DOI: /10.21088/ijra.2454.9118.11225.6

Indian Journal of Research in Anthropology
Volume 11 Number 2, July – December 2025

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Occupational Shift Among the Longpi Tangkhul Tribe of Manipur

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Rangya Gachui. Occupational Shift Among the Longpi Tangkhul Tribe of Manipur. Ind J Res Anthropol 2025; 11(2): 137-145.

ABSTRACT

Tribal communities traditionally rely on occupations rooted in their natural environment and cultural heritage. These occupations have been passed down through generations. Traditional livelihoods provide economic sustenance and play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable resource management. Due to a lack of sufficient scope for livelihood, they are forced to adopt modern occupations that are new to them. In light of the above statements, the present study deals with the occupational changes among the Longpi. This paper throws light on the traditional occupations of the Longpi, followed by a shift in their traditional occupation. This paper is purely qualitative, employing both primary and secondary sources of data collection. An active participation observation was used for in-depth face-to-face interaction with the informants.

KEYWORDS

• Pottery • Cultural heritage • Tradition • Occupational shift • Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Land and forests continue to be the epicenter of production, which is owned and managed at several levels by the tribal people (Singh, 1994). Traditionally, the tribes in India have been living in hilly areas and forests. They pursued an economy that was closer to nature and used indigenous technology. They depended on the forest and other natural resources available in their habitat. The use of simple technology characterized the primitive tribal economy. It was primarily forest-based and subsistence type, where the family was considered the unit of production and consumption. The profit motive did not drive the tribal people;

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➢ **Received:** 20-05-2025 ➢ **Accepted:** 10-07-2025

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maintaining sustenance was their sole objective (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1985). Therefore, the tribal economy is broadly categorized as a production-consumption economy (Hasnain, 2011). These people are not self-sufficient; instead, interdependence is observed among them, which leads them to practice the barter and exchange of essential commodities in the periodic market (Vidyarthi and Rai, ibid). The economic relationship among the tribes is often considered one of interdependence, while the spirit of competition is almost absent in tribal economic life.

Monetisation is one of the significant changes that are taking place in the tribal economies of India. It is the process of switching from a traditional barter exchange system to a money-based transaction. They have entered the cash-based market economy, where the profit motive drives the individual. Besides, the market has diversified their occupational choices, which brings changes in the occupational pattern of the tribal community. For their physical survival, the tribal people participate in different economic activities (Majumdar and Madan, 2018). Earlier, the tribal people accepted traditional activities as their principal occupation, while their subsidiary occupations varied in range. Currently, they are shifting from their traditional occupation to other occupational trades. Karade (2009) describes occupation as one of the best indicators of class because people tend to agree on the relative prestige they attach to similar jobs. The mobility of the tribal people mainly depends, apart from many other factors, on the availability of work/jobs and relative economic advantages. The consequences of occupational mobility can be either positive or negative and are not restricted by the direction of movement. Tribal society is among the last to adopt the change. They are not orthodox but surrounded by a world of their own, which they build with a strong will. The surrounding atmosphere is changing fast, with the need of the hour. In this era of globalization, the tribals are easy victims and prey in the hands of modernity and modernization. They are forced to come to the changing world and adopt a new occupation (Kar, 2012).

Oraon (2012) reported that livelihoods based on small and marginal land farmers are increasingly unstable. Because their lands have not supported their families, they are forced to look for other related services to distribute their means of subsistence. Many people following their traditional occupations had changed to new professions. They accepted new jobs or employment elsewhere as they got opportunities for further economic prospects and an assured livelihood. Traditional occupations associated with status and ranks can no longer sustain orthodox cohesion of the caste-occupational patterns or the social equilibrium (Bhowmick, 1969). Occupation is transmitted from fathers to their children, particularly sons, considering the occupational prestige (Horan, 1974). It is typically inter-generational occupational change. However, in areas where the essence of modernization has crept in, significant occupational changes have taken place among social groups. Mamgain (2004) has highlighted the aspects of livelihood diversification associated with occupational mobility in hill economies. They believe several waves of migration have occurred in the past few decades from hilly regions, encompassing a change of occupation from farm to non-farm livelihoods. Occupational mobility is highest among the Scheduled castes, especially the Chamars, Bhangis, and Dhanaks, who have been moving out from their village in search of new employment opportunities at Behror in Rajasthan (Mendelson, 1993).

Even in the village, which is on its way to being transformed, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have moved on to new occupations instead of being involved in the traditional ones. As a result of the change in occupational status among the social groups, the obnoxious caste-ridden hierarchy and occupational structure are also being eradicated (Jodhka, 2022). Interestingly, most Scheduled tribe families have multiple sources of livelihood (Nongbri, 1999), and their economic activities have been diversified into different occupations (Corbridge, 1988). Moreover, education has driven them, particularly the younger generation, for wage employment, specifically for organized employment (Marchang, 2016), which indicates upward occupational mobility in terms of stable salaried income and some social gains in terms of prestige and status of being a salaried person, labour mobility from rural areas, as well as semi-urban areas, comprising unskilled and semi-skilled labour to urban areas where non-agricultural economic opportunities, associated with some status or prestige are available is evident

among the Scheduled tribe population. Similar is the situation where Foote and Hatt (1953) concluded that the occupational movement was towards higher prestige jobs.

Giraldo (1993) observed that a higher educational level in the younger generations would also reinforce migration because of a lack of opportunities at home; these potential migrants would continue to flow to unskilled and semi-skilled markets abroad. Chattopadhyay and Khan (2004) stated that occupational mobility dealt with the movements of individuals over job categories during their employment periods. Since the time interval between successive job changes was a random variable. Shniper (2005) found that when economic conditions were favourable, individuals might have more opportunities to change jobs to earn more money, do the kind of work they prefer, earn more money, or reduce their commuting time. Conversely, fewer opportunities with such desirable characteristics might be available when economic conditions are less favorable.

Education is a major determining factor for a change in employment structure. Individuals treat education as a business proposition, with all those investing in education wishing for returns (Shingi and Visaria, 1988). Moreover, the educated seek a specific and sensible job (Callaway and Bettenhausen, 1973; Gumber, 2000). Giuseppe and Vella (2008) provided evidence that high unemployment somewhat offsets the role of individual worker considerations in the choice of changing careers. Ray and Majumder (2010) indicated strong intergenerational immobility in both educational achievement and occupational distribution among the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled tribes (STs), as well as occupational mobility was lower than educational mobility, indicating that educational progress was not being transformed into occupational improvement.

The nature of work in modern society is entirely different from that of traditional society, as it is marked by a high level of specialization. In primitive societies, craft workers created products from start to finish. However, in the modern industrial society, the task of making one product is divided into different steps, and each individual concentrates on their part of the work, which is termed specialization. In the present world, people perform different types of activities that involve different degrees of manual labour and skill. This further added to the process of diversification of occupations (Caplow, 1970). In the modern production system, production does not take place at home, which used to be taken collectively by all the household members in earlier societies. With the advances in industrial technology, it is taking place with the help of high-powered machines, which have increased the production rate. According to labour laws, workers work in defined specific hours in the modern economic system, and relations between employers, employees, and fellow workers have tremendously changed. The social relationships developed during production are largely impersonal, professional, and goal-oriented. Payment to workers is given in cash transactions. Modern economy involves a shift from a traditional labour-intensive economy based on differentiation, specialized labour, increased productivity, and a mechanized production system (Singh, 2016).

With the above background, the present study tries to understand the occupational shift of the Longpi (Nungbi) Tangkhul of Manipur.

Objective of the Study

1. To understand the traditional occupation.
2. To trace out the reason associated with a shift in occupation.

METHODOLOGY

The present study data were collected through observation, and the interview method was used among the potters to know about the collection of raw materials, the making of pots, time spent, trading, and also to know the consequences they faced. The data from primary sources is supplemented with secondary sources like the literature of earlier researchers.

Area of Study

Longpi is a general reference to two villages (Longpi Kajui and Longpi Khullen). Longpi village is situated in the Chingai sub-division of Ukhrul district, after passing Langdang, Shiroi, Lunghar, and then Longpi. The village is reached from Ukhrul via a motorable road around 39 kilometers north of Ukhrul, connected by National Highway 150 (Imphal-Kohima via Ukhrul and Jessami Highway.

Occupation

The Longpi depend mainly on agriculture and pottery for their livelihood. Land is the most important resource of the people, and almost the entire population is engaged as cultivators. They practice both terrace and jhum cultivation. Rice, the staple food, is the main product of their field. Other important cash crops are potatoes, tomatoes, ginger, peas, chilly, pumpkin, cabbage, beans, potato, tomato, and garlic. These crops are grown in jhum fields. Everything produced is for consumption without a regular market and currency. Whatever was marketable was done during the festival, during which goods were exchanged and bartered. Apart from cultivation, people make earthen pots known as *Hamrai*, which all the Tangkhul villages use for domestic purposes and performing socio-religious rites.

Cooperative or collective endeavor while engaging in economic activities, i.e., agricultural operation, is one of the fundamental characteristics that bind the society. The year-round agricultural operation is not an individual affair but the collective responsibility of the clan, locality, and village. It is called *yar kathui* (yar meaning age group and kathui meaning going). It is an age group going and working together; it is a rotational agricultural operation. Each of the male and female members of the *yar* exchanged their labour till they got their turn.

Unemployment and income inequality may be important economic features of the Longpi potters. Further, the lack of industrial infrastructure and low rate of capital formation have made their economy stagnant. For some families, pottery craft is a supplementary source of income for potter's families. Some of them make pots during the off period of agriculture, and some are full-time potters. In this village, they are either full-time potter, engaged in pot making and agriculture, or only in agricultural work.

Pot making

The Longpi potters use different types of rocks for pot making. The potters do not have scientific knowledge about the quality of the rock that they use for pottery making. Therefore, their perception of rock quality may be limited to the experience they have gathered traditionally. For the selection of rock, they apply their traditional methods, which they perceived or inherited from their forefathers, and they do so behaviourally. They still use the traditional pottery-making method with locally made implements/ tools. Unlike most pottery, Longpi does not resort to the potter's wheel and instead uses the coiled method of making pots. All shaping is done with the help of hands and molds. Longpi pottery is unique in style and technique. Unlike in other parts of India, today, men and women are equally involved in production (Gachui, 2018).

Pot making consumes lots of time; the pots are made of two ingredients: the *Leshon* (Weathered rock-reddish) and *Leshong lung* (back-serpentine rock). The weathered rock is obtained from a particular spot called *SLA (Shonkashok* Ngalei), located 4 kilometers east of the village. For the collection of this weathered rock, every year, a new spot, a narrow path, is made first by a group of men, and they start digging the outer part since the upper part of the weathered rock is not suitable for pottery-making. They spend lots of labour digging 10-100 feet to get good quality. The collection is done only after the seed sowing festival during the dry season, as in the rainy season, it is risky. It is carried home after collecting the raw material, as it cannot be used directly; drying is needed. When it is completely dried, it is pounded into a powder.

The black serpentine rock is obtained from the Kaphangran and Sarasen sites, which are located respectively 2 and 3 Kilometers away to the north of Longpi village. It is collected throughout the year. It is collected by children. The black serpentine rocks are of three types: hard, medium, and soft. The harder the rock, the longer the durability of the pots. The hard rock needs more energy and time to pound into powder. After hard manual work collecting the raw material, drying it, and pounding it into powder, the powder is sieved to separate the weathered rock particles, which is repeated until all the raw material is ready. After much labour, the raw material is made into powder. The exact process is done in the case of black serpentine rock, which is made into powder. The next step is to mix the two raw materials, make a paste, and shape the pot. No machine is used from the start to the end of pot making; they are purely handmade tools. The subsequent process is drying and smoothing the outer surface of a pot with the help of a bamboo scraper, and the inside layer of the pot is smoothened with the help of beads.

The shaping of the pot is not enough. The potter spent much labour after the shaping of the pot. Decoration is one of the essential tasks to make the pot attractive. Several designs have been identified in the Longpi pottery. Most of them are executed as embellishments consisting of limited patterns. In some varieties of the pot, lugs of floral structures are luted. This decoration is done manually with a fine bamboo sliver/scraper, circular tube, or cord-wrapped woven wooden paddle. They do not use any paint, stain brush for decoration/painting purposes. For smoothening and glazing, the body of the pot is rubbed repeatedly with the bamboo scraper (*hamlar*). After the decoration, the next step is drying and firing, drying the pots in a cool, shaded place, allowing the air to circulate on each side of the vessel, allowing it to dry slowly and preventing the pot from cracking. The process will take 5 to 6 days, and the pot should be completely dry to prevent cracking. It is not directly exposed to the sun, as direct exposure to the sun may result in cracks in the pot. Traditionally, the raw pots are placed in the shade by covering them with rags or plastic. The process takes longer to dry, but this strengthens the pots. Then, the potters preheat their pots by setting them over the fire hearth to heat them before firing. During the rainy season, the raw pots are dried by placing them on a hanging shelf over the fireplace in the house. Once the vessel is dried completely, it is ready to be fired.

Firing is done in an open space; the first step is the ground preparation by heating the surface with the tree branches, dried leaves, and dried branches, which are burnt for 20 – 30 minutes at the maximum heat. After that, the pots are placed horizontally, one after the other, in 4 to 5 lines according to the number of pots. After this arrangement, the cut tree branches are placed on the top of the pot, and on the next layer, the dried branches and leaves are kept burning for 90 minutes. The hotter the fire it will, the less breakage. The completely baked pot turns into an ash colour. While the pots are still hot, they are rubbed with dried pine leaves, which produce smoke and make the pot black. After which, when it is still hot, they are rubbed with green leaves locally called *machini* (Quercus species), giving the pot luster (Gachui, ibid).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pottery plays an important economic role, especially at the grassroots level. It offers a source of livelihood to many families and contributes significantly to local trade and tourism. In daily life, pottery finds extensive use, from cooking utensils and storage jars to decorative items and architectural elements; pottery has been an integral part of Longpi households since time immemorial. In this village, only a few are engaged in work other than pot making and agriculture. Many stay away from home due to their work. Longpi Kajui has thirteen clans, out of which eleven are potters, and the remaining two, Kajui Wungshi and Akhokwunga, are not potters. There is no such restriction against a particular clan in making pots. At present, there are only two Akhokwunga families. Their father was a potter, and they can be potters if they like. According to an informant, Mr. Envy Mashangva, Kajui Wungshi is mainly occupied with blacksmiths, who are traditionally potters; they can even be potters if they wish. Today, in Longpi Kajui, there are women potters. In this village, six women are found to be potters, and they are not full-time potters. Longpi Khullen has no full-time potter and no women potter.

Table 1: Clan-wise distribution of full-time and part-time potters of Longpi Kajui

Clan	Full-time potters		Part-time potters						Total
			With Agriculture		With Carpentry		With Basketry		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Sasa	05		12	02	01		01		**21**
Machanao			02						**02**
Luiram	04		04	01					**09**
Sareng	01		02						**03**
Sharon	04		12	01	01		01		**19**

table cont....

Layam	02		04	02					**08**
Ngasainao	01		01						**02**
Ronra			05				01		**06**
Tallanao	01		03						**04**
Shangrei			03				01		**04**
Mashangva	02		02						**04**
Total	**20**		**50**	**06**	**02**		**04**		**82**

Table 2: Clan-wise distribution of full–time and part-time potters of Longpi Khullen

Clan	**Full-time potters**		**Part-time potters**						**Total**
			With Agriculture		**With Carpentry**		**With Basketry**		
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	
Kamkara			07		01		01		**09**
Shimrah			02						**02**
Awungshi			03						**03**
Tangva			05				01		**06**
Total			**17**		**01**		**02**		**20**

The potters of Longpi are leaving the craft due to a combination of economic, social, and cultural factors. The rise of industrial-scale pottery production, competition from cheaper imported goods, and changing lifestyles have all contributed to the decline of traditional pottery making. The younger generation may be attracted to other, more lucrative professions, leading to a lack of successors for traditional skills. The coming of Western education and Christianity dropped the rites and ritual performances, as pots are integral to every rite and ritual performance. The people no longer use earthen pots, as they no longer believe in the associated rites, and instead, people pray to God on all occasions. Many festivals are no longer celebrated. This also led to the people giving less importance to earthen pots. Old customs and traditions were rapidly forsaken or modified, and old beliefs which for ages had been dropped, partly because they met with contempt and ridicule from missionaries and also because the young men soon learned that they were not worthy of credence. After Christianization, many festivals were abandoned, and traditional religious rites and rituals were no longer performed; only some festivals with specific changes that did not contradict the Christian faith were observed. In the days before the advent of Christianity, women were not allowed to practice pottery-making.

Transport and communication methods were developed, and now they can freely go anywhere. The contact with advanced people also led to the introduction of modern mill-made goods into the region, replacing handmade goods, such as earthen pots and wooden plates today; these Indigenous products have almost been abandoned due to the availability of mill-made products in the market at a cheaper rate than they could produce Imported goods, particularly from China, have flooded the market with inexpensive alternatives, further impacting the demand for locally made pottery. Lack of market and sales channels makes it difficult to compete with larger businesses. Modern lifestyles and urbanization have shifted away from traditional practices, including pottery making. This has posed significant challenges to the traditional pottery industry. With the growing preference for machine-made, standardized products, handmade pottery faces tough competition. The pottery industry also faced competition from industrial products. These factory-made items, often cheaper and more readily available, threaten the survival of traditional pottery crafts.

The craft of pottery has significantly declined from earlier generations to the present generation. The reason, as it appears, is primarily economic. Most potters in the surveyed area believe that their income from

pottery is insufficient or enough to support their families. These create occupational hazards for the potters, and circumstances compel them to look for other occupations. The pottery craft faces stiff competition from cheap, durable, and well–decorated metallic pots. Under these circumstances, the potters will be forced to give up their traditional age-old handicrafts. Education has also brought lots of change to the younger generation. There are three High schools, namely, Holy Spirit School. Raphei High School and Worrin High School. After completing the High School Leaving Certificate Examination, they go to Ukhrul, Imphal, and other places for higher education. The younger generations are now engaged in government service, private teaching, NGOs, as doctors, vendors, and businesses. They left the village for jobs and settled in Ukhrul, Imphal, and different parts of India.

After Machihan Sasa received the national award for indigenous pottery work, people began to pay more attention to pottery making. Women also make pots. Today, we find many women potters. People made different styles and designs other than the traditional ones to bring up their indigenous culture. They made cookers, flower vases, frames for decoration, water filters, ashtrays, and cups. With the availability of many pots, there is much export to other states. Now, a group of young people is making a pot in Delhi and selling it in the capital. This reveals that the younger generation is bringing up different styles and designs other than traditional designs, displaying their creativity and interest in their indigenous pot-making. They even started selling online.

Although pottery making is a primary occupation, at present, their patterns of occupation have undergone appreciable change. These changes may be accountable for the initiation of occupational mobility among them. The study visualized that a significant part of the population has accepted other means of occupation besides pottery making for their livelihood. The majority of the population has accepted other means of occupation besides pottery making for their livelihood. The majority are interested in achieving either white or blue-collar jobs. They are growing weary of the pottery-making profession because of its economic non-viability. This brings flexibility to traditional occupations. The potters themselves are not happy with their industry. Instead, many of them considered this a prestigious occupation. Their only drawback is that it is not economically viable, and most of the potters are poverty-stricken. The younger generation is not very interested in the craft. They stated that the main reason is the high labor costs, vis-à-vis low income.

To earn their livelihood, men take up any occupational mobility among them. The improvement in educational standards makes them interested in white-collar jobs in particular. The educated section refuses to do any low-grade work. Pottery making falls in this category. They feel that pottery production entails filthiness and hard work. Furthermore, decreasing demand for ceramic vessels associated with low income makes them disinterested in the craft.

The craft of pottery has significantly declined from the forefather's generation to the present generation. The reason, as it appears, is primarily economic. Most potters in the surveyed area believe that their income from pottery is insufficient or enough to support their families. These create occupational hazards for the potters, and the circumstances compel them to seek other occupations. The pottery craft faces stiff competition from the cheap, durable, well-decorated metallic pots. Under these circumstances, the potters will be forced to relinquish their traditional age-old handicrafts if appropriate amenities and resources are not provided. Even during transportation for selling, taking it to the district headquarters or the capital of the state, Imphal, many pots were broken, and the expenditure seems to be more than the amount they get from selling the pots. Suppose the economic condition of Longpi continues at this rate, very soon. In that case, they will be forced to give up their age-old traditional craft, and the country will lose a significant handicraft industry, which is exceptionally linked with the cultural and technological heritage of the country. Therefore, urgent and appropriate measures must be taken to upgrade the quality of the products and the production techniques.

CONCLUSION

The technique of making earthen vessels remains unchanged till today. The people have not sought to improve their technology and neither the governmental agency has been successful to have a change in pottery making

in this village. Potters should be motivated to acquaint themselves with new designs and decorations. Necessary training should be imparted to them for the manufacturing of commercially viable vessels at a low cost. Benefits should be percolated to the potters. Proper market facilities should be given to sell the finished product, as the potters are unable to sell the pots they have made. Handicraft workshops should be conducted to preserve their indigenous culture. Government and other agencies should motivate the potters to go for training to capture the market in a wide range and earn a good amount of money. Necessary financial assistance may be given for developing cottage industry, and thereby, the age-old craft can perhaps be saved against extinction.

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