

Plight of Pangal migrants in informal sector in Imphal

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Abstract

The growth of informal sector of economy, particularly in urban areas, in India can be attributable to the increasing engagement of rural-urban migrants in the productive activities of the sector as their livelihoods. Poor economic and educational background of rural-urban migrants, high competition for employment in formal sector and the readily available and feasibility with little capital requirement have been related to their tendency to take up economic activities in the informal sector. However, they are not free from challenges and problems when being in the sector which they hardly able to be brought to the notice of justice givers because of their lack of awareness about the existing protective laws against their harassment and humiliation by officials and police. It is in this backdrop that the paper makes an attempt to examine the plight of Pangal migrants who earn their living in Imphal city by engaging in economic activities in the informal sector. Self-employment in this sector has been preferred by these migrants to other types of economic pursuits in Imphal as evident from the increasing number of Pangal migrants involved in street vending, shop keeping and meat and chicken selling etc. in Pangal concentrated localities of Imphal. Thus, the paper also tries to ascertain the factors which influence in making their decision to take up such livelihoods and also an observation has been made to understand the plights of these Pangal migrants while pursuing their economic activities. *Author correspondence:*

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilisation, the process of migration has been one of the most dynamic aspects of human activity. This process is found to be occurring in all places due to one or other reasons. Today as a result of the improved and sophisticated means of transportation and communication, the rate of migration is alarmingly increasing both at national and international level. However, in developing countries like India internal migration is more persistent. Manipur is not an exception to this. In Manipur, there has been increase in the migration of people to urban areas particularly Imphal city from rural areas of Manipur and of other states in India. There has also been rapid movement of people from Manipur to cities outside the state. While migration of people from other states to Manipur and Manipuri people to various urban centres outside the state have been observed and investigated, migration to Imphal city from various rural areas of the state has been increasing but less observed and examined. This phenomenon of rural-urban migration within Manipur has also been increased steadily among the Pangals of Manipur.

Migration to urban areas is usually closely related to employment and earning opportunities both in the formal and informal sectors in urban areas. At the national level, it has been reported by the census of India 2011 that a significant proportion of rural people migrated to urban areas for 'work' or 'employment'. As per this report, 18.70 per cent migrated to cities/towns in search of an alternative or better means of livelihood there. It is generally the informal sector which is likely to provide work to these rural-urban migrants (Bhattacharya, 1998). It is in this backdrop that this paper attempts to examine the extent to what rural-urban Pangal migrants take up work/employment in informal sector of economy and also the factors that influence their decision for engaging themselves in the sector. The paper also looks into the plights of Pangal migrants in informal sector.

2. Pangals – the community

Pangals (also known as *Meitei-Pangals*) are an ethnic group in Manipur who practice Islam as their religion and speak Manipuri as their primary language. So, they are basically Manipuri speaking Muslims who have been residing in Manipur as an indigenous community. The *Pangals* primarily settle on valley regions in modern-day Manipur, although a sizeable Diasporas have settled in parts of Assam, Tripura, Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar). These *Pangals* in Manipur concentrate mostly in the villages of the valley districts albeit, small localities in Imphal city like Golapti, Hatta and Mantripukhri have also been concentrated by *Pangals*.

The Muslims including *Pangals* constitute 8.4% of the total population of Manipur according to 2011 census. The social life of *Pangals* is greatly influenced by various social institutions and organisations of Meiteis. They imbibed, assimilated and made their own, many of the traditions pertaining to family life and organisation of the *Meiteis* (Irene, 2010). What distinguishes *Pangals* from *Meiteis* is the religion they followed. The *Pangals* are grouped into *shageis* where there are about more than fifty *Pangalshageis* (clans) in Manipur and the members are related by blood (Singh, 1986, as cited in Irene, 2010). A *shagei* is composed of many families. Again, a *shagei* is further subdivided into 'singlup' or sub-clans. Generally, a *singlup* is a closely knit group of the members of a *shagei* of particular area kin-group. On auspicious occasions like wedding or death rituals or a feast, the members of a *singlup* are bound together in mutual assistance, and feed and house family and relatives coming from distant areas (Shah, 1994). Although *Shari'at* (Islamic law) doesn't prohibit, *Pangals* refrain from marrying within the same *shagei* (Khan, 2012).

Such relationship is viewed as taboo, and the Kings (of Manipur) forbade all such practices and punished the violators (Irene *op. cit.*). Pangals in Manipur perceive that all members of a clan are descended from an ancestor which thus leads them to recognise all members of their clan as incestuous to intermarry. Every *Pangal* village is like a united body having voluntary organisations and societies involved in different social activities concerning the village as well as the state. The spirit of mutual help in ups and downs of life can be explained by few examples. For instance, on the occasion of marriage, every villager contributes in cash and kind to the concerned family, besides helping the family in making the marriage arrangements (Choudhury, 1989).

There has been rapid migration of Pangals from villages in the state to the three urban localities since decades which is evident from the rapid increasing population and the economic activities in the localities.

3. Research Method

The primary and secondary sources of data were used for the present study. Empirical primary data were collected from three localities in the city of Imphal viz. Hatta, Golapti, Mantripukhri through observation, In-depth interview, Interview schedule and questionnaire techniques. A total respondent of 150 who had completed on year in the urban locality were selected from the Pangal migrants in the three urban localities mentioned above by using simple random sampling technique. In case of family migration, only one migrant from a family was selected as respondent who was actually the head of the family or the bread-earner.

Data from secondary sources like published books, articles, materials in the form of research dissertation and thesis, census reports, government documents, NGO reports, newspapers etc. were also collected. Data pertaining to the population, the physical background, urban amenities and facilities of the three urban areas have been obtained from the abovementioned secondary sources.

4. Factors of Rural-urban migration of Pangals

Nobody feel like leaving their homeland. One leaves home and migrate to another place because of several factors which may be prevalent either at the place of origin or the place of destination of migration or at both. This movement is not an immediate action nor is inspired by a single basic impulse that is same for all the people (Yadava,1989). Sometimes these reasons may not be obvious, but are the result of social, economic, political, demographic and other factors occurring in different combinations either at the destination or the origin. However particularly in the context of rural-urban migration, people in rural areas mostly migrate to the urban areas because of the inherent problems in the rural areas although other factors in the urban area may have also pulled the people. Gulliver(1955) posits, 'Other causes of migration are relatively unimportant and are generally of the "last straw" type – i.e., difficulties which affect individuals in their family and social life and which go to tip the balance and induce a man to leave home for a spell at a particular time. Even for particular individual, the prime factor of economic necessity is almost always the real cause.'

Mitchell(1959) after reviewing considerable literature on the factors of rural -urban migration emphasises the importance of economic factors in inducing movements and opines, 'In logical terms, economic factors appear to be necessary condition, but they may not in themselves be a sufficient condition. In other words, if the economic drives to labour migration are not present it is unlikely that it will occur, but if the economic conditions are

present the actual migration may not occur until some event in the personal life of the individual precipitates events and triggers off his decision to go.’

The primary reason for migration of the majority of *Pangalsto* Imphal city was found to be ‘seeking job or employment’ or ‘opening up or extension of personal businesses’. Percentage distribution of Pangal migrants having different primary factor of their migration is given in Table No.1. Out of the total migrants, 46 per cent responded ‘seeking job’ as their primary reason for migration to Imphal city.

Table No. 1: Primary Factors of Pangal Migration

Sex	To seek job		To gain Education and training		To open or extend Business		To seek modern urban facilities		Marital migration		Personal enmity in birth place		Job transfer		Others	
	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.	Total	P.C.
Male	63	47	30	22.38	17	12.68	4	2.98	0	0	0	0	2	1.64	18	13.43
Female	3	18.75	11	68.75	0	0	0	0	1	6.25	1	6.25	0	0	0	0
Total	69	46	41	27.33	17	11.33	4	2.66	1	0.66	1	0.66	2	1.33	18	12

In a state like Manipur where 90 per cent of the geographical areas are hilly terrain with low agricultural practices, there is high rate of rural unemployment and underemployment. On the one hand, because of low productivity in agriculture and limited development of non-farm activities, poor people from rural areas prefer to move towards Imphal city for alternative economic activities. On the other hand, villagers migrated to Imphal because of the mechanization of agriculture whereby many agricultural activities which used to be done by men have been replaced by machines. Some labourer respondents reported about how they used to get work every day during harvesting season. But now with the coming of harvesting machines in Manipur, harvesting of paddy of 0.60 acres of land which required 12-15 people can be completed by only 4 people with the help of the machines. Moreover, monsoon and crop failures also bring about economic disastrous to the farmers. These factors lead to the loss of means of livelihood for many agriculturallabours in rural Manipur. Thus, there is surplus of unproductive labour in the agricultural sector in the state. Poor Pangal villagers had been widely affected by the changes in agricultural practices since majority of them are engaged in agriculture as an occupation. Hence, the surplus Pangal agricultural labourers were pushed out from villages. Imphal city centre is said to have provided vast scope for employment or earning opportunities particularly in informal sector of economy. Poor Pangal migrants in villages are attracted by the economic opportunities provided in the sector and hence migrated to one of the three urban localities discussed above. Thus, the primary economic factors of migration of Pangals to Imphal city as presented by the data were both push and pull factors. While the agricultural unemployment, low productivity and income were the factors available in villages in Manipur which pushed the migrants towards Imphal, economic opportunities in Imphal,

particularly in informal sector, also pulled the poor Pangal villagers who were looking for alternative means of livelihood.

Though occupation in rural India is predominantly agriculture, an analysis of the occupational characteristics of migrants before migrating to urban areas is relevant as it throws some light on the economic motives for migration and provides insight to enable identification of the factors of rural-urban migration (Caldwell, 1968 cited in Yadava, 1989). The field data given in Table No. 2 show that 34.66 per cent were farmers before migration. These farmers in due course of time experienced low productivity and income in farming. They no longer were in the position to fulfill the increasing needs of the family with the income they got from farming. This agricultural low income has been one of the reasons for the increase in the percentage of population living below poverty line in Manipur (Government of Manipur, 2009). Moreover, after starting nuclear family of their own many Pangal migrants didn't inherit any agricultural land from their parents. Land owned by other villagers to practice agriculture on lease was also not readily available. Thus, they became agriculturally unemployed in their origin villages which became one reason for their migration to Imphal city.

Thus, large proportion of Pangal migrants were also found to have been compelled to migrate to Imphal city due to the paucity of land for practicing agriculture or for constructing house to start their nuclear family after they got married. These migrants were mostly not the only son or the last of the multiple sons of their parents. Thus, large number of Pangal migrants tended to come from large families. It was found that majority of the male Pangal migrants had more than 2 brothers. Hence, immovable property including agricultural land, particularly when it was small, was inherited by the last brother only. Thus, majority of the Pangal migrants didn't have land, either because of the family size factor mentioned above or others, that could be used for practicing agriculture. This became another reason for unemployment among many Pangal migrants in the village before migration. This was one reason for producing larger proportion of Pangal migrants by the larger families in villages. Caldwell (1969) has pointed out four reasons for large number of migrations from larger families. But Pangal migrants moved to Imphal city not for the Caldwell's reasons but because of pressure on land i.e., not enough land for cultivation which consequently pushed them out from their villages in search of livelihood to Imphal city.

However, as Gulliver (1959) and Mitchell (1955) have pointed out above, among Pangal migrants, economic factors might be primarily responsible for their movement to Imphal city, but other factors like education for children and accessing better urban facilities including health care might played the secondary role in the process of making decision for their outmigration.

Another interesting finding is that most of the pangal migrants who moved to Imphal for seeking work preferred seasonal, temporary and circular migration as part of their, in Bhagat (2013)'s words, 'livelihood strategies' and 'income security'.

Table No. 2: Profession of Pangal migrants before migration

Sex	Student		Employee		Housewife		Unemployed		Farmers	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Male	20	14.92	49	36.56	00	00	15	11.19	50	37.31
Female	10	62.50	1	6.25	3	18.75	0	0	2	12.50
Total	30	20	50	33.33	3	2	15	10	52	34.66

5. Pangal migrants and informal sector

The term 'informal sector' was used for the first time by a British anthropologist, Keith Hart, in his study in Ghana, to refer to self-employment (Hart, 1973). Tokmen (1978), one of the dualistic theorists of informal sector argues that informal economic activities persist due to the fact that not enough job opportunities have been generated in formal sector to absorb surplus labour due to a slow rate of economic development and a faster rate of urbanization. The pangal migrants who were mostly poor and unemployed in village, after reaching Imphal, started engaging themselves in the informal sector as chances for getting employment in formal sector was remote. They preferred economic activities in this sector as they could readily start their small business without much hurdles and earn good income in the sector. Thus, the informal sector has become the prominent sector of economy in Imphal where the Pangal migrants mostly engaged in.

Many of the poor Pangal migrants have been said to have faced the problem of not getting a job or a means of livelihood just after they reached Imphal. This problem of unemployment in the city may be attributable to the high rate of migration of rural youths who have been failed to get jobs in government sector. To escape from the situation of unemployment and to sustain themselves in the city, majority of the poor Pangal migrants took up economic activities in informal sector.

As there has been high demand of labourers in construction sector in Imphal areas, many of them started working in construction sites as labourers. While others found to be self-employed as street vendors (mostly Pangal women migrants), autorickshaw drivers, rickshaw pullers, tea stallers, shop keepers and meat vendors etc. Thus, majority of the pangal migrants were self-employed in informal sector in Imphal.

In the literature of rural-urban migration, the role of informal sector is a controversial issue. Most classical migration models treat the informal sector as a temporary employment opportunity for migrants (see Todaro, 1969 & Lal, 1973). In the early 1970s, the international labour organization (ILO) published a report (ILO, 1972) on Kenyan employment, income and equality, which challenged the above-mentioned theoretical models and suggested that the informal sector in Kenya played an important role in economic development. Since then, other studies have supported the ILO findings (Bhattacharya, 1993; Banerjee, 1983; Deshpande, 1983). Among the Pangal migrants too, the informal sector plays an important role in providing livelihoods in Imphal city. One reason for wider engagement in the economic activities in informal sector by Pangal migrants was

the higher earnings in the informal than in the formal sectors. Excess demand for small services like repairers, construction workers, availability of vegetables and other perishable food items at door steps in the three urban localities provide them with many employment opportunities with better earnings. Thus, a Pangal migrant readily gets a wage-labourer work in construction sector in Imphal. A Pangalmigrant woman could also earn readily by vending vegetables and other food items on the streets or in residential areas. One could also open a tea stall or pan shop in a residential area or roadside. But, the location of the settlements is important for the ability to develop livelihoods. Usually in city migrants in the settlements close to markets, construction sites or roads feel privileged relative to people in settlements at the fringes of the city. Thus, Pangal migrants in Hatta and Golapti considered themselves as more advantageous than those in Mantripukhri when comes to livelihood matters.

There may be many reasons for the Pangal migrants in Imphal city for not getting employment in formal sector. Among those reasons, discrimination is one that the Pangal migrants citedⁱ. Generally migrants are looked upon by the host society as a burden on systems and resources at the destination. In India, migrants' right to the city is denied on political defence of the 'sons of the soil' theory, which aims to create vote banks along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. Thus, a gulf between migrants and locals has been caused by exclusion and discrimination against migrants which are taking place through political and administrative processes, market mechanisms and socio-economic process (Bhagat, 2011). The high level of discrimination in the mainstream job market in Imphal city was one reason for high rate of self-employment among Pangal migrants in Imphal city. However, Devoid of poor social security and legal protection, the pangal migrants working in informal sector particularly self-employed ones were in the poor conditions and faced real discriminations. They faced eviction several times from police and traffic officials. Their goods were kicked and thrown out mercilessly by the police constables. The autorickshaw drivers also faced harassment by policemen often in the form of random document checks, with the specific aim of exhorting money.

6. Coping strategy for low income among Pangal migrants

To cope with the problems of low income from their insecure livelihoods, unemployment in formal sector, discrimination and humiliation in their economic activities in informal sector, Pangal migrants did not involve only in one economic activity for their livelihood in Imphal city but in more than one. They made strategies for their sustainable livelihoods in the city. It was found that Pangal migrants resorted to 'income diversification through diversifying activities' as the most preferred livelihood strategy. They employed both short-term coping mechanisms and long-term survival strategies against asset vulnerabilities that they faced within the contexts where they were operating their livelihood activities. These livelihood strategies centre on income earning activities, either in formal or informal sector or as wage employment, unpaid family works, and in self-employment. Some of the short-term coping mechanisms adopted by Pangal migrants include renting out home and get low cost house in the outskirts of the city; limiting basic needs like using second hand clothes, shoes and other items; and switching among jobs seasonally etc. It was also found that many Pangal migrants who were employed in government sector run small grocery shop in their residential areas looked after jointly by the family members to cope with the increasing expenses of the family.

Thus, majority of the Pangal migrants try to cope with the difficulties of getting a job in formal sector or inability to meet the increasing needs in the family, by adopting the strategies discussed above. Many migrants have improved their life through these strategies that many have their house in one of the three urban localities. In the initial period of their stay in Imphal, these migrants had been tenants. They achieved this feat by adopting livelihood strategies. Hence, the livelihood outcomes of pangal migrants or households are the results of their success or failure in transforming through variety of strategies, the assets available to them into income or basic goods and services.

7. Pangal women migrants and street vending

It is estimated that in India more than 1 crore people rely on street vending for their livelihoods (Jha, 2018). Street vending becomes an ideal choice for self-employment and additional income because of its ease of entry and exit, lower levels of start-up capital and flexible working hours. However, Street vending was not legal in urban India for almost six decades until the passage of the street vendors act in 2014. It was only in 2014 when the parliament passed the protection of livelihood and regulation of street vending act, that the activity of street vending became legal. The purpose of the act is to protect the livelihood of street vendors and provide them with a conducive environment for carrying out their business. It covers all varieties of vending and defines the “mobile vendor”, “stationary vendor” and “street vendor”. The act mentions vending in a “street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park or any public place or private area”. Among the abovementioned self-employments, street vending is considered mostly by female Pangal migrants as the most readily available and feasible one with little capital requirement.

Despite of the legality of street vending and the contribution made by it to the urban economy, vendors are often considered anti-social, anti-developmental, dirty, unesthetic and unhygienic. There are sections of public who feel that vendors encroach on spaces meant for civic uses and others simply consider them as eyesores. They are being frequently harassed and evicted by the government officials. Pangal street vendors particularly the women were not able to protect themselves or took help of law in fighting discrimination against them. This seems to be because of the lack of awareness about the prevailing laws and legislation about street vending which is also again related to the illiteracy of the Pangal women street vendors. So, they submitted to what the officials or the police asked for to continue their vending activity. They didn't protest against the acts of those officials or police. Moreover, their primary concern was to earn some money for a day so that they could feed their family.

As far as the allotment of stall in market is concerned, not a single Pangal woman got a seat in the three Ema market in Khwairamban bazar. So, the Pangal women did vending activity in front of permanent shops in Paona Bazar, on the streets of Khairamaband Bazar and other locations, and on the roadsides of the three urban localities mentioned above. However, they faced harassment and humiliation from police officials as well as extortion of money by shop keepers for allowing them to vend in front of their shops. Most of the times, officials ignored them when convenient and tightened the rules on them when exigencies demanded preventative action. This served a dual purpose: some underhand money went to the administration for turning a blind eye, and the street vendors got to conduct their business too.

Like this there are different tales of humiliation, harassment and discrimination against for every Pangal women street vendors in Imphal city. The common struggles or challenges of these migrant women which were also found by Zingkhai and Anand (2019) in their study, were –

1. Pangal women vendors faced complaints and harassments from permanent shop owners in the Paona Bazar or government authorities like municipality officials and traffic police regarding the space they occupy.
2. Financially many pangalwomen street vendors struggled to keep up with the interest rate of loans from money lenders which at times reach 10% which did not leave them with much to take home after they pay the interest.
3. Unavailability of basic facilities such as public toilets in the market areas where they do the vending.
4. The challenges of selling out the perishable food items like fish and vegetables before they get spoiled.
5. Bandhs and strikes are very frequent in the state of Manipur which affect almost everyone but the poor women street vendors who are the sole bread earners had been badly affected. They had to face a number of troubles such as their perishable items getting spoiled, their daily money pulling (*marup*) gets affected as they were not able to pay without their daily income. They got to face such kinds of trouble every now and then because of the frequentness of bandhs.

8. Conclusion

From the findings and discussions above, we can conclude that Pangals in Manipur villages migrated to Imphal city mainly for the reason of ‘seeking job or employment or economic opportunities’ in the informal sector of economy. They had been primarily out pushed, although other secondary factors in Imphal might have also pulled, by low productivity in agriculture, limited development of non-farm activities and agricultural unemployment in villages. These migrants mainly took up self-employment like street vending and work in construction sector because of its nature of readily available and feasible with little capital requirement. Not only those who couldn’t get government jobs took up these economic activities but those Pangal migrants who were employed in government sector also engaged themselves in such economic pursuits as livelihood strategy which was jointly managed by all family members to cope with insufficient income to manage the family. Although, majority of the Pangal migrants faced problems in carrying out their livelihood activities in Imphal, women street vendors were the ones who often faced discrimination against and harassment from municipality officials and police which they didn’t fight against but settled with bribing them because of the lack of awareness about their rights which can be attributable to their illiteracy.

Notes

ⁱIt is generally perceived that to get a government job in Manipur, one has to pay lakhs of rupees to ministers and officials. But, Pangals have the view that even after giving lakhs of rupees they are being discriminated in recruitment for jobs in government sectors. Pangals, as they believe, are not selected despite of the merits the candidates have or even after giving money to the ministers.

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