

Poverty, Multidimensional Deprivation and Economic Vulnerability among The Meitei-Pangal Community

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Abstract

The Meitei-Pangals, commonly known as Manipuri Muslims, constitute a historically rooted minority community of Manipur. Despite their long association with the social, cultural and economic life of the state, a considerable section of the community continues to experience livelihood insecurity, limited asset ownership, inadequate housing and restricted access to essential services. This article examines poverty, multidimensional deprivation and economic vulnerability through a descriptive and analytical review of household-level secondary evidence. The principal sources include the Report on Socio-Economic Survey of Meitei-Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), 2004, Census of India 2011, District Census Handbooks, government reports and relevant academic studies. Poverty is examined beyond monetary income by considering livelihood stability, employment, landholding, productive assets, housing, water, sanitation, electricity, education, healthcare and financial protection. Available evidence suggests that dependence on cultivation, casual labour, petty trade and informal self-employment exposes many households to seasonal income fluctuations. Small or fragmented landholdings, limited savings, inadequate productive assets and weak formal-sector participation further reduce household resilience. Women, landless workers, informal labourers, school dropouts and households with high dependency burdens appear particularly vulnerable. The article recommends an updated household survey, multidimensional poverty mapping, market-linked skill development, livelihood diversification, financial inclusion, improved infrastructure and gender-responsive social protection.

Keywords: Meitei-Pangal; multidimensional poverty; economic vulnerability; livelihood insecurity; household assets; housing; deprivation; Manipur

1. Introduction

Poverty is commonly associated with insufficient income, but household well-being is shaped by a wider set of circumstances. A family may remain vulnerable even when its earnings place it slightly above an official poverty line. Irregular employment, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, absence of savings, limited land ownership, weak educational attainment and restricted healthcare can make such a household highly susceptible to economic shocks.

A multidimensional approach recognises that poverty is simultaneously economic, educational, occupational, social and infrastructural. It is experienced not only when households cannot purchase basic necessities but also when they lack the capabilities and resources required to improve their future.

Sen (1999) described development as an expansion of substantive freedoms and capabilities; income is important in this framework, but it is not the sole measure of deprivation.

The Meitei-Pangal community provides a relevant context for this analysis. It has lived in Manipur for several centuries and contributed to agriculture, trade, crafts, construction, transport, fishing and other economic activities. Nevertheless, available studies indicate that a section of its households remains concentrated in informal and low-return occupations. The present article examines how livelihoods, assets, housing and public services interact to shape household poverty. It does not portray the community as uniformly deprived; conditions vary across localities, occupations, genders and generations.

2. Background of the Meitei-Pangal Community

The Meitei-Pangals are a distinctive Muslim community concentrated mainly in the valley districts of Manipur. Historical accounts generally connect their settlement and integration with the reign of King Khagemba in the early seventeenth century. Over time, the community developed a regional identity combining Islamic religious traditions with the language and cultural environment of Manipur.

Meiteilon, or Manipuri, is the principal language of the community. Census 2011 recorded Muslims as approximately 8.4 per cent of Manipur's population. Important settlements are located in Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur, with smaller populations elsewhere. Many rural and semi-urban households continue to depend on agriculture, casual work, petty commerce and small-scale self-employment.

The community is internally diverse. Some households have achieved upward mobility through higher education, professional employment, government service, entrepreneurship and migration. Others remain dependent on insecure livelihoods. Educational attainment, land ownership, gender, locality, infrastructure and access to finance influence these differences.

Monetary Poverty:

Monetary poverty refers to insufficient income or consumption for meeting minimum needs. It is useful for estimating deprivation but does not fully describe employment security, public services, health, education and household assets.

Multidimensional Deprivation

Multidimensional deprivation arises when a household experiences disadvantages across several areas at the same time. The analytical dimensions used here are presented below.



Figure 1. Household dimensions of multidimensional poverty

Economic Vulnerability:

Economic vulnerability refers to the likelihood that a household will suffer a serious fall in living standards after a shock. Crop failure, illness, unemployment, price increases, conflict, displacement or

the loss of an earning member may push an insecure family into deeper poverty. Poverty describes an existing condition, whereas vulnerability also captures future risk.

3. Review of Related Literature:

The Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur (2004), conducted the most important community-specific socio-economic survey. It examined employment, income, education and living conditions and remains a valuable baseline, although its monetary categories are now dated.

The Government of India (2006), through the Sachar Committee Report, demonstrated that Muslim deprivation across India is associated with unequal schooling, employment, credit, infrastructure and representation. Irene (2010) documented the historical and cultural position of Muslims in Manipur, while Ahmed (2011) discussed their social organisation and socio-economic circumstances.

Khan (2015) linked educational disadvantage with poverty, parental illiteracy, school discontinuation, weak vocational opportunity and limited institutional support.

Syed (2020) highlighted the participation of Muslim women in informal and unorganised work, often alongside unpaid domestic responsibilities.

Ahmed and Khan (2022) observed that gains in basic literacy had not produced equivalent participation in higher education and professional employment.

Zakariya et al. (2024) found strong educational aspirations among Meitei-Pangal women but continuing financial, geographical, gender-related and institutional barriers.

The literature establishes the presence of educational and economic disadvantage but reveals three gaps: recent household evidence is limited; poverty, assets, employment, housing and amenities are rarely analysed within one framework; and conflict, displacement and livelihood disruption may have changed household conditions since earlier studies.

4. Statement of the Problem

Available evidence indicates that sections of the community experience low or unstable income, limited land ownership, informal employment, weak financial protection and inadequate access to essential services. These disadvantages are interconnected. Casual employment restricts savings and asset creation; limited assets weaken access to formal credit; and financial instability contributes to educational discontinuation and inadequate housing. The central problem is the absence of an updated, integrated household-level assessment. Without current and disaggregated evidence, the present scale and pattern of deprivation cannot be measured precisely.

5. Rationale and Significance of the Study

Income-based estimates alone cannot explain the lived experience of vulnerable households. Poverty must be understood alongside education, employment, assets, housing, health, amenities and capacity to withstand shocks. This study integrates these dimensions, distinguishes present poverty from future vulnerability, highlights women and informal workers, identifies data gaps and provides a framework for policy planning and an updated household survey.

6. Research Objectives

1. To examine the principal livelihoods and earning sources of Meitei-Pangal households.
2. To analyse available evidence on household income and employment security.

3. To study landholding, productive assets, savings and financial protection.
4. To examine poverty as a multidimensional household condition.
5. To assess housing quality and access to basic amenities.
6. To identify groups facing greater economic vulnerability.
7. To examine relationships among livelihood, education, assets and living conditions.
8. To suggest policy measures for reducing poverty and vulnerability.

7. Research Questions

1. What are the principal livelihood sources of Meitei-Pangal households?
2. How does informal and seasonal work affect household security?
3. What role do landholding and productive assets play in resilience?
4. Which dimensions are most closely associated with poverty?
5. How do housing and amenities affect quality of life?
6. Which groups face greater vulnerability?
7. What interventions can promote sustainable economic security?

8. Research Methodology:

Research Design: The study follows a descriptive, analytical and secondary-data-based research design. Household-level analysis refers to the interpretation of documented household evidence and indicators; the article does not claim that a new field survey was conducted.

Sources and Method: Sources include the 2004 Meitei-Pangal socio-economic survey, Census 2001 and 2011, District Census Handbooks, the Sachar Committee Report, Ministry of Minority Affairs publications and relevant academic studies. The analysis uses thematic classification, descriptive interpretation, comparison of community and state indicators, assessment of livelihood risk and examination of relationships among income, assets and amenities.

Ethical Considerations: Only published and publicly available material is used. No personal household information is disclosed. The analysis avoids cultural stereotyping, recognises internal diversity and clearly identifies older monetary values rather than treating them as present income.

9. Results and Analysis:

Livelihood Structure: Cultivation, agricultural labour, casual employment, petty trade, construction, transport, livestock rearing and informal self-employment are important livelihood sources. The 2004 survey reportedly found cultivation to be a major occupation among economically active community members. Agriculture remains exposed to small holdings, irrigation limitations, weather, input costs and price fluctuations, while daily-wage work depends on seasonal local demand.

- Dependence on seasonal or irregular work.
- Absence of contracts, pensions and insurance.
- Low productivity and limited capital.
- Weak occupational diversification and market access.
- Limited participation in professional and organised-sector work.

Income Pattern and Economic Insecurity: Later studies citing the 2004 survey report that approximately 41.23 per cent of households then had monthly income below Rs. 2,000, while about 3.06 per cent reported Rs. 10,000 or more. These figures cannot describe current income because prices and wages have changed substantially. They are used only as evidence of historical concentration in lower-income categories.

Income regularity is as important as the amount earned. A household may receive reasonable earnings during harvest or construction periods but very little in other months. Multiple income sources - cultivation, wage labour, livestock, trade and remittances - can strengthen resilience, but may also indicate that no single livelihood is sufficient.

Landholding and Productive Assets: Land is a source of production, security and social status. Small, fragmented or non-irrigated holdings limit agricultural productivity. Landless and near-landless households depend more heavily on tenancy, casual work, informal commerce or migration. Asset analysis must distinguish consumer goods from productive resources such as cultivable land, livestock, machinery, tools, commercial vehicles, business equipment and savings.

Savings, Debt and Financial Inclusion: Irregular income limits household saving. Medical treatment, education, housing repair and livelihood investment may require borrowing. Where formal credit is inaccessible, families may depend on relatives, traders or informal lenders. Meaningful financial inclusion must therefore extend beyond account opening to affordable productive credit, savings, insurance, financial literacy, digital assistance and protection from exploitative debt.

Multidimensional Poverty

Dimension	Common form of deprivation
Income	Low, irregular or seasonal earnings
Employment	Informal work and absence of social protection
Education	Dropout and limited higher education
Assets	Small landholdings and inadequate productive resources
Housing	Weak construction, overcrowding or insecure tenure
Amenities	Inadequate water, sanitation, drainage and transport
Health	High out-of-pocket expenditure and weak insurance
Finance	Limited savings and dependence on informal borrowing

Housing and Living Conditions: Housing quality is an important indicator of security. A durable and adequately spaced dwelling protects residents from weather, disease and physical risk, whereas overcrowding, poor ventilation, temporary construction and inadequate drainage reduce well-being. District Census Handbooks contain housing and amenity data, though not every table isolates Meitei-Pangal households. Formal availability also differs from effective access: an electrified settlement may face irregular supply, and an existing water source may be distant, seasonal or unsafe.

Groups Facing Greater Vulnerability

- Landless and marginal farming households.
- Casual and informal workers.
- Women-headed households and women in unpaid or low-paid work.
- Households containing elderly, disabled or chronically ill members.
- Families with high dependency ratios.
- School dropouts and unemployed youth.
- Households without savings or productive assets.
- Families affected by conflict, displacement or livelihood loss.

Economic Shocks and Coping

Vulnerable households may cope with crisis by reducing food and healthcare expenditure, withdrawing children from education, borrowing informally, selling livestock, delaying housing repairs or migrating for work. Such strategies can provide immediate relief but weaken future resilience, particularly when productive assets are sold or education is interrupted.

10. Discussion:

Poverty among the Meitei-Pangals cannot be explained through income alone. The central concern is the simultaneous presence of unstable livelihoods, limited assets, educational discontinuation and uneven infrastructure. Agricultural and informal occupations are economically important, but their insecurity exposes households to seasonal shocks. Policy should improve their productivity while opening pathways to new occupations.

Asset poverty is equally significant. Land, livestock, equipment, savings and enterprise resources protect households during emergencies. Families without such resources are more likely to borrow at high cost or sell essential property. Educational disadvantage further reinforces the cycle: students who leave education because of financial hardship may enter the same insecure occupations on which their households depend.

Housing and amenities are also economic concerns. Poor roads restrict market access, inadequate sanitation increases health costs, and unreliable electricity or internet limits education and enterprise. Infrastructure improvement can therefore enhance both welfare and productive opportunity.

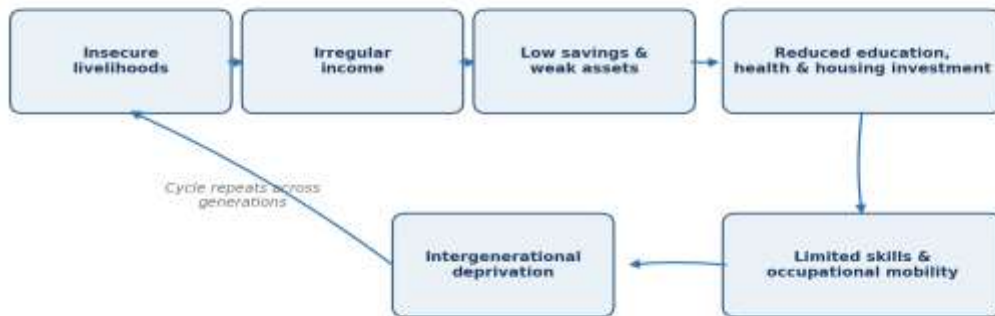


Figure 2. Household economic vulnerability and intergenerational deprivation cycle

12. Major Findings

Educational awareness has improved, but discontinuation limits entry into professional work. Cultivation, casual labour, petty trade and informal self-employment remain major livelihoods. Seasonal and low-return work produces income uncertainty and weak saving capacity. Historical evidence indicates long-standing concentration in lower-income categories. Small or fragmented landholding restricts productivity and household security.

Poverty includes income, education, employment, housing, health and infrastructure deprivation. The existence of amenities does not guarantee their reliability, quality or affordability. Women, informal workers, landless families, unemployed youth and displaced households face greater risk. The absence of recent disaggregated data limits accurate policy planning.

13. Suggestions and Policy Implications

A new socio-economic household survey should collect district-wise and gender-disaggregated information on education, employment, income, debt, assets, housing, health, digital access and scheme participation. This evidence can support a community-specific multidimensional poverty index and identify the most deprived settlements.

Livelihood improvement should combine agricultural support with occupational diversification. Irrigation, quality seeds, storage, machinery, insurance and market linkages can strengthen farming, while horticulture, fisheries, poultry, dairy, food processing, construction, healthcare, information technology and renewable-energy services can create additional work. Training must be linked with apprenticeships, placement, enterprise incubation and affordable credit.

Financial inclusion should provide usable bank accounts, productive loans, savings, insurance and counselling. Housing and infrastructure programmes should prioritise safe water, sanitation, drainage, roads, transport, electricity, internet, schools and health facilities. Women require childcare, flexible training, access to credit and productive assets, and representation in local planning. Scheme implementation should be monitored through transparent settlement-level indicators and community participation.

14. Conclusion

The Meitei-Pangal community has made an important contribution to the historical, cultural and economic development of Manipur. Nevertheless, available evidence indicates that sections of it

continue to face multidimensional poverty and substantial economic vulnerability. The principal difficulty is not merely low income but the interaction of insecure employment, inadequate productive assets, limited education, deficient housing, weak financial protection and uneven public services. Sustainable improvement requires a coordinated development strategy. Education, employment, agriculture, credit, infrastructure and social protection should not be addressed through isolated programmes. Policy must strengthen household productive capacity while protecting families from illness, unemployment, crop failure, price increases, conflict and displacement. An updated household survey is urgently required because the 2004 survey and Census 2011 cannot fully represent present conditions.

15. Limitations of the Study

The article is based on secondary evidence and does not include a new household survey. The principal community-specific survey was conducted in 2004, while Census 2011 remains the latest completed decennial Census source for many indicators. Older income figures cannot be directly compared with present earnings without adjustment. Census tables do not consistently identify Meitei-Pangals separately, and published studies use different concepts, locations and samples. The analysis identifies relationships but does not statistically establish causality. Conflict, displacement and economic disruption may also have altered current household conditions.

16. Scope for Further Research

Future studies should conduct a large-scale survey across rural, peri-urban and urban settlements and examine income, consumption, landholding, debt, productive assets, women's paid and unpaid work, youth unemployment, migration and access to schemes. Researchers may construct a community-specific multidimensional poverty index and undertake district-wise and longitudinal comparisons to determine whether education, livelihood diversification, digital access and public programmes produce sustained mobility.

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