



Prabandhan Darpan - Journal of Management Studies

Contents available at: <https://prabandhandarpan.com/index.php/pjms>

Gendered Identities and Informal Livelihoods: A Study of Tribal Women Vendors

Christina Lalremdik^{1*}

Abstract

Women constitute a substantial segment of the informal economy in India and continue to experience heightened vulnerability arising from the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and economic marginalisation. This article examines the socioeconomic conditions of tribal women vendors operating in Lamka Town and its peripheral areas in Churachandpur District, Manipur. Although women vendors from the Meitei community have received considerable scholarly attention, empirical research on tribal women vendors remains limited, despite their numerical predominance in local vending spaces. Drawing on Kimberle Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality, the study analyses how overlapping social identities shape the livelihood experiences, social positioning, and recognition of tribal women vendors. The study adopts a quantitative research design and is based on primary data collected from 350 respondents using structured, closed-ended questionnaires. Statistical analysis was conducted across three dimensions: demographic characteristics, economic conditions, and family structures. The findings indicate that vending is widely perceived as a gendered occupation, with marriage constituting a critical entry point into the profession. While aspirations for intergenerational mobility motivate women's participation in vending, the results show that income levels and years of experience do not significantly translate into economic advancement or improved social status. Furthermore, women's economic contributions remain largely undervalued within households and the wider society, reflecting persistent patterns of gender marginalisation. The study demonstrates the relevance of an intersectional analytical framework for understanding the structural constraints faced by tribal women in informal livelihoods. By empirically foregrounding their socioeconomic realities, the paper contributes to existing literature on gender and informal work and underscores the need for targeted policy interventions, institutional support, and inclusive development strategies to enhance the recognition and socioeconomic positioning of tribal women vendors.

Keywords: Tribal, Women, Vendors, Socioeconomic, Intersectionality

1. Introduction

In Manipur, informal economy played a significant role in diversifying the livelihood activities for the people (Singh, 2019; Baruah, 2020). Over the decades, the tribal communities have witnessed a marked transition from subsistence-based economies to market-oriented livelihoods (Hemam & Reddy, 1998). This economic shift has transformed Lamka town into a commercial hub, with women emerging as key actors in trade. In comparison to the Meitei community, where women's vending has deep historical roots (Singha, 2022; Devi & Sechdeva, 2022; Maring & Potsangbam, 2022), Devi, 2017), the rise of tribal women vendors is relatively a new phenomenon (Valte, 2020), represented by a significant departure from their traditional gender roles. This shift is often underscored by their

¹ PhD Research Scholar at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur. christinard@protonmail.com

increasing visibility in the public sphere. Kamei (2015) noted that tribal economy in the hills of Manipur historically operated on a sophisticated system of reciprocity and barter, where local items and forest produce were exchanged for valley salt and fish. These tribal societies lived in seclusion and wealth was not held in currency but in livestock, particularly the Mithun, which functioned as a primary unit of value (Kipgen, 2021; Haokip & Haokip, 2024). However, the rapid monetization of the 20th and 21st centuries has forced a transitional shift prompting tribal women to move from unpaid subsistence labour to market-based vending, driven by a desperate need for liquid cash to fund modern necessities like children's education and healthcare (Shimray & Devi, 2021). This shift brings forward an inclination towards structural conformity rooted in male dominance as the study shows that the practice of vending by tribal women is merely considered as an extended role of a women besides domestic duties.

This primitive way of thinking is highly influenced by the patriarchal practice among the tribal community in the region, which glorifies male's ability to hunt and provide for his family (McDuié-Ra, 2013). The chapter hypothesis that this pattern of indoctrination restricts women's autonomy and shapes their socioeconomic roles even in modern age. The transition from traditional gender roles to active economic participation among tribal women does not mirror the trajectory observed in the Meitei¹ community (Singha, 2022). This difference establishes the need for a comprehensive study focusing specifically on the unique experiences and challenges faced by tribal women vendors.

Vending serves as an accessible entry point to economic activity for marginalized women due to its low capital and skill requirements (Bhowmik, 2005; Kabeer, 2016). The high concentration of women in the vending sector in Lamka town area is not an isolated local trend but rather a trend that reflects a broader Southeast Asian regional characteristic (Chen, 2023). Historically, women in Southeast Asia have occupied a central role in the marketplace, serving as the primary agents of trade and household financial management (Andaya, 2008). This pattern is vividly mirrored in the Indo-Myanmar borderlands, where women negotiate their gender roles through active participation in informal cross-border trade (Lalpekhui, 2022). While the Meitei women of the valley have established a globally recognized institutional presence through the Ima Keithel, tribal women in the hills engage in similar 'necessity-based' entrepreneurship, driven by the need to sustain family livelihoods in a rapidly changing economy (Bachaspatimayum, 2020; WIEGO, 2022). Consequently, such women's socioeconomic positions are often shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class, resulting in compounded barriers to empowerment (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2020). The concentration of women in the role of vending in the cultural context of the state has inhibit their empowerment to a certain extent. Consequently, there remains a paucity of empirical research analysing their socioeconomic realities and empowerment trajectories of tribal women vendors in Manipur.

By employing a quantitative framework, this chapter systematically assess the socioeconomic profiles of women vendors in Lamka. A total of N= 350 respondents were selected based on purposive sampling methods. The inclusion criteria require the respondents to be of tribal affinity and with a vending experience of more than two years. Data were randomly collected from the vending spots in the periphery of Lamka town area. The quantitative set of questionnaires include a close ended questions prepared based on a previous pilot study and secondary data. The data are then systematically coded, tabulated, statistically analysed. Prior and informed consent was obtained from all the respondents and confidentiality were assured to each participant. By foregrounding their empirical data, the following sections examine the intersecting realities of age, marital status, and educational background to provide new insights into the complexities of empowerment within a marginalized frontier setting.

2. Method of the Study

The present study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the socioeconomic conditions of tribal women vendors operating in Lamka Town and its peripheral areas in Churachandpur District, Manipur. A survey method was employed to generate primary data, enabling systematic measurement of demographic, economic, and family-related

¹ Meitei community form the largest and dominant ethnic group of Manipur in Northeast India.

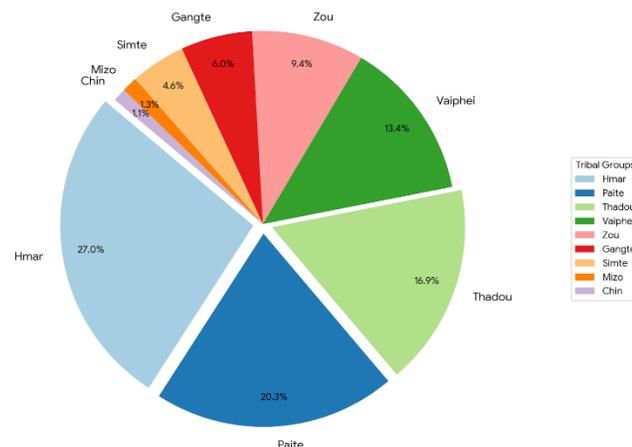
variables relevant to the study objectives. The study universe comprised tribal women engaged in informal vending activities within the selected area. A total of 350 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the study specifically targeted tribal women vendors who constitute the majority of the local vending population. Data were collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire designed to capture information across three major dimensions: demographic characteristics (such as age, marital status, education, and household composition), economic conditions (including income levels, capital investment, type of vending activity, and duration of engagement), and family structures (decision-making roles, domestic responsibilities, and recognition of economic contributions).

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and contextual relevance, and necessary modifications were incorporated. Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews to accommodate varying literacy levels among respondents and to enhance response accuracy. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly maintained throughout the study. The collected data were coded and analysed using statistical techniques such as frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, and descriptive analysis to identify patterns and relationships among variables. The quantitative approach facilitated an objective assessment of the socioeconomic realities of tribal women vendors and provided an empirical basis for interpreting their experiences within an intersectional analytical framework.

3. Socio-Demographic Context of Women Vendors

Demographic variables such as age, marital status, and educational attainment in the context of intersecting identities are crucial elements that must be viewed as more than a mere-statistical markers. They are the primary determinants that dictate a woman's entry into and survival within the informal economy. Understanding these social characteristics gives a clear picture on how the "intersecting identities" discussed previously—specifically the overlap of tribal identity and gendered domestic expectations—manifest in the marketplace. The data presented in the following charts provides a baseline for understanding the structural constraints and individual motivations of these vendors, offering a window into how personal history and social standing intersect to shape their economic agency.

Figure 1: Demographic Profile Overview
Distribution of Tribal Communities among Women Vendors in Lamka (N=350)



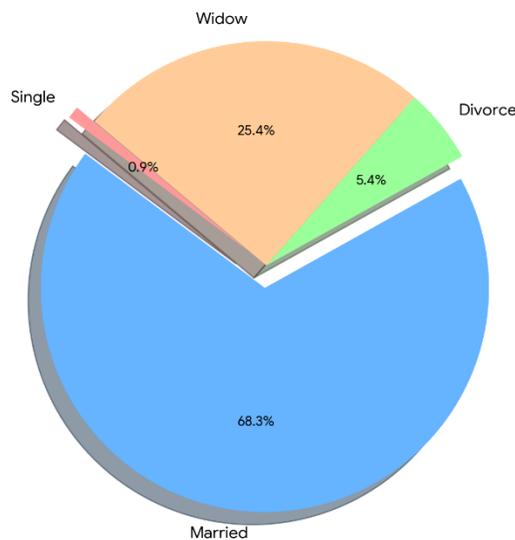
Source: Field Survey Data, Authors' Calculations

The above pie chart represents the distribution of respondents by tribe as recognised by the Indian Constitution (Article 342), among 350 surveyed local women vendors in Lamka town. The majority belong to the Hmar tribe (27%), followed by the Paite (20.3%), Thadou (16.9%), Vaiphei (13.4%), and Zou (9.4%) tribes. The remaining respondents are Gangte (6%), Simte (4.6%), Chin (1.1%), and Mizo (1.3%). These figures are specific to the surveyed samples and

do not represent the overall population of women vendors. However, this representation played a significant role, making the data a reliable indicator of the tribal vending population in the studied site.

The significance is that, it reveals about the social dynamics at play; indicating the potential of vending to transcend traditional inter-tribal boundaries. The market areas in Lamka town functions as a neutral, modern economic sphere where women from varied ethnic backgrounds come together, temporarily setting aside social divisions in pursuit of commerce which in turn enhance their position in their family and society as well. This integration underscores the role of the market not just as a site of economic activity, but also as a space where inter-tribal coexistence is fostered by shared livelihood goals.

Figure 2: Distribution of Women Vendors by Marital Status in the Study Area (N = 350)



Source: Field Survey Data, Authors' Calculations

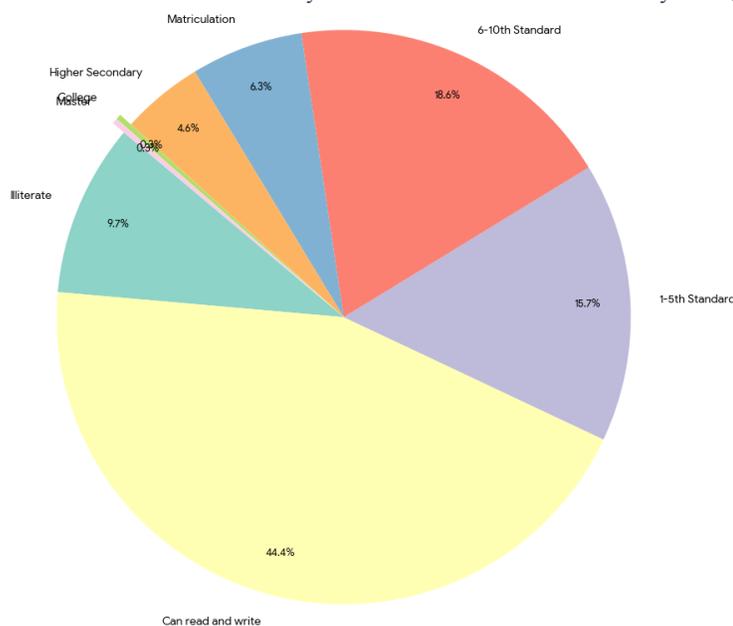
The data on marital status provide further insight into the social dynamics of tribal women's participation in vending. A significant majority, i.e. 68.3% of women vendors are married, while 25.4% are widowed and 5.4% are reportedly divorced/separated². Together, these groups account for an overwhelming i.e. 99.1% of respondents, indicating that vending is predominantly pursued by women who are, or have been, married. This trend reflects the profession's positionality in the context of tribal society where vending is viewed as a mere side-job for married women who are willing to earn money due to its accessibility and adaptability.

The prominent participation of widowed and divorced women in vending highlights its role as a crucial economic safety net even though the profession's implication could be totally different from the married women. For many, vending becomes essential after losing their primary source of male economic support, whether due to the death of a spouse, marital dissolution, or the inability of their husband to secure stable employment upon relocating to town, where agricultural opportunities are limited. In these scenarios, vending offers much-needed financial independence and resilience, allowing women to provide for themselves and their families. Still, these set of women had to prove themselves against the bias societal view on them as they lack the support of male figure thus making the profession their best shot as a livelihood support. Additionally, the presence of single women, though it constitutes only 0.9% of the sample, demonstrates that vending is perceived as a viable means of livelihood for tribal women.

² Spousal disputes are usually under the purview of specific tribal laws, therefore the researcher used divorce/ separated for a general indication.

The demographic and socio-economic profiles like education, age, marital history, and family structures are vital in defining the lived realities of the women vendors. They help explain the distinctiveness of the vending profession in Lamka town and identify unique patterns associated with vending.

Figure 3: Distribution of Women Vendors by Educational Attainment in the Study Area (N = 350)



Source: Field Survey Data, Authors' Calculations

The educational attainment of respondents is notably low; 9.7% are illiterate, and an additional 44.3% can only read and write but have not completed formal schooling. Only 15.7% have completed up to 1–5th standard, while 18.6% up to 6–10th standard, and a mere 6.3% have reached matriculation. Those who have completed higher secondary (4.6%), college (0.3%), or postgraduate studies (0.3%) are a small minority. This pattern strongly supports the argument that vending is characterized by low barriers to entry, making it the most accessible form of livelihood for women with limited human capital.

The structural barriers to alternative employment—such as lack of education, training, and marketable skills—serve to confine these women to informal-sector occupations like vending, where formal qualifications are not required and entry is open regardless of educational background. The surprising presence of respondents with college (0.3%) and postgraduate degree (0.3%) depicts the intersectional reality of tribal population in Manipur with respect to limited employment opportunities even for educated individuals.

Variables	Percentage
Unknown	0.3
21-30	4.6
31-40	18.8
41-50	37.4
51-60	25.7
61-70	12.3
71 and above	0.9

Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.

The age distribution underscores that vending is predominantly the domain of women at a marriageable age as none of the respondents are under 20. The largest segment is aged 41–50 years (37.4%), followed by those 51–60 (25.7%), 31–40 (18.8%), and 61–70 (12.3%). Only 4.6% are in their twenties; of whom all of them were found to be married, and

a negligible fraction (0.9%) are over 70. 0.3% of the respondent, do not know their real age as their parents do not keep record of their birth, depicting the ground reality of tribal women. The table indicate a decline in participation of younger women in the market. This could be explained in two ways- its lack of appeal and better livelihood options. While the latter is indicative of societal progress, the former could mean that for women engaged in the profession of vending, they will constantly be stigmatised and will have a lower social position as compared to other profession, further undermining the profession’s ability to become a profitable source of income.

Variables	Percentage
14 years	0.6
15-18 years	30.7
19-25	58.6
26-30	6.6
31-35	0.9
36 and above	1.7
Don’t remember	0.9
<i>Source : Authors’ calculations based on primary data.</i>	

The study shows that most respondents entered into marriage between the ages of 19 and 25 (58.6%), reflecting societal norms that encourage early adulthood unions. A significant portion (30.7%) married even earlier, at 15–18 years, while 0.6% married as young as 14, illustrating the persistence of early marriage practices within some segments of the community. Marriages after the age of 25 are relatively rare (6.6% at 26–30, 0.9% at 31–35, and 1.7% above 36), but their presence points to some diversity in marital experiences. The continued prevalence of early marriage among tribal women vendors likely intersects with their limited educational attainment, as early marriage can restrict opportunities for further schooling and skill development, perpetuating cycles of economic vulnerability (Fanai et al., 2024).

Variables	Percentage
1-2	31.6
3-4	41.4
5-6	18.1
7 & Above	5.7
No Children	3.2
<i>Source : Authors’ calculations based on primary data.</i>	

Family size among the respondents is moderate, with the majority having 3–4 children (41.4%), followed by 1–2 (31.6%), and 5–6 (18.1%). A small percentage have seven or more children (5.7%) or no children at all (3.2%). This distribution reflects the intersection of social norms around marriage and fertility, and the need for a livelihood that is flexible to accommodate childcare and family responsibilities. In spite of their financial contribution, vending provides these women with limited time for their children which can further implicate a huge contradiction towards their primary goal i.e. to support their children’s education so that they can become successful later in life. The finding highlights a strong correlation between early marriage, limited education, and economic vulnerability. This is consistent with the findings made by Purmini et al. (2025) & Yarsah et al. (2025) in a separate study where they discuss about how early marriage is “closely linked to intergenerational socioeconomic disadvantages, such as limited educational and employment opportunities”.

4. Economic Trends and Diversity

The occupational profiles and economic activities of the women vendors surveyed reveal significant transitions and diverse livelihood strategies. The following tables depicts the economic trends and diversity of women vendors.

Variables	Percentage
Housewife	54.9
Farmwork	28
Weaving	5.2
House helper	0.3
Teacher	0.3
Sweeper	0.3
Butcher	0.3
Tailor	0.3
Daily wager	7.1
Vending	1.8
Tea hotel	0.9
Thrifty clothes	0.6
<i>Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.</i>	

The above table depicts that majority of respondents previously identified as housewives (54.9%) or farmworkers (28%), with only 1.8% engaged in vending (selling different items than now) prior to their current role. This highlights a substantial shift from unpaid domestic labour and subsistence agriculture to income-generating activities within the market economy, indicating the structural changes brought about by development and increased political autonomy for tribal populations in Manipur (Ao, 2009; Kipgen, 2013). Such a transition has the potential to profoundly impact women's social and economic positioning. This shift however, does not translate to empowerment since certain section of the respondent; 0.3% (Teacher), 0.9% (Run tea hotel); 0.3% (Tailor) moved to vending after being in a respected profession and some after running a successful business.

This shift is mainly caused by gendered expectations which demands their time at home as well as financial contribution. The respondents share that they took up vending due to its flexibility and low capital. For tribal women, vending is emblematic of their resilience, adaptability, and strength as they rebuild their lives within a rapidly changing economy—where survival instincts drive them to transcend longstanding structural barriers. These patterns directly reflect the broader socioeconomic transformations discussed in the introduction, wherein women are gradually and, perhaps subconsciously, establishing a more active and public economic role (Chen, 2001; Kabeer, 2012).

Variables	Percentage
2-5 years	36.5
6-10 years	21.7
11-15 years	20.4
16-20 years	11.4
21 and above	10
<i>Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.</i>	

The data indicates that a significant proportion of women, 36.5%, have been engaged in vending for 2–5 years. This relatively high percentage can be attributed, in part, to the ongoing conflict in the state, which has led to a decline in the workforce and compelled women to step out of their homes to support household finances. Beyond this, the majority of respondents have been involved in vending for more than five years, with 21.7% vending for 6–10 years, 20.4% for 11–15 years, 11.4% for 16–20 years, and 10% for over 21 years. This indicates that vending is not only a short-term economic activity but also a sustained livelihood for many women. The study further reveals that women often enter vending after marriage, particularly when their children begin attending school, as a means to meet the educational and basic needs of their families. This trend highlights the intersection of familial responsibilities and economic necessity as a key motivator for women's participation in the informal economy. Overall, the data underscores that the primary

driving force behind women engaging in vending is the economic demand within their households. Many women adapt to external circumstances, such as socio-political conflicts or limited employment opportunities, by taking up vending as a practical and accessible source of income. Their sustained participation over the years reflects not only resilience and adaptability but also the critical role that women play in supporting family livelihoods through informal economic activities.

Variables	Percentage
Vegetables	60.1
Fruit	12.6
Thrifted Clothes	5.1
Meat	8
Home Cooked Meal	0.6
Sugarcane Juice	1.1
Items Form Moreh	0.6
Petrol	0.9
Toys & Accessories	0.9
Fish	5.2
Ice-Cream	0.3
Beetle Nuts	0.3
Milk	0.3
Tea & Snacks	4
Roasted Corn	0.3

Source : Authors’ calculations based on primary data.

The range of items sold is diverse, with the majority selling vegetables (60.1%), followed by fruit (12.6%), meat (8%), fish (5.2%), and other products such as home-cooked meals, sugarcane juice, and tea. Swetnam (1999) in his study of Women and Markets: A Problem in the Assessment of Sexual Inequality, observes that women tend to sell perishable goods and unprofitable products due to its low capital requirements. The current study observes similar pattern in older women however; the study also identifies a shift in the items sold among younger respondents who are below the age of 40. Younger women have diversified their products by selling items like Thrifted clothes (5.1%), Ice-creams (0.3%), Petrol (0.9%), goods from Moreh (0.6%), and Toys, shoes and accessories (0.9%) reflecting not only the adaptability of women vendors but also their strategic engagement with changing market demands. Additionally, women also find ways to diversify their products by selling cooked meat/meals, fresh fruits, sugarcane juice, roasted corn to beat the intense competition and in an attempt to meet customers evolving needs thereby creating opportunities for themselves without directly competing with established markets.

5. Contextualizing Economic Power

Intersectionality recognizes that overlapping social identities like gender, class, ethnicity, age and the structures of power associated with them are shaped by economic experiences and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989). For women vendors, their economic power is deeply influenced by these intersecting factors, which can either enable or constrain their earning potential (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). In order to fully understand the patterns reflected in the daily income of women vendors, it is essential to contextualize economic power within an intersectional framework. The table below provides the daily income of the responders.

Variables	Percentage
Below 500	25.1
500-1000	56
1001-2000	7.9

2001-3000	7
3001-4000	2
4001 and above	2
<i>Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.</i>	

The economic data reveals a strong concentration of earnings at the lower end of the spectrum: 56% of vendors report a daily income including their capital, ranging from INR 500 to INR 1000, with an additional 25.1% earning below INR 500. Contextualizing these figures (approximately 6–12 USD daily, based on 2024 exchange rates, RBI, 2024), this range typically is lower than the rate for unskilled, non-formal labour in the region. One prominent finding is that, when asked about their daily earnings, the women vendors answer by stating the amount without deducting their capital and expenditure. This has made the calculation of their daily income very difficult. Srivastava (2019), states that such market participation often yields only a subsistence income, not a significant surplus. This economic reality is vital to understanding the limitations of true economic empowerment which translate that, despite their active engagement in the market, the vendors' limited earnings are rapidly consumed by household needs and children's education that they barely had enough for themselves. Consequently, the low level of profit generation in addition to their poor level of financial literacy, restricts their ability to acquire savings, reinvest in the business, or gain significant individual financial autonomy, maintaining a cycle of economic vulnerability rather than achieving financial emancipation.

6. Family Structure and Household Contributions

Family structure plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic realities and opportunities available to individuals, particularly women vendors. The composition of households—including the number of dependents, marital status, and the presence of extended family members—directly influences both the distribution of resources and the division of labour within the home (Chant, 2014; Moser, 1993). Women's economic contributions are often mediated by their familial responsibilities, which intersect with other social identities and structural factors to impact their daily earnings and overall economic power (Kabeer, 2011).

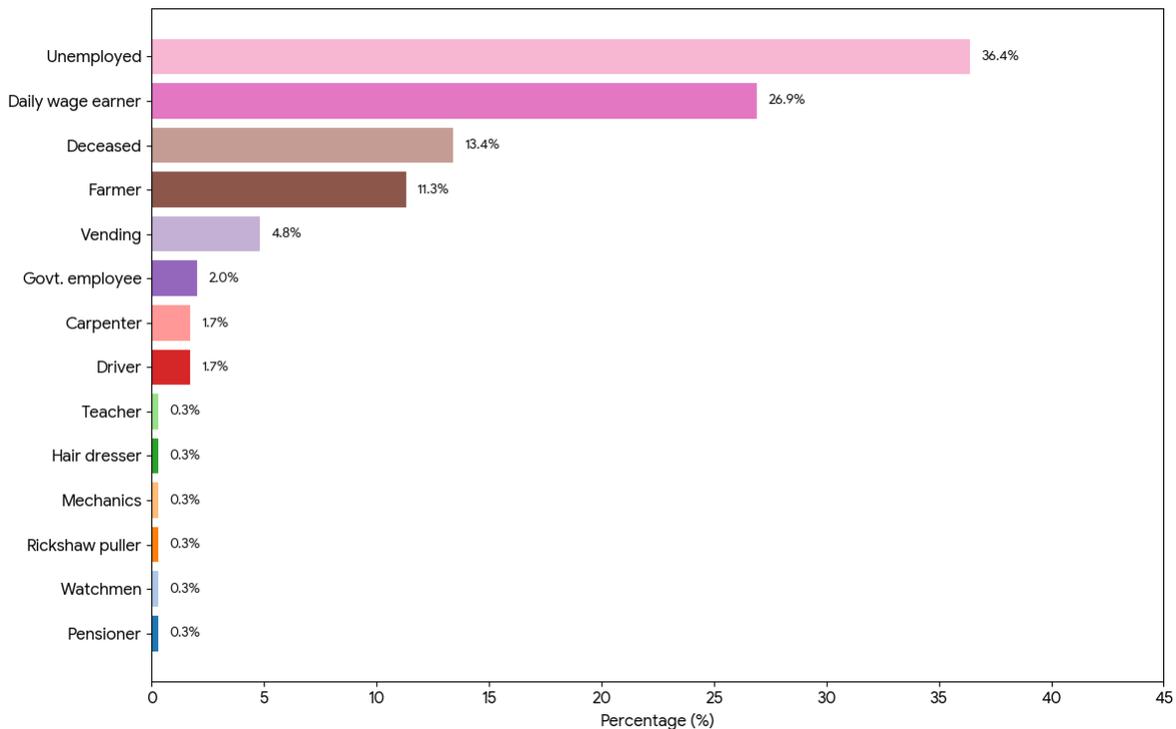
By examining family structure and household contributions through an intersectional lens, this analysis aims to illuminate the complex interplay between domestic arrangements and women's economic outcomes. The following section presents data on household composition, types of family and occupation of spouses and children, providing a foundation for understanding the broader context of their livelihoods.

Variables	Percentage
Joint family	42.2
Nuclear family	56.6
Solo living	0.9
Geographically separated family	0.3
<i>Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.</i>	

The analysis of family structure indicates that 56.6% of respondents live in nuclear families, reflecting a shift from the traditional joint family, long considered a “defining feature of Indian society” (Kadu & Jiri, 2023). This trend suggests an adaptation to modern living arrangements, often driven by pragmatic responses to rising economic challenges. Nonetheless, 42.2% of respondents reported residing in joint households. Among tribal communities, customary laws dictate that either the youngest or eldest son must remain with their parents, and this individual becomes the sole inheritor of the father's property. As a result, many respondents live with their in-laws. In certain cases, joint family arrangements are maintained to accommodate and support school-going nieces or nephews, whose parents reside in distant hometowns, where access to proper education is limited. The study also identifies 0.3% of respondents living in geographically separated households due to economic necessity, while 0.9% live alone, primarily following the death of a spouse or other family members. These findings highlight the interplay between tradition, economic pressures, and

educational considerations in shaping contemporary family structures, revealing a community navigating both customary obligations and modern practicalities.

Figure 4: Distribution of Women Vendors by Educational Attainment in the Study Area (N = 350)

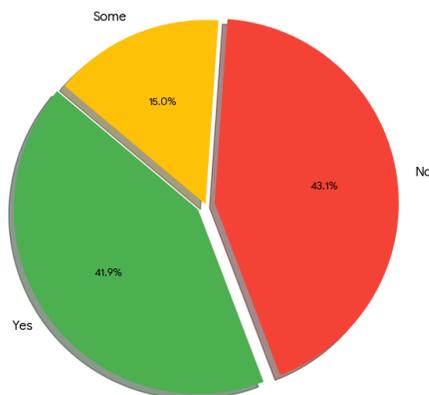


Source: Authors’ calculations based on primary data.

The data reveal that 63.3% of male spouses are either unemployed (36.4%) or engaged in unstable daily wage labour (26.9%), highlighting a significant deficit in the economic security traditionally associated with male breadwinners. This finding points to a growing vulnerability within households, particularly in the context of urban economies where steady employment is increasingly necessary to sustain livelihoods. In contrast, many women vendors have shifted from domestic roles or subsistence agriculture to pursue market-based livelihoods in urban settings, with 54.9% previously identifying as housewives. This transition reflects both agency and necessity, as women step into economic roles to compensate for the financial insufficiency of their male counterparts.

This pattern exposes a critical contradiction within prevailing gender norms and patriarchal structures. Despite the ideological dominance of men within familial and societal hierarchies, women are compelled—by economic necessity—to assume the role of primary earners. The limited adaptability or ‘coping skills’ exhibited by male spouses in response to the evolving urban economy underscores the rigidity of patriarchal expectations, which often discourage men from engaging in informal, low-prestige, or feminized forms of labour, even when such work could provide critical household income. Simultaneously, these same patriarchal structures place the burden of economic resilience on women, compelling them to participate in vending, a profession culturally coded as female-centric in the regional context.

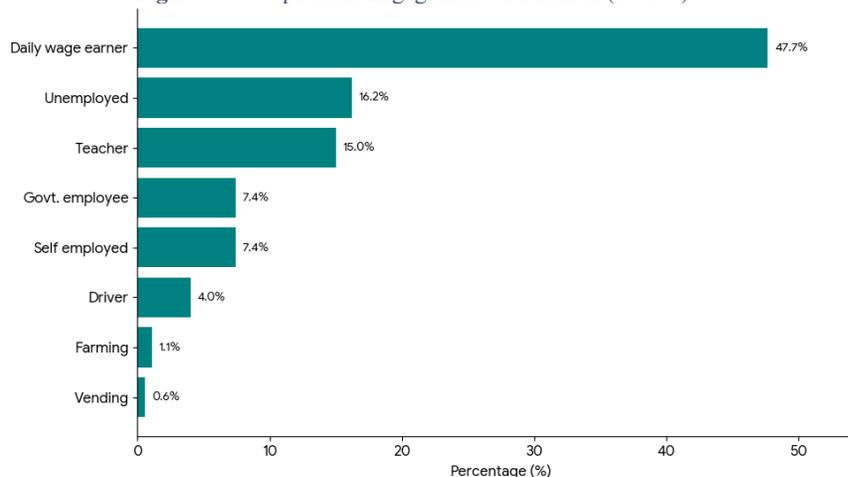
The phenomenon also highlights the broader social and economic transformations occurring in urban tribal communities. Women’s engagement in market activities is reshaping household dynamics, challenging conventional assumptions about gendered labour, and redefining what constitutes economic contribution. However, these shifts are not without tension, as they expose gaps in social support, the persistence of male unemployment, and the unequal distribution of labour both within households and in the marketplace. Ultimately, this scenario underscores the complex interplay between economic necessity, cultural expectations, and gendered labour, revealing how women navigate and negotiate patriarchal constraints to secure family livelihoods in the context of urban economic pressures.

Figure 5: Proportion of Children Attending School

Source: Authors' calculations based on primary data.

The data indicates a significant commitment to education among women vendors in Lamka town. With 41.9% of respondents having children still in school and 43.1% reportedly do not have school going children either due to absence of children or they have grown beyond the age of schooling. The remaining 15% of respondents who have both school-going and graduated children further demonstrate this ongoing prioritization of education among the vending community.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the decision to enrol children in school is made regardless of gender, highlighting a progressive shift in attitudes toward equal educational opportunities. This is particularly notable within the context of a tribal society, where traditional norms may have previously limited educational access based on gender. Overall, the data reflects a changing social landscape in Lamka town, with education and development emerging as central values within the community. The proactive stance of women vendors toward their children's education not only contributes to personal and family advancement but also indicate efforts towards intergenerational mobility.

Figure 6: Occupational Engagement of Children (N=174)

Source: Authors' calculations based on primary data.

Among 350 respondents, 174 of them reportedly have children who are past school age and are at an employable age. The table depicts the occupation of the said respondent's children. Only 7.4% of the children have stable job (Govt. employment), while 7.4% (self-employed), 15% (teacher) are engaged in a private sector with average pay. A good number (47.7%) of them are daily wage earner while 4% work as driver. 0.6% of the respondents also have their children engaged in the same sector as them and 1.1% are in agriculture allied jobs. The data also confirms that 16.2% of the

respondent children who are of employable age remain unemployed. The occupation of their children shows a diverse occupation ranging from Government jobs to private and surprisingly unemployed. The unemployment is mainly due to their children being an alcoholics or drug addicts which is alarming. This situation highlights the complex challenges faced by mothers who must balance their responsibilities as both caregivers and providers for their families. The respondents’ absence from home, due to work commitments, may negatively impact their children’s upbringing and moral development.

7. Domestic Responsibilities and Daily Negotiations

The transformation of women’s roles from primarily domestic labourer to the economic pillars of their households is reflected in the shifting dynamics of domestic responsibility (Mickelson et al., 2006). However, Rangaswamiah (2024) in her analysis of evolving women’s participation to work forces underscores that despite family being a primary social institution, “remains a critical barrier to women's mobility, particularly in patriarchal rural societies where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched”. The following data represents how domestic roles, coupled with women vendor’s daily negotiations reflect the theoretical underpinnings of their marginalisation.

Variables	Percentage
Herself	12.1
Children	42.4
Husband	23
Relatives	9
Daughter-in-law	12.3
Everyone	1.2

Source : Authors’ calculations based on primary data.

When asked about who is mainly responsible for domestic work at home, only 12.1% of women vendors reported that they remain primarily responsible for household chores. A significant portion of these responsibilities has shifted: 42.4% of domestic duties are now handled by children, and 23% by husbands. In households following a joint family system, domestic responsibilities are somewhat more distributed, with 9% managed by other relatives and 12.3% by the daughter-in-law. This redistribution of household labour suggests a pragmatic renegotiation of traditional gender roles in response to economic necessity, reflecting how women’s increased participation in the labour force has begun to reshape domestic arrangements.

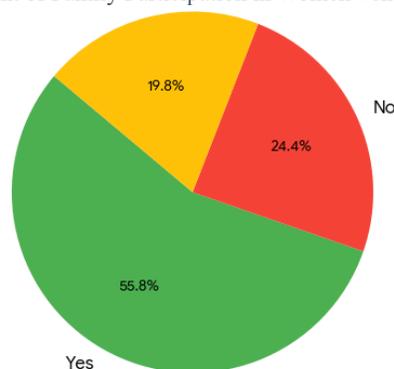
However, the concentration of duties on children and daughters-in-law raises concerns about the intergenerational effects of women’s economic engagement. While mothers are less involved in routine household chores, they emphasize that they still contribute to domestic work whenever possible, indicating that they are not entirely free from household responsibilities. This dual role—balancing paid work outside the home while still maintaining some domestic duties—highlights the ongoing tension between economic participation and traditional expectations of women’s labour at home.

Although male participation in domestic work has increased to 23%, this remains limited, particularly given that over a third of husbands are unemployed. Men’s contributions are largely confined to cooking and escorting children to school, whereas tasks such as cleaning, washing, and other household maintenance remain predominantly women’s responsibilities, usually undertaken in their limited free time. This persistent gender imbalance reinforces the societal expectation that children, rather than men, must compensate for their mothers’ absence from household work.

The current scenario underscores the incomplete nature of domestic labour restructuring. While economic necessity has prompted a partial redistribution of chores, the bulk of household work continues to fall on women, children, and daughters-in-law, rather than being shared equally among adult men. The resulting arrangement demonstrates both the adaptability and the limitations of changing gender norms: families are adjusting responsibilities out of necessity, yet deeply ingrained expectations about women’s domestic role continue to shape the division of labor. Ultimately, while

women's participation in the workforce has catalyzed some change, true egalitarian restructuring of domestic responsibilities remains constrained by persistent cultural norms and limited male engagement, leaving significant burdens on younger generations and female family members.

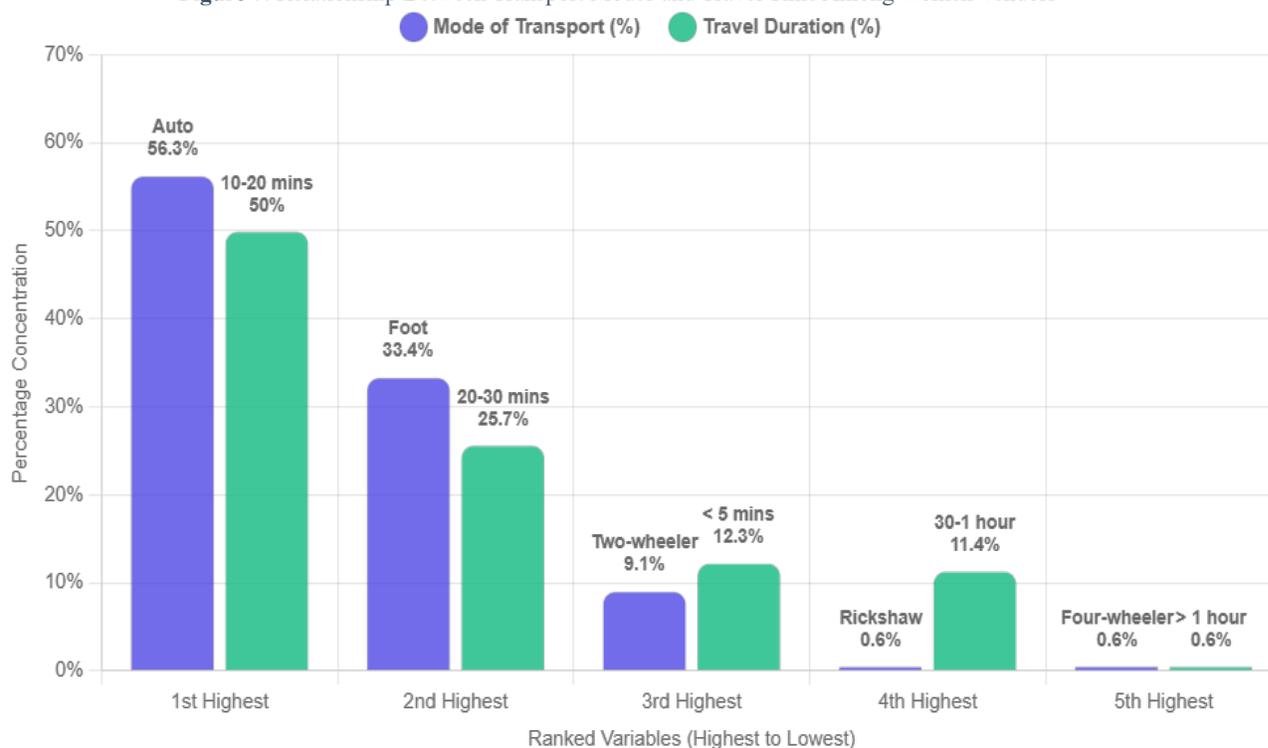
Figure 6: Extent of Family Participation in Women Vendors' Work



Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.

The table depicts the involvement of the family members in her business, to which 55.8% of the respondents claim that their family members actively provide help in certain ways, and 19.8% reveals that their family members sometimes do help out. This positively reflects that being an economic contributor in a family gives women certain level of agency and space for negotiation within their family members (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1990). The data however, shows that 24.4% of the respondents claim that their family members do not help out in her business despite knowing the precariousness of her condition. Such women tend to have lesser autonomy and satisfaction level which in turn affect her overall wellbeing (Agarwal, 1997; Bhattacharya & Banerjee, 2012).

Figure 7: Relationship Between Transport Modes and Travel Time Among Women Vendors

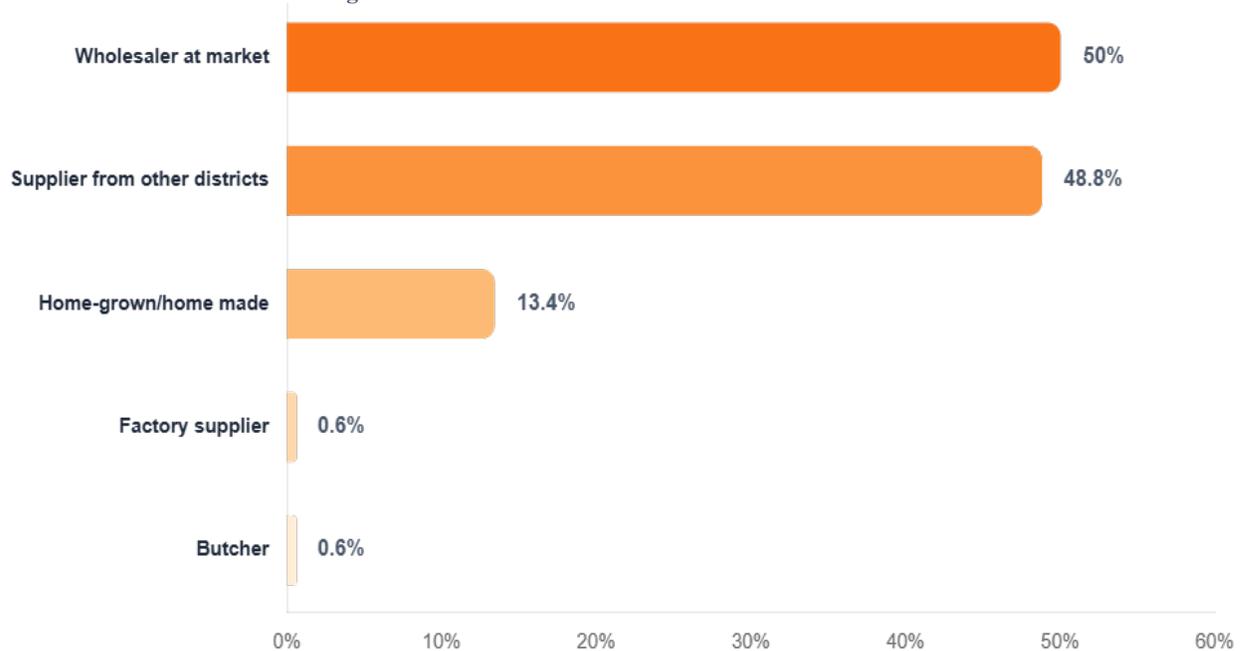


Source : Authors' calculations based on primary data.

The figure presented above show how mode of transport correlates to time taken during transportation/ The average means of transport used by the women vendors is Auto (56.3%) and 50% of the respondents took 20-30 minutes to arrive to their vending spot, suggesting the presence of motorized transport which efficiently reduce their travel time in just 30 minutes, with only 12% of the respondents spending more than 30 minutes to travel. A good number of respondents (33.4%) travel by foot with 12.3% respondents claim to have arrived within 5minutes, indicating that significant population lives in a close proximity to their workplace.

There is also record of respondents traveling in four-wheeler (0.6%), indicating their spousal contribution in the business. Similarly, only a few portions of the respondents are said to have travelled for more than one hour (0.6%). This finding implies the presence of a highly localized workforce with peculiar and diverse locations with nearly 90% of people traveling by Auto or Foot, and over 62% of people reaching work in under 20 minutes. The findings also note the presence of women vendors from far flung villages in the daily market of Lamka town. The presence and contribution of rural women vendors could be explained below using the women vendor’s way of obtaining resources.

Figure 8: Sources of Raw Materials for Women Vendors



Source : Authors’ calculations based on primary data.

From the above figure, majority of the women vendors get their materials for sale at the main market in Lamka, which is nearby ‘Nute Bazaar’, specially constructed for women vendors. Considering the diverse vending location of the studied population though they all fall under the town area; considerable number of women had to transport their goods using different mode of transportation. In light of this, 48.8% reportedly obtain their raw materials in bulk from suppliers who travel daily early in the morning to the town area to sell their products in bulk. Among the respondents 13.4% reportedly use their own homegrown products and these set of suppliers are usually women from different villages who opted to use their early mornings to conduct business. Such women tend to stay for as long as their products got sold out and sometimes stay until the afternoon to sell the leftovers at market rate. A very few numbers (0.6%), obtain their supplies form factory suppliers, normally accounting for Milk and Ice-cream sellers in table 1.8. Respondents who sell cooked meat and raw meat obtain their resources from the butchers (0.6%).

In a highly patriarchal tribal society, the relegation of domestic duties or its lack of by women who are engaged in vending indicates their positionality in their family. Data shows that there are good number of vendors who receive help form their family members, this gradual reconfiguration of their roles within household represents a positive shift, even

though not all vendors get to experience the same. The study suggests a need for an in-depth study on how the vending community feel about their current position in their family and whether it translate to broader empowerment within community spheres.

8. Conclusion

Women are more vulnerable than men in almost every human society, a condition that is further intensified in tribal contexts where structural inequalities intersect with gendered norms. The findings indicate that tribal women predominantly engage in vending due to its low entry barriers, minimal capital requirements, and flexible working conditions; however, neither daily income nor years of experience in vending demonstrate a significant relationship with business advancement or improvement in social status, suggesting that vending functions primarily as a survival strategy rather than a pathway to upward socioeconomic mobility. These outcomes reaffirm that deeply embedded traditional gender roles continue to constrain women's autonomy and shape their socioeconomic positions even in contemporary settings. While the marketplace extends beyond an economic sphere to serve as a space for social interaction, integration, and limited agency for marginalized women, the persistence of low incomes, early marriage, and restricted economic mobility highlights the ongoing vulnerabilities faced by tribal women vendors. Addressing these challenges necessitates a nuanced, intersectional approach that recognizes the interconnections between gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Overall, vending remains a vital means of economic survival and a potential source of empowerment for tribal women; however, its transformative potential depends on targeted policy interventions, enhanced educational opportunities, and greater societal recognition of women's economic contributions within both familial and community structures, warranting further research into sustainable pathways for long-term empowerment in marginalized contexts.

9. Reference

- Agarwal, B. (1997). "Bargaining" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household. *Feminist Economics*, 3(1), 1–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135457097338799>
- Ao, A. S. (2009). *Transition from tradition to modernity: A study of the tribes of Northeast India*. Mittal Publications. DOI:10.61841/V24I9/400368
- Bachaspatimayum, L. (2020). *Women street vendors in Manipur: A study of their socio-economic conditions and challenges* [Doctoral dissertation, Manipur University]. Shodhganga. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/312456>
- Baruah, S. (2020). *In the name of the nation: India and its Northeast*. Stanford University Press.
- Bhattacharya, R., & Banerjee, D. (2012). Women, wellbeing, and work: Issues and challenges. *Social Science International*, 28(1), 149–158.
- Bhowmik, S. K. (2005). Street vendors in Asia: A review. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(22/23), 2256–2264.
- Chant, S. (2014). Exploring the "feminisation of poverty" in relation to women's work and home-based enterprise in Latin America. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 6(3), 255–281. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-09-2013-0085>
- Chen, M. A. (2023). The informal economy in comparative perspective: Theory, policy and reality. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 66(2), 395–420.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Devi, L. B. (2017). Women vendors in Manipur: A sociological study. *Manipur University Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1), 72–85.
- Devi, N. D. R. N., & Sachdeva, N. P. M. (2022). Socio-economic status of women entrepreneurs of EMA Markets Manipur, India. *EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook*, 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra11197>

- Fanai, L., Jeyachandran, V., & Maliakkal, D. J. (2024). Early marriage and mental health in India. In *Advances in psychology, mental health, and behavioral studies (APMHBS) book series* (pp. 141–162). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-3394-5.ch006>
- Haokip, P. L., Maya, M., & Haokip, D. B. (2024). An ethnographic expose of Mithun-human interrelationship among the Kuki community of Northeast India. *Asian Ethnicity*, 25(3), 403–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2023.2275588>
- Hemam, N. S., & Reddy, B. M. (1998). Demographic implications of socioeconomic transition among the tribal populations of Manipur, India. *Human Biology*, 70(4), 597–619. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41465660>
- Kabeer, N. (2011). Between affiliation and autonomy: Navigating pathways of women's empowerment and gender justice in rural Bangladesh. *Development and Change*, 42(2), 499–528. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2011.01703.x>
- Kabeer, N. (2016). *Gender, labour markets and poverty: An overview*. Routledge.
- Kadu, M., & Jiri, T. (2023). Paradigm shift in family dynamics of tribal households in Arunachal Pradesh. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 28(9, Series 7), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2809070107> (Note: Add DOI if available; this is formatted based on typical journal style.)
- Kamei, B. (2015, August 16). Pre-colonial trade of Manipur. *E-Pao*. http://e-pao.net/epPrinter.asp?src=manipur.History_of_Manipur.Pre-colonial_trade_of_Manipur_Part_1_By_Budha_Kamei
- Kipgen, N. (2013). Politics of ethnic conflict in Manipur. *South Asia Research*, 33(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728013475540>
- Kipgen, N. (2021). *The Kuki-Chin communities: Identity, culture and socio-political dynamics in Northeast India*. Routledge.
- Lalpekhlu. (2022). Negotiating gender role: Participation of women in border-trade in Indo-Myanmar borderland. *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 8(1), 245–262.
- Maring, L. D., & Potsangbam, C. (2022). A review of the marketing performance of women vendors in Manipur. *IJFANS*, 11(10), Article 23207876. (Note: Adjust if volume/issue/page details differ; this appears to be an online journal.)
- McDuie-Ra, D. (2013). Being a tribal man from the North-East: Migration, morality, and masculinity. *South Asian History and Culture*, 4(2), 250–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2013.768867>
- Mickelson, K. D., Claffey, S. T., & Williams, S. L. (2006). The moderating role of gender and gender role attitudes on the link between spousal support and marital quality. *Sex Roles*, 55(1–2), 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9061-8>
- Moser, C. O. N. (1993). *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203411940>
- Purmini, P., Nopiah, R., Hutapia, H., Ramah, N. M., Purmini, P., Nopiah, R., Hutapia, H., & Ramah, N. M. (2025). Economic consequences on early marriage: Correlation with women's employment and education mobility. *Journal of Economics and Business Letters*, 5(5), 96–112. <https://doi.org/10.55942/jebll.v5i5.969> (Note: Duplicate authors listed as provided; verify if error.)
- Rangaswamiah, A. (2024). From domestic roles to economic independence: Analysing women's evolving participation in the labour market. *South India Journal of Social Sciences*, 22(3), 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.62656/sijss.v22i3.697>
- Sen, A. (1990). Gender and cooperative conflicts. In I. Tinker (Ed.), *Persistent inequalities: Women and world development* (pp. 123–149). Oxford University Press. (Note: Added assumed page range; adjust if known.)
- Shimray, S., & Devi, A. R. (2021). Transition from subsistence to market: A study of tribal women vendors in Manipur. *International Journal of Modern Agriculture*, 10(2), 1545–1553.
- Singh, M. A. (Ed.). (2019). *Northeast India and India's Act East Policy: Identifying the priorities* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429285790>
- Singha, J. (2022). Economic participation of Meitei women in Manipur. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*. <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2212479.pdf>
- Srivastava, S. (2019). Women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship in the hill districts of Manipur. *Journal of North East India Studies*, 9(1), 45–62.
- Valte, T. (2020). *An exploratory study on tribal women street vendors in Lamka Town Churachandpur* [Unpublished manuscript or similar; format as report/thesis if from repository]. (Note: Limited details; if online, add URL.)

WIEGO. (2022). *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture*. International Labour Organization.
Yarsah, W. N., Tanzil, D., Ulum, M. B., & Syaifullah, A. (2025). The influence of socioeconomic factors on early marriage. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Global Masa Kini*, 16(2), 146–156.