 +	33	187	5.67	28	193	6.89	61	380	6.23
Total	200	876	4.38	60	327	5.45	260	1203	4.63

Table 14 : Distribution of Muslim women by age, family types and number of live-births

| Present age of the women (yrs) | Nuclear families | | | Joint families | | | Total | | |
| | No. of women | Live-births | | No. of women | Live-births | | No. of women | Live-births | |
		No.	Average		No.	Average		No.	Average
15 - 19	41	76	1.85	2	3	1.50	43	79	1.84
20 - 24	41	93	2.27	9	26	2.89	50	119	2.38
25 - 29	57	186	3.26	5	23	4.60	62	209	3.37
30 - 34	24	102	4.25	4	25	6.25	28	127	4.54
35 - 39	34	179	5.26	4	36	9.00	38	215	5.65
40 - 44	9	63	7.00	3	25	8.33	12	88	7.33
45 - 49	8	52	6.50	4	35	8.75	12	87	7.25
50 +	9	61	6.78	6	57	9.50	15	118	7.87
Total	223	812	3.62	37	230	6.32	260	1042	4.01

the Muslims. The lowest average number of live-births is shown by wives of rickshaw pullers in both the groups (Table 11 and 12). Different works conducted in Inida, have clearly shown that the cultivators have higher fertility than the professional classes. Agarwala (1970) observed that the wives of cultivators and labourers had a fertility rate of 7.4 and for those who were engaged in service and other profession, the fertility rate is 6.6. The highest fertility rate among the cultivators and lowest in the service and professional groups was also observed by Driver (1963). However, Mahadevan (1979) opined that the effect of occupation on fertility is yet to assume importance in view of very high rate of illiteracy prevailing among women, lack of employment opportunities of such women and customs of women which do not permit them to work outside home.

Among the Meiteis there is only one couple in case of which the husband is rickshaw puller. But among the Muslims 68 women have rickshaw puller husbands. The lowest fertility of the wives of rickshaw puller in both the communities is difficult to interpret. Rickshaw pulling is usually a prefession of a younger age group. Older people are very rarely found in this profession. The lower fertility of the wives of rickshaw pullers may perhaps be because of the fact that the majority of them are in the younger age group and are yet to complete their fertile period.

Considering the relationship between family types and fertility (Table 13 and 14) the present study shows a higher average number of live-births in joint families than in nuclear families in both the Meiteis and the Muslims. This is contrary to the earlier finds of Driver (1963), Nag (1965), Pakrasi and Malakar (1967), Baruah (1980), Sharma (1991) and Bhowmick et al. (1971). Shariff (1989) is of the opinion that in the Indian situation the association between family types and fertility is a matter of controversy as there are studies to show positive and negative relationship between them. Lorimer (1954), Davis and Blake

(1956) and Davis (1957) are of the opinion that extended family or its Indian counterparts, the joint family, is conducive to high fertility.

Though the average fertility is higher in joint families than in nuclear families in both the communities under study, there is a departure from this trend among the women of younger age groups. A perusal of the age specific fertility in both the family types (Table 13) depicts that the Meitei women upto 34 years of age have higher fertility in joint families. In case of Muslims, this departure from the general trend of having higher fertility in joint families is noticed only among the women of 15-19 years age group. This indicates that the traditional values related to fertility are undergoing change. This change is found to occur earlier among the Meiteis than among the Muslims.

From the above discussion it is clear that the average fertility rate cannot always be considered as a reliable indicator of fertility performance of a community. To have a clearer picture, age specific and completed fertility are also to be examined. The Meitei women, despite their having higher mean average fertility than their Muslim counterparts, show lower age specific and completed fertilities. Relatively higher educational status, better employment, the custom of freeing women from compulsory wife-mother role may be some of the causes of the lower fertility of the Meiteis.

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