

## MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF THAILAND IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract:**

Thailand is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. Islam is the second largest religion after Buddhism in the kingdom of Thailand. Thai Muslims belong to different communal groups and each group has particular history and ethnicity. The purpose of the research mainly elucidates the history, life style and identity of the diverse ethnic groups of Siamese Muslims. It also analysis, how the Islam came in Thailand, including how the Muslim community transformed in different times and periods with different cultures and identities under different Monarchies in the kingdom. A qualitative method of research is used, while explanatory research design has been applied. The Research paper deeply emphasis the socio-cultural arrangements of the Thai Muslim community and the response of the state and society of Thailand. The socio-cultural design qualitatively expounds the living style, traditions, norms and values of Thai Muslim community and its identity in the diverse communal outlook of Thailand.

**Keywords:** Siamese Muslims, Diverse ethnic groups, Minority community, Khun Kheak

### **1. Introduction**

Thai Muslims are the second largest community that has mainly concentrated in the southern provinces of Thailand. The Muslims of Thailand are known as '*Kheak*' which literally means guests, strangers or dark skinned visitors. According to recent census, Thailand has approximately sixty-four million populations in which more than seven and half million are Muslims that about 12% of the total Thai population. Islam was introduced in the Malay Peninsula by the Arab's traders in 13<sup>th</sup> century and later it spread other southernmost provinces of Thailand. Muslim Community of these provinces utmost shares common culture, heritage and language with Malaysian Muslims. According to the report of statistical department, 45% of total population of the Muslim community lives in three southern provinces, while others has scattered throughout the Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Buddhists                         | 55.2 Million (87.2%) |
| Muslims                           | 7.9 Million (12%)    |
| Christians                        | 0.55 Million (0.72%) |
| Others Hindu, Confucius, Sikh etc | 0.09 Million (0.08%) |

Muslims of Thailand have diverse ethnic identity and their ancestors migrated from Pakistan, India, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and many Arab countries. Thailand's society comprises of three main ethnic groups as Wah, Karen and Thai Yai, while Thai Muslims distinct from others for their religious beliefs. Many of Muslims in Thailand are ethnically and linguistically Thai inherent, that are either Muslims by intermarriages or by switching their belief. Mostly ethnic population of the Muslims is living in southern and central parts of Thailand that is varying from different Muslim's communities and has mixed settlement in Thailand<sup>2</sup>. The culture and life style of the Thai Muslim are also diverse, southern parts culture and life style assimilate with Malay Muslims, while in Central provinces culture has mixed due to the different ethnic Muslims groups and availability of the Muslims migrants from different countries.

Thailand has no state religion in the constitution that's why it gives equal freedom and rights to its citizens, Thai society and the government authorities do not treat differently to any minority group on the base of its religion. The Muslim community has equal political and legal status as much Buddhist, Hindu, Confucius and Christian communities have in the constitution<sup>3</sup>. Each community has its own way of life, culture and identities, while these values create unique diversity on the free land of Thailand.

The '*Chularatchamuntri*' or Sheikhul Islam in Thailand preside the central Islamic council of the country, advice to the council of religious affairs, education and Interior ministries on different Islamic matters. According to Statistical department of Thailand, the kingdom has 3494 Mosques, with a largest 636 in only Pattani province , the report of religious affair department 99% of the Thai Muslim population is Sunni while 1% is Shia Islam<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, hundreds of Islamic schools on primary and secondary level are being maintained by the Thai government and Islamic organizations, while country has an Islamic bank that is providing countrywide Interest free business opportunities. Thailand makes distinguish from other many non Muslim countries of Southeast Asia where halal science center is working in Chulalongkorn

University under the supervision of a Muslim food scientist Dr Winai Dahlan. The main aim of this center is to develop and maintain halal standards, provide forensic work for expansion and growth of halal products including guarantee to the customers of these manufacture goods.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Preserving ethnic identity through native language and religion is highlighting the facts of the particular groups of the Thai Muslims which are recognized by their religious and linguistic identities, The Y Munirah has worked on the Malay Muslim community of the Thailand who has kept particular religious and linguistic identities since centuries. The Author has examined the culture, life style, language and religion of south Malay Muslims which are making dissimilar from other Native Thais. The Author has examined, how the language and religion transfer from one generation to the next and how these identities attach with the personality, while Author has observed the interaction of Malay Muslims community with other Thai communities in the south part of Thailand<sup>5</sup>. Islam in Modern Thailand, this book mainly focuses on the role of the Islamic waqf which attach with mosques in different parts of the country. Rajeswary Brown has historically highlighted these institutions which have visible diversity according to their thoughts and ideologies that make social, political and economic transformation of the Thai Muslim society. The author has also examined the role of Maddaris and Mosques in Thailand. He elucidates how these private institutions are cooperating with modern state and how these institutions are playing effective role in power politics & social welfare. The author critically highlights the position of Muslim in modern Thailand<sup>6</sup>. Joseph Chingyong Liow comprehensively illustrates the educational reforms according to the two main Islamic schools of thoughts in the southern provinces of Thailand. The Author has identified in this book the role of Islamic values & principles on the Muslim community of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces while he has elucidated the facts behind the ongoing tensions in this region. The work has conducted empirically which narrated the importance of the Islamic education in southern parts and its influence on the Muslim minority in modern society as well as it critically highlights the main stream challenges for the government of Thailand by the specific Islamic groups<sup>7</sup>. The Author has examined the varying cultural & linguistic trends of the different minority groups by their locations & ethnicity in Thailand. The Book has identified the impacts of

diverse culture and identities of these groups on common structure of the society. Michel Gilquin has deeply investigated the origin, culture & traditions of the Malay Muslim community of south Thailand and their decisive political role in ancient Siam and contemporary secular state of Thailand. The book has also highlighted the security condition of the southernmost provinces while has tinted the political and social demands of different Muslim groups from central government of Thailand<sup>8</sup>. Sabine Putzgruber historically delineates the culture and identity of the different ethnic groups particularly Chinese Muslims of Thailand. He examines the ethnic minorities in nationalistic tools such as their dealing and response towards the society as well as their bound up with single national identity. Paper has emphasized the role and position of different ethnic groups under the Siam Monarchy as well as their political, economic, religious and ideological input in the modern Thai culture. The Author also comparatively elucidates the position of minorities in last constitution which was ended in 1997, while he analysis how the recent constitution is treating with religious communities of Thailand<sup>9</sup>.

### **3. Materials & Methods**

The purpose of the research paper is mainly elucidates the history, life style and identity of the diverse ethnic groups of Siamese Muslims. It also analysis, how the Islam came in the Kingdom of Thailand as well as how the Muslim community transformed in different times & periods with different cultures & identities under different Monarchies in Thailand. This paper is highlighting the various trends of the Thai society for the minority population, while it is also focusing on the legal and political status of the Muslims in the constitution of Thailand as minority community.

A qualitative method of research is used, while explanatory research design has been applied for conducting comprehensive research on given variables. Research paper is based on secondary source of data, while research work deeply emphasis the socio-cultural arrangements of the Thai Muslim community and the response of the state and society of Thailand. The socio-cultural design qualitatively expounds the living style, traditions, norms & values of Thai Muslim community and their identity in the diverse communal outlook of Thailand.

### **4. History and Origin of Islam in Pre- Modern Dynasties in Siam**

Islam came in Thailand from three directions such as south, central and north. Islam at first was introduced in this region by the Persian-Arab Muslim Traders, while later followed by Indian Muslim

traders in 10<sup>th</sup> century. These Muslim traders were trading frequently & actively in the ancient Siam centuries before establish the Kingdom of Sukhothai<sup>10</sup>. Although Islam came in Siam in pre-Sukhothai era, yet visible presence of the different ethnic groups of the Muslims in Siam are historically counted since 13<sup>th</sup> century. These Muslims got significant attention in 15<sup>th</sup> century under the period of Ayutthya Kingdom when number of Muslim traders from Persian and Arab settled permanently for trade and commerce purposes and later settled with their families in Siam. The Muslims were great influence on the Southeast Asian trade during this period and with the help of these traders, Islam spread in lower Southeast Asian countries. Trade was only dominant factor that made possible of Ayutthya monarchy to come close with the Arab and Persian Traders. When the Ayutthya was Capital city, the sea route from Gulf to Siam and Siam to the Singapore was well established and it was easily task for foreign traders to sell their goods in urban areas of sea route countries, while assimilation of different ethnic Muslim groups such as Persian, Arab, India, Malay, Chams and Acheenes were largest non-Thai Muslim community in Ayutthaya Kingdom<sup>11</sup>.

Islam was supported by the different Kings in the realm of Ayutthya in many ways. Due to the successful assimilations and allow to continue trade, Arab & Persian Muslim groups assumed powerful position and they served with different Kings and their ministers from Ayutthyan to Chakrian dynasty. King Songtham of Ayutthya (1610-28) a first time introduced a seat in his court a '*Chularajmontri*' for the Muslim community. The purpose of the '*Chularajmontri*', Grand Muffti or a Muslim advisor to the King that dealt the matter of his community including supervise the activities of the Muslims of the Kingdom<sup>12</sup>.

The Chakri dynasty was established in 1782 and capital city was shifted from Ayutthya to Bangkok. Further, settlements were made by the Muslim groups such as Cham, Iranian, Malay, Indonesian and South Asians in the new capital city from throughout the Kingdom. The Chakri dynasty from its early days had changed the traditional policies on trade and commerce. Due to the number of new centralized policies for the foreign trade and commerce, the influence of the traders became limited on state level relations, while Muslim groups still enjoyed significant position in the Kingdom of Siam. Although many other Muslim groups settled in Bangkok around the kingdom, yet the Ayutthyan Muslims still in dominant role in the King court because they already had well established linked with the nobility and they affianced with commercial

& trade activities. Chakrian dynasty, the Siam was moving gradually towards the modernity. It was the challenge for the Siamese Muslims, but they successfully adaptation and integrated with the Thai Society, they made a space for them and also effectively made the successful relations with the Thai State.

Muslim groups that settled from Northern provinces of the Siam such as Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lamphang provinces had migrated to Thailand from China, Bangladesh and Burma. These groups and Muslim families shifted in Thailand due to economic and political reasons mostly due to communal persecution, better economic and trade opportunities. Historically, Bangladeshi Muslim group was among the others who migrated first from Bangladesh to Burma and Burma to Chiang Mai in early 1830, while Chinese Muslim group migrated from Yunnan after failed the 'Panthay Rebellion of *Tu Wen-hsiu* in Ch'ing Empire' in 1876. Group of Chinese Muslims was known in North of Thailand as "*Haw*" Chinese from Yunnan, China<sup>13</sup>. Another migration was made by the Chinese Muslims in 1950 when communist gained power in China.

The foundation of Islam in currently southernmost provinces of Thailand was in middle of 13<sup>th</sup> century when these provinces were under the Pattani Kingdom. The prominent folk lore about the name of this Kingdom, it named after proclamation made by the Sultan Ismail Shah, another myth was about the Patani Kingdom that named on Malay local Beach, while other historian argued that it was the same territory which was known by the Chinese traders as '*Pan Pan*' Kingdom that was ruled by the King Langkasuka<sup>14</sup>. Sultan Ismail Shah was the first ruler of Greater Pattani that made foundation of the Muslim kingdom. During 15<sup>th</sup> century Pattani port had significant importance for trade and commerce for local region. Arab, Persian and Indian Muslim traders gradually settled in Malacca Aceh and Melayu Peninsula which were later the southern Parts of Thailand. From these parts Islam spread other Southeast Asia such as Sumatra, Java and Borneo<sup>15</sup>. While on the early age of Islam in southern parts of Siam, people had mixed religious beliefs as Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist and these communities were centered with their cultures, customs and religious practices.

The southeast region particularly Malay Peninsula already flourished other civilizations such as Hindu, Buddhist and Confucius before Islam. Arab and Persian traders travelled through the Southeast Asian parts before 16<sup>th</sup> century, while their settlement started in early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The elite of Southeast Asia converted in Islam in between 16<sup>th</sup>

and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and Islam did not make new civilization in the region, but it made transformation of their beliefs and religious identity including it influenced on the Malay race that later made Muslim dynasties of Southeast Asia as Patani, Kedah, Trengganu and Kelantan.

During the colonialism, Rama-II king of Thailand made Burney Treaty with Britain and these southern provinces were annexed with Siam. A citizenship and territorial policies were introduced (1902-06) by King Chulalongkorn in which semi autonomous status of the southern territory turned into the status of provinces of the Kingdom of Siam, while he introduced a Thai citizenship policy for the population of these provinces<sup>16</sup>.

### **5. Siamese Muslim Community in Epoch of Nation State**

The concept of nation state in Southeast Asia was the movement towards the modernity. The characteristics of the nation state on the other words were the integrity and independency as a nation or state from colonialism. Independence of Siam was achieved by the 1896 Anglo-French treaty in which the status of Siam was declared as a buffer state between the two western colonies. The Siam in mid of nineteenth century shaped its politics, economy, social values by the largely modernization. It replaced the authoritarianism with centralized administrative system. Young intellectuals from the South Muslim community were dreaming the Independent Muslim state under the trends of modernization, but they could not do so because Britain made a treaty with Siam Kingdom and these southernmost parts handed over to the Kingdom of Siam.

The Malay Muslim community centers in main three southern provinces of recent Thailand. These Muslims become Thai citizen not by choice but the cognized force by the government of Thailand in series of actions & reforms that were taken since (1902-44). Although at the early days of centralization, the government of Siam felt the religious difference between Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim community so that they allowed to the local elite of southern parts to rule with Islamic code & conducts, yet these laws also were translated in Thai language and requisite for further integrated with Thai law court. The government of Siam griped on the procedural matters and directly involved the administrative matters of court or the Qazi's courts '*Sala To'Kodi or Sala To'Kali*'<sup>17</sup>. The government directly involved in the selection of Ulema for the penal court justice according to the Thai legal structure for the appointment of Judges on religious base.

Another problematic and divesting situation for the south Malay Muslims during centralization was the intercession in Islamic community with Thai practices. The most important factor was the abolition of '*Shria law*' Devine laws and '*Adat Melayu*' Malay customary laws that were practicing daily life. The major Islamic institutions were linked with Mosque as '*Qadi*' and religious school '*Pandok*' or Madrisa. Mosque was the centre place and main functions were rule, administration and worship, while the Pondok was adjoining hall for the learning of the Muslim community. The local rule replaced with central administration and provincial hall changed with old Mosque, which meant that the religious affairs separated from political matters under the centralization<sup>18</sup>. Shria laws replaced with central administrative laws or secular Thai laws equally throughout the Siam except Muslim family and inherent laws. On the other hand, inherent and private laws, the decision of the Muslim judge was not final until the consent of the sitting Thai judge and appeal of the higher court was possible with the assent decision of Thai judge that was not Muslim.

After incorporation of Greater Pattani with the Siam numbers of reforms were made in education sector for achieving the modernization in the Kingdom of Siam. The other part of Siam the education was conceded with local Buddhist Temples together with the education office, while in South of Thailand Greater Pattani Muslims had their particular education system and own language instructions<sup>19</sup>. The education system of South Muslim community based on the Islam principles and their medium of languages were Malay and Arabic. There were not as such systemic system of education except the memorizing the Quran and teaching the core values of Islam. After the Modernization the secular subjects and pro Buddhist values of education were enforced with the reading and writing the Thai language on the Malay community. Number of rebellions out broke in (1910-22) in deep south of Thailand in which the nobility and even the Raja Abdul Kadir of Pattani involved and purpose was independence and rid off the cruel secular laws which were forcibly imposed on the Malay community of the region by modern Thailand.

The Muslim groups of Northern and Central provinces had different experience than the South Muslim community in early modernization. These Thai Muslim groups assimilated into the Thai society, they were conversing Thai language for social as well as religious purposes. During the Modernization Kingdom of Siam considered, these



non Malay Muslim groups tend to be more flexible and positive for their Thai national identity and they did not make any contradiction being a religious Muslim or ethnically Thai. Though, their cultural and ethical boundaries separated them from Thai Buddhist community, yet both Muslim and Buddhist communities emerged a high level of similarity in cultural and linguistic values except religious and customs practices<sup>20</sup>. The factor of their flexibility due to the mix marriages with local Siamese and later their families converted from ethnic Thai to Islam, so their offspring adopted the culture and language from mothers, while religious customs and practices adhere from the fathers. These mixed generation easily made assimilation into modernity of Thailand.

### **6. Muslim Community of Thailand under the Constitutional Monarchy**

The Kingdom of Thailand was under absolute monarchy before the democratic revolution. Absolute monarchy replaced with constitutional monarchy with the first Thai written constitution in 1932. Although, this constitution did not run for a long time and replaced with other constitutions which were enforced in last few decades in the history of Thailand. Thai Muslims believe that the democracy is more than the secularism and it gives guarantee to the equality in multi-ethno religious state like as Thailand where diverse cultures and religions are practicing. The Malay Muslim community has engaged the political process during the Insurgency that is quite different behavior than other minority communities of the world.

Over the decades, the government of Thailand had been re-adjusting its politics according to the religion and cultural demands of the Muslims. Muslim community is being facilitated by the government through number of the ways according to their culture and values such as allow to the Muslim females to wear '*Hijab*' on public places and offices, permission of photo with headscarf on official documents as identity cards and passports, facilitate the travel arrangement for pilgrimage of Hajj, Official holidays on '*Eidul Adha and Eidul Fittar*' festivals in south provinces of Thailand and permission of five time Azan in the loudspeakers. The State is also supporting the processions of the celebration of the '*Mawalid*' Birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and as well as halal certification on the particular products for Muslims use from Thai food industries. The Act on the Administration of Islamic organizations was enacted in 1997 which are leading to the formation of the Central and provincial Islamic Committees of Thailand. The office of

'Chularajmontri' as the office of head of Thai Muslims, including establish the central Islamic committee of Thailand and council of Islamic affair on provincial level.

Thai constitutional Monarchy is consistently supporting the Muslim community in different activities and ceremonies that are the part of religion. The King appointed the seikhul Islam with the consent of the Prime Minister after receiving the approval from the Islamic provincial councils. The last King of Thailand Bhumibol Adulyadej has launched a project to translate Quran in Thai language. The King often gives personal funds to Muslim community for construction of the Mosques and Islamic Monuments, while royal family participates in different religious festivals of the Muslims. The Muslim community has religious liberty and they can propagate the Islamic values and principles publically, including participates in religious and social affairs inside and outside of the country<sup>21</sup>.

Young generation of Thai Muslims has full rights and liberty to study about Islam that is offered by the different entities at very young age. Commonly the Thai Muslim community sent their child to the pre-school development centers 'Rawadh', while in the next level the young generation of the Muslim community enrolls at the centre for religious & ethics training 'Tadika' and both basic institutions run by the local Mosques. At the primarily and secondary level of study the Thai Muslim young generation has choice to enroll at whether regular or private Islamic schools 'Pondok or Ponoh' which run by the government and Muslim non government organization or private schools which are also offer the religious studies including regular subjects. On higher education studies, government of Thailand has set up a college of Islamic studies in Pattani province in 1988 and a private Islamic college has worked since 1998 in Yala province with the financial assistance of Asian development bank including the governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar.

| <u>Region</u> | <u>Mosques</u> |
|---------------|----------------|
| Bangkok       | 174            |
| Central       | 194            |
| Eastern       | 112            |

|                                      |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Northeast                            | 15    |
| Northern                             | 35    |
| Southern(excluding border provinces) | 699   |
| Five southern border provinces       | 2,180 |
| Imam Bargha ( All over the Thailand) | 85    |

Thai Muslims have remarkable achievement in almost all walks of life and having prominent position in bureaucracy as well parliamentary affairs in Thailand. There are presently eight senator and twenty one Muslim members in current house of representative. In past numbers of parliamentarians have sit on key posts such as foreign minister, executive bench of government, president the house of representative and headed the different ministries. Mr Wanmuhammad Noor Matha a parliamentarian from Yala province has served as an interior minister and later deputy prime minister of Thailand since (2004- 05) under prime Minister ship of Taksin Sinowatra 'Pheu Thai' Red Shirt Party.

Three southernmost provinces of the Thailand as Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat have Muslim majority of Malay population, a recent census by the ministry of interior of Thailand the inhabitants of these Muslim provinces can be grouped by the religious communities as followed

| <u>Provinces</u> | <u>Muslims</u> | <u>Buddhists</u> | <u>Christians</u> |
|------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Pattani          | 500,000        | 130,000          | 4,000             |
| Narathiwat       | 600,000        | 100,000          | 3,000             |
| Yala             | 300,000        | 200,000          | 3,000             |
| Total            | 1.4 Million    | 0.43 Million     | 0.01 Million      |

For these dens Muslim populated provinces in Thailand have enacted a royal act since 1946, which provides the Thai Muslim community in these provinces with the rights to adopt for the application of law that concern the heritage and family affairs including judicial hearing through Islamic laws by the two Muslim judges 'Dato Yuttitam' that have been appointing according the Act in each provincial court (Aphornsuvan 2003). In order to conduct the trade and business through the Islamic way the

government of Thailand has set up an Islamic bank and its numbers of branches are operating in nationwide since 2003, while Brunei is one of the main shareholders of this bank. Although the government of Thailand has been trying to manage the violent situation of southernmost provinces since 2004 yet situation of these provinces are consistently moving to uncertainty and separation. The Majority population particularly youth of these south provinces is infuriate with Thai authorities due to economic, political and social injustice.

### **7. Taste of the Mixed Culture & Ethnicity of Thai Muslim Community**

The Muslim community of Thailand divides into two board categories such as Malay Muslims and Thai Muslims. Malay Muslims are the majority group among the Muslim community from southern parts of the Thailand, while the Thai Muslims are varying from different ethnic backgrounds such as migrants from different countries. Thai Muslims have numbers of religious sects. Mostly Muslims of Thailand are Sunni and they following Shafee School of thoughts, while few subsequently follow the Hunfee School and they among the Indian Muslims. A minority about 1% among the Muslim population follow the Shia School, these mostly resident in Ayutthya, and Thonburi district of Bangkok central of Thailand, while Shia Muslims further divided into Ismailee and Bohri sects<sup>22</sup>. The Muslim community of Central Thailand links with the diverse occupations as national business sectors, locally businesses as trading of local products, halal butchery and food vendors in markets.

Settlement of The Muslims particular Malay ethnic Community in Bangkok after the war was between Siam and the Pattani Kingdom in 1832, when more than five thousand captives that were involved in rebellion were taken to the Bangkok as war prisoners. These prisoners or the descendents of the current Muslim families of Bangkok later settled in eastern districts of Thailand and organized as a labor work on the number of national projects under the Thai Monarchy<sup>23</sup>. The majority Malay Muslim families of Bangkok are residing alongside the rivers and these are old Muslim populated areas that are speared from the Buddhist community since their settlement.

Muslim of south Asian countries migrated to Thailand with an agreement with British to import the well trained worker from Indian subcontinent to Siam and paid those duties that local Thai community could not perform. These Muslims settled in mostly in central and

eastern provinces after their settlement they made noteworthy contribution for the uprising the Islam in Thailand<sup>24</sup>.

The Muslim group of Pathan migrated from the tribal area of Pakistan and Afghanistan nearly about seventy years ago is residing in Sara-Buri and Ayutthya northeast provinces of Thailand, their number of population is more than eighty thousand and they are associating with agriculture, meat and dairy farming business.

The Cham Muslims Chinese ethnic group settled in central Thailand in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mostly Cham community is residing in Bang Krui and Thonburi districts in Bangkok. The Cham Muslims settled in Bangkok with the migration from Northern provinces of Thailand. At their early settlement, they associated with Agriculture, with the urbanization and increasing the population, they started local trading and economic business. The Yunnani Muslims (*Haw Chinese*) are living mainly in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Northern provinces of Thailand. The ethnic group of North Muslim '*Kudi Khao*' is known for trading and retailing business and group has well integrated with non Muslim Thai communities of north with religious limitations. This Haw Muslims have resided in Northern provinces of Thailand in two waves first in 1876 and secondly in 1950. The Haw Muslims are integrating into wider society of the region and fluent in Thai language.

Ethnic Muslim group of Bengali Muslims is residing in Northern parts of Thailand since 1830. It is historically the first Muslim ethnic group who migrated in Northern parts of Thailand and settled there. The Bengali Thai Muslims are running the successful Meat and halal food businesses commonly in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces. Chang Phukek and Cheng Kalang are the famous places for the Bengali Muslims. The Bengali Muslims are running Mosque, Madrisa and an Islamic institute for religious studies to contribute the Islamic community of Chiang Mai.

The Malay Muslim community of South Thailand is known with different names as '*Orang Melayu Thai, Ore Neyu, Bangdu Yawi and Jawe*. The Malay Ethnic community of Muslims is living in north of the current Malaysia and South of Thailand. Their dynes population is residing in Pattani, Yala, Narrathiwat, Songkhla, Chumphon and Suthan provinces. This community of Muslims is culturally and religiously differs from the Thai Buddhist Community. Deep South of Thailand people speak *Jawee* language that is different from Thai and Malay Language. Majority population of the Southern provinces is following Shaffi School of

thoughts and people of these areas comparatively less urbanized than the central and northern parts of Thailand. The Muslim community of South mostly associates the agriculture and fish industry, while the Muslim population of Ranong, Karbi, Trang, Phuket, Phatthalung and Phang Nga cities is connecting with the tourism industry. The culture, customs and food of the Malay community of Thailand resemble with the Malay people from Malaysia.

### **8. Conclusion**

Diverse ethnic Muslim groups as a Muslim minority community of Thailand have been playing significant and vital role since centuries. Although Thai society has been transforming constantly into pluralistic ethno-religious society since modernization, yet the role of the Thai Muslim community has restrained by the numbers of Thai nationalists seeking to uphold the Buddhist ascendancy and dominance. The nation of Thailand is maturing with the passage of time and it has been accepting the religious identity of the Muslims as a truly members of the state. The government of Thailand is also improving and working to maintain relationship with the Muslim community and it has manifested to develop constructive policies for the second largest population of the Muslims while under the secular state constitution it acknowledging the Islamic customs and festivals of the Muslim community at state level.

The Muslims of Thailand are mostly residing in south, north and central provinces with diverse cultures and ethnicities including many faces of Islam. Thai Muslims of north and central provinces well integrated into the Thai society and non Muslim communities, while the Malay Muslims of south have particular culture and identity. The Muslim community of Thailand has equal rights and religious freedom as the other non Muslims Thai citizens have. Though in south Malay region numbers of tensions and separatist movements are uprising and particular numbers in the Muslim community are non-cooperative and against with policies of Thai government, yet Majority population of south regions are deviating from the separation and become integrated with Thai Society. Number of Muslims areas and provinces still need the attention from the government of Thailand in economic, political and education sectors as equally distribution of the resources in modern states and society, so that youth members of the community could make ruthless contribution for their own Muslim community including the wider Thai society.

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