



Exploring factors of rural-urban migration among *Pangals* in Manipur

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I. Introduction

Migration of people, both internationally and internally, has been very rapid in India for quite some time now with its widespread impacts including unwanted and unanticipated repercussions in both the origins and the destinations. However, internal migration becomes far greater and persistent owing to the increasing connectivity between city centres and the rest of the country on the one hand and infeasibility of larger number of migrants to move internationally on the other hand. In Manipur, there has been increase in the migration of people to urban areas particularly Imphal city from rural areas of Manipur and other states. There has also been rapid movement of people from Manipur to cities outside the state. However, 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 yet less observed and examined. This phenomenon of movement to Imphal city has also been increasing rapidly among the *Pangals* of Manipur.

Movement of people from home to another place is triggered by several factors including social, economic, political, demographic and others. Some of these factors may be associated either with the place of origin or the place of destination or both. It is in this context that the paper tries to explore the wide range of factors related to the migration of *Pangals* to Imphal city using both the primary and secondary sources of data.

II. *Pangals*–the community

Pangals who are also known by another name ‘*Meitei-Pangals*’ is one of the ethnic groups in Manipur who primarily reside in valley regions in modern-day Manipur. They practice Islam as their religion and speak Manipuri as their primary language. So, they are basically Manipuri speaking Muslims (Khan,2021). Muslims including *Pangals* and others who follow Islam constitute 8.4 per cent of the total population of Manipur (Census,2011). People of this community mostly reside in the villages of the valley districts in Manipur albeit, small localities in Imphal city like Golapti, Hatta and Mantripukhri have also been inhabited by *Pangals*. Of late, there has been a phenomenon of rapid migration towards these urban localities from amongst people of this community in villages and now becoming favourite destinations of intra-state rural-urban migration among them.

Pangals in Manipur are grouped into *shageis* (clans) which are today numbered at more than fifty and the members of a *shagei* are related by blood (Singh, 1986). A *shagei* is composed of many families. The social life of *Pangals* is more or less the same with *Meities/Meeteis* (the majority community of Manipur) who also mostly inhabit in the valley regions. What distinguishes *Pangals* from *Meiteis/Meeties* is the religionⁱ they follow. *Pangals* are also organised into *singlup*, a closely knit group of the members of a *shagei* or *shageis*, for the purpose of executing various activities 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 kins and relatives coming from distant areas (Shah,1994). Although *Shari’at* (Islamic law) doesn’t prohibit, *Pangals* refrain from marrying within the same *shagei*ⁱⁱ as such relationship is viewed as taboo, and the Kings (of Manipur) also forbade all such practices and punished the violators (Irene,2010). Every *Pangal* village is like a united body having the spirit of mutual help in ups and downs of life on the occasions like marriage, where every villager, in an endeavour to help the family in which wedding is taking place, contributes in cash and kind, besides helping in making the marriage arrangements (Choudhury,1989).

III. Theoretical framework and research methodology

Present study aims to find out whether *Pangals*, in their movement to Imphal city, are pushed by factors associated with the place of origin or pulled by factors associated with the place of destination or both. Since migration in general and rural-urban migration in particular is a diverse and complex phenomenon, there are multitudes of theories that explain the factors related to migration. While Lewis-Fei-Ranis Model considers rural-urban wage differential as the key factor of rural-urban migration (Lewis,1954), Todaro Model observes rural-urban wage differences as the factor (Todaro,1969). Everett Lee, a migration theorist, argues that decision to migrate is influenced by four sets of factors viz. push, pull, intervening and personal factors. While push and pull factors are associated with the places of origin and destination respectively intervening obstacles are found between the place of origin and destination (Lee,1969). Personal factors include personal sensitiveness, intelligence and awareness of conditions. Thus, the present study intends to explicate the factors of migration of *Pangals* within the framework of the above mentioned three models of migration. It is a descriptive and exploratory research based on a field study, albeit secondary sources were used too, conducted in three localities of Imphal city viz. Hatta, Golapti and Mantripukhri. Data were collected through

observation, In-depth interview, Interview schedule and questionnaire techniques from 150 migrants selected as sample of the study using Purposive and Snow ball sampling techniques.

IV. Factors of migration of *Pangals*

As mentioned earlier, *Pangals* inhabit mostly in the villages of Manipur, but there has been high rate of outmigration to Imphal urban localities since recent decades. Urban localities of Hatta, Golapti and in the recent years Mantripukhri have been the favourite destinations of migration among *Pangals*.

Migration may take place because of several factors as discussed by many theorists. However particularly in the context of rural-urban migration the factors are the inherent problems in the rural areas. 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.”

(a) Demographic profile

The propensity to migrate and the demographic characteristics of migrants like age-sex composition, marital status, occupational status, educational qualification, family size and place of birth etc. are closely related as reported by many studies (Connell et. al., 1976 & Narain, 1972). In the present study, majority of the migrants are male which comprised of 89.33 per cent while large number are in the age group of 35>50 years which comprised of 39.33 per cent of the total migrants. While the non-producing and consuming category of migrants who are above 60 years comprises only 3.33 per cent of the respondents, 14 per cent are in the ‘under 25 years’ age group. These youths are generally students who migrated for the purpose of education. An interesting feature, however, observed from the data is that most of the female migrants are young who are in the age group of ‘under 25 years’ which comprised of 50 per cent of the total female migrants.

The matter of being married, unmarried (single), divorced and widowed has a bearing on the decision to migrate. Commenting on the relatedness between distance moved by a migrant and marital status Singh (1985) points out “married persons having higher responsibilities usually try to move to shorter distances or does not go longer distances with a view to visiting his family easily and frequently”. As per the field data, majority are married comprising 78 per cent followed by single category comprising 18.66 per cent. Very few migrants are divorced and widowed comprising only 0.66 and 2.66 per cent respectively of the total migrants. However, majority of the female migrants are single comprising 62.50 per cent of the total female migrants unlike their male counterpart which comprises only 13.43 per cent of the total male migrants. The proportion of widowed migrants is also high among female migrants as it comprises 25 per cent of the total female migrants.

While people of *Pangal* community scattered in all valley districts of the state, majority of them concentrates in the district of Thoubal. Imphal city comes under both Imphal east and Imphal west district however, the field areas i.e., Golapti, Hatta and Mantripukhri fall in Imphal east district. Field data show that majority of the migrants comprising 49.33 per cent belong to Thoubal district originally followed by Imphal east district with 22.66 per cent of the total migrants. A very small number of migrants belong to Kakching and Jiribam district owing to two reasons firstly, a smaller number of *Pangal*'s population inhabit in Kakching district who think that there is better scope to do business at a distance of just 50 kms in Moreh, a town in Tengnoupal district, with many economic opportunities to attract people than in Imphal. Secondly, Jiribam is at a distance of more than 150 kms from Imphal which leads people to decide not to migrate to Imphal although Imphal has many opportunities being the capital of the state. Instead, people from Jiribam are more attracted to the opportunities in Silchar of Assam.

(b) Economic push and pull factors

As mentioned earlier beside the demographic characteristics of migrants, migration is caused by several factors – economic as well as non-economic. Economic factors are classified as push and pull by Lee (1969) as discussed earlier. This push-pull theory is primarily concerned with identifying a list of factors that drive people away from origin village and those which attract them to potential areas of destination. As per the field data, 'seeking for job' or 'employment' or 'opening up or extension of personal businesses' is the primary reason of migration of *Pangals*. The migrants are pulled by factors that include economic opportunities in informal sector, better and quality education and health care facilities in Imphal city while they are also pushed by factors including poverty, agricultural unemployment, agricultural low income and seasonal unemployment in the villages.

Generally economic migrants move from poorer developing areas into richer areas where wages are higher and more jobs are available (Lewis,1954). Imphal city centre provides vast scope for economic opportunities in the informal sector of economy which attract *Pangal* migrants. As found in other studies (Bhattacharya,1998) that informal sector provides work to rural-urban migrants, in the present study poor economic migrants opt for the economic activities in this sector as they can readily start their small business without many hurdles and earn good income. Field data reveal that 41.33 per cent of the migrants engage themselves in economic activities like tailoring, shop keeping, auto rickshaw driving, rickshaw pulling, meat selling, tea stalling and street vending etc. thus implying the importance of informal sector in Manipur in providing income and employment where formal opportunities are limited and social security is almost non-existent.

In the wake of mechanization of agriculture, men who used to do many agricultural activities have been replaced by machines. Some migrants reported about how they used to get work everyday during harvesting season. Moreover, monsoon and crop failures also bring about the loss of means of livelihood for many seasonal labours in rural Manipur. This affects the *Pangals* badly as they are mostly scattered as mentioned earlier in villages and engaged in agriculture. There is also limited scope for development of non-

farm activities in rural areas. They therefore, move towards Imphal for alternative economic activities and thereafter taking up the aforesaid economic pursuits.

(c) Land holdings and family size

The size of land holdings and family size are two other factors instrumental for migration. Field data indicate that large proportion of *Pangal* migrants has large family size hence the practice of agriculture by all sons after they get married becomes less feasible when and as there is no distribution of the agricultural land to all the sons. So, those sons who don't have a piece of agricultural land either inherited from their parents or acquired through purchase have to rely on means of livelihoods other than agricultural practice which are mostly scarce in villages and abundant in Imphal city and thus, are the reasons for their migration to Imphal city.

(d) Education

Another significant primary factor of migration in the present study is education. Generally, the role of education in the process of migration can be viewed in two different ways. One is to assess the impact of education on inducing migration which can be discussed under the heading 'education for migration' and the second is to examine education as a purpose for which people, particularly students, migrate which can be discussed under the heading 'migration for education' (Yadava,1977). The field data reveal that about 27.33 per cent of the migrants both male and female migrated for the primary reason of education for themselves or their children. The proportion of female migrants with education as the primary reason for migration was high with 68.75 per cent of the total female migrants. This is because villages in Manipur seldom have good schools beyond X standard while colleges and higher educational institutes are obviously confined to urban areas in Imphal. Better school and college education as well as good coaching institutes for competitive exams like NEET-UG and engineering entrances and also other competitive exams for employment conducted by Manipur Public Service Commission (MPSC) and Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) attract the parents and prospecting candidates to Imphal city.

(e) Insurgency

Another important reason for migration of many migrants is insurgency. Insurgency in Manipur is not a problem in villages only but in the state as a whole. But this problem affects the social, psychological and economic life of people more in the villages. Some of the insurgent groups of the valley region active till today or recent years are (Revolutionary People Front) RPF, (People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak) PREPAK, (United National Liberation Front) UNLF, (Kanglei Yawol Kanba Lup) KYKL and (People United Liberation Front) PULF etc. They asked for donations/monetary contribution to continue their struggle for independence from India to rich people, government employees, contractors, businessmen and even petty bread earners like shop keepers, autorickshaw drivers etc. Beside these regular contributions, they asked money by giving demand letter to rich people in Manipur. When people didn't give money, the members of these insurgent groups kidnaped and killed either of the family members or sometimes hurled hand grenade to the houses of the rich people. If their monetary demand was not fulfilled, shoot to kill was their norm.

During 1990s till recent years, monetary demand by these insurgent groups to rich people, particularly in villages, and gunning down of people when their demands were not fulfilled was common in Manipur. In villages, they had the information through their overground members about who were wealthy. Moreover, members of these groups sometimes took shelter for nights at the residence of families, preferably rich ones, in villages. When police got the information about their sheltering in the family, most of the time after the group members left, members of the family were interrogated, sometimes with physical assault, to tell whereabouts of them. They continued to face harassment in the form of, both mentally and physically, from police. Thus, villagers were victims of both insurgency and counter-insurgency. Whereas, in Imphal city almost all permanent residents seem to be rich, because of which overground members were not able to pinpoint any rich people unless one was very rich. Moreover, in the city because of the kind of instrumental and impersonal relationship that people had, hardly one knew who was how much rich. And because of the high level of security being deployed in Imphal city it was not safe for the group members to move here and there for giving demand letter to rich people. Thus, people in city were less affected by insurgency and counter-insurgency in Manipur.

So, many rich *Pangals* in villages decided to migrate to Imphal city to escape from the unwanted incidents because of insurgency and counter-insurgency. During 1990s and 2000s many *Pangals* from villages purchased land and constructed houses in Golapti, Hatta and Mantripukhri because of the above discussed reasons. One Pangal migrant narrated,

“I belong to Heitroi pokpi in Thoubal district by birth. Before I migrated to Mantripukhri I was owning a truck which transported sand and stones from Thoubal rivers to deliver to different locations in Imphal. During 1990s, I was facing frequent monetary demand from many insurgent groups not because I was rich but because I was owning a truck. Sometimes I was not able to meet their demand for which I was threatened to be killed. In some instances, hand grenades had been hurled inside the courtyard of my house. So, I decided to migrate to Mantripukhri to escape from that kind of harassment. I purchased a land of 0.06 acres in Mantripukhri in 2007 and constructed house and started living here.”

Another migrant narrated, *“I am a lecturer in one of the government colleges of Manipur drawing a good salary. Considering the high salary, I am drawing, I used to get monetary demands from various insurgent groups operating in Manipur and had fulfilled the demands most of the time. But sometimes, the amount demanded was too high to afford for me. When I didn't fulfill their demand, I used to get threat in the form of gun shots to the walls of my house and keeping of hand grenade in my courtyard. So, unable to bear such harassment and psychological disturbances I decided and migrated to Golapti to escape from such situations after purchasing a house there.”*

V. Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that *Pangals* migrate to Imphal city not because of single factor which is same for all but rather by considering several factors which can be categorized into primary and secondary associated both with the origin village and the destination. These factors vary depending upon the demographic characteristics of migrants like age, sex and marital status. 'Economic opportunities in Imphal city or (and) problems like insurgency in the villages and 'education' found out to be the primary factors although other factors like big family size with little land holdings, accessing urban amenities and living a higher standard of life play secondary role in the migration of *Pangals*. Despite of the finding that a considerable number of migrants are educated, their educational qualification played little role in their migration for employment or work as skilled work which required certain educational level is scarcely available in Imphal. Irrespective of the fact that their educational level plays no role in getting a job or work in unorganised sector, migration for education is significant among *Pangals* as many responded that they migrated for the primary purpose of education of their children or themselves although they had secondary purposes.

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Notes

ⁱ Meiteis/Meeteis follow either Hinduism or Sanamahism or Christianity.

ⁱⁱ Khan, Md. Yusuf. (2012). *Marriage among Muslims in India* (Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation). University of Delhi.