The Indian Geographical Journal
Volume 100 (1) June - 2025, pp 55-68
ISSN 0019-4824

SPATIAL PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC MARGINALITY AND THEFT IN MANIPUR CENTRAL VALLEY, NORTH EAST INDIA

Khwairakpam Shreeraj Singh*

Department of Geography, Bir Tikendrajit University,

Imphal West, Manipur-795 003

*Corresponding Author Email: shreerajkh@gmail.com

Abstract

The spatial configuration of economic marginality and theft across the Manipur Central Valley reveals a positive correlation (r=0.341), between non-worker populations and theft cases, which underscores how informal employment and economic instability reinforce social vulnerability, where limited access to formal economic opportunities may lead to increased engagement in theft as a coping mechanism within marginalized groups. This research paper aims to analyze the demographic and economic marginality profile and evaluate the spatio-temporal patterns of deviant behaviours (Theft) within the Manipur Central Valley. The theft cases and its patterns in Manipur Central Valley were assessed using FIRs and victim's letters drawn from the law enforcement agency (NCRB), and police station of Manipur. The demographic and economic parameters were extracted from the Census of India, 2011. The study investigated the intercorrelation between theft (X1), population density (X2), Schedule Caste population (X3), Schedule Tribe population (X4), and economic marginality (X5). The study adopts both (mixed) qualitative and quantitative approach to analyze the spatial distribution of theft and its relationship with demographic and economic factors, as well as the impact of crime on victims. The quantitative analyzes include estimate of decadal population growth rate, z-score of economic marginalities and Pearson's correlations. Qualitatively, narrative analysis (FIR reports and victim letter of 2021 incidence) had utilised to gain insights into the social and psychological repercussions of theft. The study reveals that regional disparities are evident in socio-economic indicators, with Imphal East exhibiting the highest incidence of theft (z-score = 1.496), and Imphal West showing a significant concentration of non-working population (z-score = 0.989). The sum of correlations also reveals patterns in how each variable interacts with the others. Economic marginality shows the highest combined influence on the other variables, whereas Scheduled Caste (X2) has the weakest overall association. Theft cases reported (FIR qualitative analysis) across Manipur Central Valley offer rich cultural insights into the changing moral economy, spatial insecurity, and community perceptions of safety and trust. The spatial disparities in theft and economic marginality across the districts underscore the need for targeted crime prevention strategies and economic development programs.

Keywords: Theft, Marginality, Economic Disparities, Demography, Spatial Analysis.

1. Introduction

A fundamental aspect of social geography is the study of social patterns and problems. Crime, a deviant human behaviour, is a universal issue that plagues all societies. It has been regarded a severe vital concern for every society, whether rural or urban, peasant or industrial. Crime is a deviation from the social ideal that can be remedied by group effort (Furfey, 1961). The legal definition of crime is that, it is a behaviour or activity in violation of the legal code (Mishra, 2022). Theft emerges when there is a disconnection between individual aspirations and societal expectations—a state termed as "anomie." Anomie occurs when rapid social change, economic instability, or breakdowns in social institutions weaken the moral fabric of society, leaving individuals feeling disconnected, alienated, and lacking clear guidance on acceptable behaviour (Durkheim, Émile, 1951). The rapid demographic change resulting social conflicts. Population, social composition, and economic marginality are deeply interlinked elements of society. Rapid population growth often intensifies resource scarcity, leading to unequal access to basic amenities like education, healthcare, and housing. Social composition, shaped by factors such as caste and ethnicity, determines how resources and opportunities are distributed. Marginalized groups often face systemic exclusion, which pushes them into economic marginality—characterized by poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to productive resources. Marx emphasized that population growth in capitalist societies often exacerbates class struggles and intensifies economic inequalities (Saito, 2020). The urban planning and resource allocation practices often reflect broader capitalist priorities, resulting in uneven development and spatial injustice (David, 2001). Economic marginality further entrenches social inequalities, creating a cycle of deprivation, urbanization and uneven population distribution exacerbate these disparities and hence turn to deviant for the fulfilment of their goal survival.

Manipur (including Central Valley) has experienced a notable social, cultural and demographic transformation over the past decades; the population of the Manipur has increased significantly, rising from 577,635 in 1951 to 2,855,794 in 2011 (Directorate of Economics & Statistics, 2017; Singh, 2014; Alamá-Sabater et al., 2021). This demographic trend reflects a complex interplay of factors, including natural population growth and migration patterns (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Singh, 2014). The population growth rate of Manipur had been higher than India as a whole since 1901. The state has experienced steady population growth up to 1951, the post-1951 period witnessed a continuous rise in population, which subsequently intensified the problems associated with overpopulation (Bhattacharyya, 2006). This has placed significant strain on resources, including infrastructure, healthcare, and education, which often lag behind the growing demand (Abeysinghe, 1986). The rapid urbanization in the fertile Central Valley, coupled with inadequate infrastructure and social services, has contributed to socio-economic inequalities and heightened social tensions (Singh, 2014; Durkheim, 1951). One of the manifestations of these tensions is the rise in deviant behaviours such as theft. The essential ingredients of theft include a dishonest intention to take the property, the property

must be movable, it must be taken without the owner's consent, and there must be some movement of the property to complete the act (Mishra, 2022).

Economic marginality is a critical factor contributing to social unrest in the Manipur (including central valley); the predominantly agrarian economy, with limited industrial development, restricts formal employment opportunities, resulting in high rates of informal employment and non-worker populations (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Schöneberg et al., 2022). Economic marginalization intensifies social tensions and conflicts, as marginalized communities struggle to access the resources necessary for a stable and prosperous life, leading to higher incidences of deviance in a society and potentially lead to thefts (Callo-Concha et al., 2014; Gatzweiler & Baumüller, 2014; Durkheim, Émile, 1951). In this context, the primary objectives of the study are to: 1) analyze the demographic and economic marginality profile of the Manipur Central Valley, 2) evaluate the spatio-temporal patterns of deviant behaviours, with a specific focus on theft within the region, and investigate the intercorrelation between theft cases (X1) and key socio-economic variables, such as population density (X2), Scheduled Caste population (X3), Scheduled Tribe population (X4), and economic marginality (X5).

2. Study Region

Nestled between latitudes 24°20' N to 25°0' N and longitudes 93°0' E to 94°0' E, the Manipur Central Valley spans approximately 2,067 sq. km and comprises five core districts—Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Kakching, and Bishnupur. Surrounded by the eastern and western hill ranges, this valley serves as the ecological and cultural heartland of Manipur (Singh, 2014). The valley presents a unique lowland settlement pattern distinct from the highland communities inhabiting the hills of Northeast India. The valley's alluvial soil, indicative of a relatively young geological formation, has historically encouraged sedentary agriculture over shifting cultivation. This environmental stability facilitated the evolution of settled village life and a deeply agrarian ethos. Some geologist interpretations suggest that the valley may have once been a vast water body, larger even than Loktak Lake, whose gradual silting by surrounding hill streams gave rise to fertile plains and the foundation for human settlement. The presence of the saucer-shaped depression towards the southeast—housing the sacred Loktak Lake—adds spiritual and ecological depth to the valleys cultural (Arunkumar, 2011). The Imphal River, originating from Senapati and flowing through Kangpokpi into the valley, is more than a geographic feature; it is a living artery of socio-economic life. Its network of tributaries supports rice cultivation, fishery practices, and ritual-based water usage, anchoring land tenure customs and influencing clustered settlements. Seasonal cycles—summer, monsoon, retreating monsoon, and winter—regulate agricultural rhythms and cultural festivals. March and October are considered climatically pleasant, while December and January are colder months when agricultural labour patterns and even communal interactions slow down.

Land holding and agrarian identity are shaped by the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960, which codifies ownership, personal cultivation rights, and land

ceilings. This legal framework not only governs land access but also intersects with caste, clan, and kinship-based inheritance patterns, influencing socio-political hierarchies within valley communities (Census of India, 2011). Under this law, a single person can hold up to 2.5 acres of land, and a family up to 7.5 acres, which implicitly structures social inequality, resource allocation, and rural power dynamics. Urbanisation in the valley has accelerated post-2001 census. Of the Fifty-one (51) urban centres recorded in 2011, Forty-four (44) lie within the Central Valley, reaffirming its role as a population magnet due to infrastructure concentration and economic opportunity (Bhattacharyya, 2006). This shift reflects a transition in spatial identity—from agrarian society to hybrid urban-rural cultures that negotiate modernity with tradition.

3. Database and Methodology

This research adopts a spatial analysis approach, leveraging GIS and spatial statistical techniques using ArcGIS software, to analyse the dynamics of socio- economic and behaviour in Manipur's Central Valley Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Kakching, and Bishnupur. Crime data (theft) were collected from the law enforcement agencies (NCRB, 2001, 2011; Manipur Police department, 2017) and geo-coded to identify the spatial clustering of thefts. The demography data have collected from the Census of India (2011). The study adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the spatial distribution of theft and its relationship with demographic and economic factors. The qualitative aspect involves narrative analysis of FIR reports and victim letter of 2021 incidence to gain insights into the social and psychological repercussions of theft. On the other hand, the quantitative approach incorporates techniques such as the calculation of decadal variation of population growth, z-score of economic marginalities, theft and intercorrelation analysis of variable from the Pearson's correlation to evaluate population trends and their correlation with the theft patterns. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how demographic changes and economic conditions influence crime distribution and its effects on individuals in the Manipur Central Valley.

The calculation of decadal variation of population growth is expressed as:

$$\mathrm{Dg} = \frac{P1 - P2}{P2} \times 100$$

Dg= Decadal Growth rate of the population, P1=Population at End of Decade, P2= population at the start of the Decade. The z-score of marginal workers (non-worker) is expressed as:

$$z = \frac{x - M}{S.D}$$

Where: z =z-score of the Marginal worker, x= incidence of Marginal worker, M= Mean, S. D=Standard deviation. Further, z-score had utilised for the theft analysis. The intercorrelation-matrix analysis was attempted using a Pearson Correlation (r). The formula is given as:

$$r = \frac{\sum XY - \frac{\sum X \sum Y}{N}}{\sqrt{\sum X^2 - \frac{(\sum X)^2}{N}} \sqrt{\sum Y^2 - \frac{(\sum Y)^2}{N}}}$$

The qualitative approach aims to delve deeper into the impact of deviant crimes on individuals within the Manipur Central Valley. The selected FIRs (2021), representing diverse districts, include cases from Imphal East (Porompat Police Station), such as FIR 224 (9) 2021 PRT-PS Under section 379/34 IPC and FIR (226) 2021 PRT-PS Under section 379/34 IPC. As well as Imphal West (Imphal Police Station), which includes FIR 192 (11)2021 IPC Under section 379 and FIR 212 (12) 2021 IPS Under section 379 IPC. Similarly, from Thoubal district (Police station) FIR 29 (3) 2021 TBL-PS Under section 380 IPC and FIR 39 (5)2021 TBL-PS Under section 379 IPC. Kakching (Police Station), FIR (61)2021 KCG-PS Under section 380/34 IPC and FIR 79(08)2021 KCG-PS Under section 380/34 IPC. Lastly, Bishnupur (Police Station), FIR 29(4)2021 BPR-PS Under section 380 IPC and FIR 33 (6) 2021 BPR-PS Under section 380 IPC. These cases were strategically chosen to represent various deviant crimes across the region, enabling a comprehensive analysis of their social and psychological effects on victims.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic and Economic Marginality Profile

The population density of the Manipur Central Valley is given in Table 1. The total area of the Valley is 2,238 square kilometres, with a combined population of 1,633,672, resulting in an overall population density of 730 persons per square kilometre. Imphal West has population density of 928.3 persons per square kilometre, which is the highest density among the districts. The social composition of the Manipur Central Valley is diverse, as seen in the distribution of different social groups across its districts. In Imphal East, the population comprises 15,839 (Scheduled Castes) and 27,657 (Scheduled Tribes). Imphal West shows a similar composition, with 16,530 (Schedule Caste) and 24,161 (Schedule Tribe). Bishnupur has a population that includes 22,113 (Schedule Caste) and 3,287 (Schedule Tribe). Thoubal including Kakching is notable for having the highest Schedule Caste population among the districts, with 40,593 (Schedule Caste) and 1,808 (Schedule Tribe). Imphal East and Imphal West have relatively balanced distributions between Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe.

The consistent population increase may lead to issues of social integration, especially if infrastructure and social institutions (e.g., schools, healthcare) do not keep pace with the growing population (Durkheim, 1951). The population of the Manipur Central Valley has shown a consistent increase from 1951 to 2021 (Table 2). In 1951, the population was 387,523 (Table 2). By 1961, this had increased to 532,793, resulting in a decadal variation of 145,270 and a growth rate of 37.49%. In the following decades, the growth rates maintained as 35.99% in 1971, 28.23% in 1981, and 27.65% in 1991. From

1991 to 2001, the population grew to 1,411,766, with a decadal growth rate of 19.04%. The 2011 census recorded a population of 1,633,672 with a growth rate of 15.72%. This data highlights a steady increase in population over seven decades with a declining growth rate. The declining growth rates may be attributed to lower birth rates and migration patterns.

Table 1: Population distribution, density and Social Composition in Manipur Central valley, 2011

District	Area in sq. km	Total Population	Population Density	Schedule Caste	Schedule Tribe
Imphal East	670	456113	680.8	15839	27657
Imphal West	558	517992	928.3	16530	24161
Bishnupur	496	237399	478.6	22113	3287
Thoubal (Kakching)	514	422168	821.3	40593	1808
Valley Total	2238	1633672	730	95075	56913

Source: Census of India, 2011; Note Pd= Population Density (persons per square kilometre)

Table 2: Growth trend of Population in Manipur Central Valley (1951-2021)

Year	Population	Decadal Variation	Growth Rate in %
1951	387523	-	-
1961	532793	145270	37.49
1971	724537	191744	35.99
1981	929077	204540	28.23
1991	1185992	256915	27.65
2001	1411766	225774	19.04
2011	1633672	221906	15.72
2021	1877416	243744	14.92

Source: Calculated from the Census of India; Note: 2021 is based on the projected population

According to the Census of India, 2011, a non-worker is an individual who is not currently engaged in paid employment (Directorate of Census Operation, India, 2011). This group encompasses both those who are not participating in the labour force (such as students, homemakers, retirees, and those unable to work) and those who are classified as unemployed, meaning they are actively seeking employment and are available to work but do not currently have a job. The non-worker data for the Manipur Central Valley in 2011 reveals significant regional variations (Table 3). Imphal West has the highest concentration of non-workers, accounting for 33% of the total non-working population, with 304,605 individuals. This is reflecting in its z-score of 0.989, indicating it is almost one standard

deviation above the mean (230,045.25). Bishnupur has the lowest percentage of non-workers at 14%, with 127,462 individuals, and a z-score of (-1.360), highlighting it is significantly below the mean. The total non-working population across these regions is 920,181. The statistics highlight the uneven distribution of informal employment across the Manipur Central Valley, with Imphal West and Imphal East exhibiting higher concentrations of non-workers compared to Bishnupur, which has notably lower levels.

Table 3: Non-worker population and z –score in Manipur Central Valley, 2011

Region	Non-worker	Percentage	Z-Score
Imphal East	261265	28	0.414
Imphal West	304605	33	0.989
Bishnupur	127462	14	-1.360
Thoubal (Kakching)	226849	25	-0.042
Total	920181	100	-
Mean	230045.25	-	-
Standard Deviation	75426.27	-	-

Source: Compile from the Census of India, 2011; Note: The data include informal employment such as illegal activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking, gold smuggler etc.

4.2 Spatial distribution of theft

In 2001, the theft data for the Manipur Central Valley reveals significant variation across different districts (Table 4 and Figure 1). Imphal West reported 39 theft incidents, making up 17 % of the total thefts, whereas Thoubal (Kakching) stands out with 162 theft incidents, a substantial 71% of the total thefts. Theft data of 2011 revealed significant differences in theft rates among its districts. Thoubal recorded 65 incidents, representing 10% of the total thefts, wheras Imphal West experienced 76 theft incidents, making up 11% of the total. Imphal East, on the other hand, had a strikingly high number of thefts at 496 incidents, which constituted 73% of the total thefts. The total number of thefts in the Central Valley was 677 with considerable variation in theft rates.

The relationship between theft cases and population growth over two decades reveals distinct patterns. During this period, a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.8$) was observed between theft cases and population growth, suggesting that higher population growth was associated with increased theft rates. Despite a dramatic rise in overall theft numbers in 2011, the correlation between theft cases and population growth during this period weakened significantly ($r = 0.15$). This analysis indicates that while theft occurrences were strongly linked to population growth in the earlier decade, other factors likely played a more dominant role in influencing theft rates in 2011.

Table 4: Distribution of theft in Manipur Central Valley (2001-2011)

District	2001			2011		
	No. of Theft	Percentage	Z-Score	No. of Theft	Percentage	Z-Score
Bishnupur	9	4	-0.675	40	6	-0.592
Imphal East	18	8	-0.548	65	10	-0.477
Imphal West	39	17	-0.253	76	11	-0.427
Thoubal (Kakching)	162	71	1.476	496	73	1.496
Total Valley	228	100	-	677	100	-
Mean	57	-	-	169.25	-	-
Standard Deviation	71.12	-	-	218.35	-	-

Source: Prepared from NCRB Report, Superintendent of Police, Manipur Central Valley

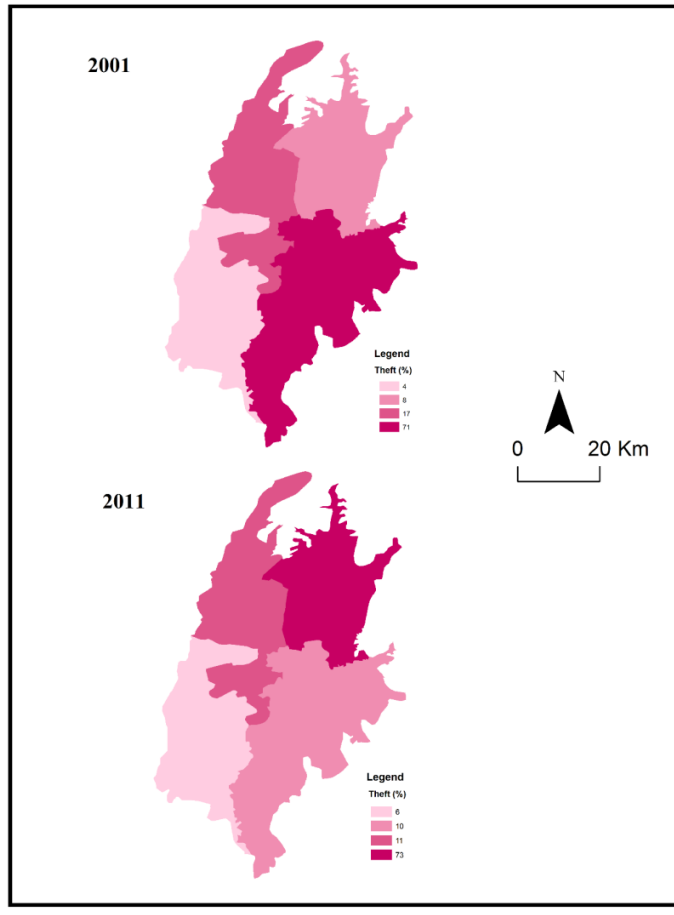

Figure 1: Spatial distribution of theft in Manipur Central Valley. ***Source: NCRB 2001 and 2011***

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix provides valuable insights into the factors influencing theft (X1) in relation to population density (X1), Scheduled Caste population (X2), Scheduled Tribe population (X3), and economic marginality (X4, non-workers). Theft and population density show an insignificant correlation (r= -0.091), suggesting that theft rates are not directly affected by the populated in an area. However, theft has a moderately negative correlation (r= -0.456) with Scheduled Caste populations, indicating that areas with larger Scheduled Caste communities experience fewer thefts.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Deviant, demography, social composition and Economic

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5
X1	1.000	-0.091	-0.456	0.694	0.341
X2	-0.091	1.000	0.135	0.370	0.881
X3	-0.456	0.135	1.000	-0.784	-0.257
X4	0.694	0.370	-0.784	1.000	0.756
X5	0.341	0.881	-0.257	0.756	1.000
Sum	1.487	2.295	-0.362	2.035	2.721

Source: Prepared from NCRB, 2011 report and Census of India, 2011; Note: X1=Theft, X2=population density, X3=Schedule Caste population, X4=Schedule Tribe population, X5=Economic marginality (non-worker population)

In contrast, theft shows a moderately strong positive correlation (r= 0.694) with Scheduled Tribe populations, suggesting that these areas are more prone to theft. Furthermore, a mild positive correlation (r=0.341) exists between theft and economic marginality, meaning that regions with more non-working individuals are slightly more susceptible to theft. Population density also correlates positively with economic marginality (r=0.881) and Scheduled Tribe populations (r=0.370), emphasizing its role in shaping socio-economic contexts in the study region. The sum of correlations also reveals patterns in how each variable interacts with the others. Economic marginality (X4, with r sum=2.721) shows the highest combined influence on the other factors, whereas Scheduled Caste (X2) has the weakest overall association (r sum=-0.362), indicating its more limited interaction within this context. Areas with higher Scheduled Tribe populations and greater economic challenges tend to experience higher theft rates. Interestingly, while population density has little direct correlation with theft, its strong association with economic marginality suggests it indirectly contributes to theft-related factors.

4.4 Social-Geographical Inquiry into Property Crime

The qualitative study overviews the experiences of theft victims across the districts of Manipur. Drawing from reported FIRs, the analysis provides a narrative-rich lens into the socio-economic and psychological dimensions of these incidents. The vibrant yet densely

populated Imphal East has seen a wave of two-wheeler thefts, reflecting a growing concern over property safety. These incidents underscore the collective anxiety surrounding the erosion of safety. The heart of Imphal (Imphal West) is no stranger to theft, with offenders displaying increasing levels of sophistication and boldness. The vehicle thefts in this district not only stripped the owner of an expensive vehicle but also exposed systemic gaps in community safety mechanisms. The suburban district of Thoubal offers a glimpse into crimes that exploit the relative quiet of non-urban spaces. The intrusion into private property marks an unsettling shift in criminal strategies targeting residential spaces. The district of Kakching presents a unique facet of theft incidents, moving beyond personal vehicles to institutional and workplace property. In Bishnupur, thefts often involve breaches of domestic and institutional sanctuaries, leaving victims grappling with both financial and emotional losses.

5. Discussion

The present study observes a spatio-temporal shift in theft concentration across the Manipur Central Valley between 2001 and 2011. In 2001, Thoubal (including Kakching) registered the highest theft incidents. However, by 2011, the hotspot had shifted to Imphal East. This transition marks a dynamic and evolving geography of deviance, suggesting theft is not spatially static but reshaped by underlying socio-economic and environmental changes. This finding aligns with Sivamurthi's (1982) spatial analysis of Madras City, where he noted increasing theft trends in peripheral urban zones such as Adyar, Anna Nagar, Sembium, and Agaram. He attributed this to land-use changes and new environmental opportunities. Conversely, theft rates declined in inner congested areas like Tondiarpet and Seven Wells, where limited economic potential and constrained spaces possibly deterred offenders. A similar logic unfolds in the Manipur context, where theft incidents are more concentrated in peripheral or semi-urban zones like Thoubal and Imphal East, rather than in commercial cores or established central business districts. This reinforces the idea that spatial expansion, infrastructural development, and ecological restructuring—rather than centrality—shape theft patterns. However, a point of divergence arises when examining the relationship between population growth and theft. In 2001, theft incidents in Manipur showed a high positive correlation ($r = 0.8$) with population growth from 1991 to 2001, indicating that urban expansion and demographic pressure might have driven initial crime surges. Yet, by 2011, this correlation dropped significantly to $r = 0.15$, suggesting that population growth alone was no longer a reliable predictor of theft distribution. This decoupling highlights the need to consider other intervening variables such as urban planning, surveillance infrastructure, and socio-spatial reorganization—elements that Sivamurthi tended to subsume under broader land-use transitions rather than demographic dynamics.

The correlation analysis between theft and socio-economic variables in the Manipur Central Valley offers deep insights into the structural roots of deviant behaviour. A strong positive correlation between theft and Scheduled Tribe populations ($r= 0.694$) suggests that areas with higher tribe populations are more prone to theft. This aligns with studies

(Sengupta & Mukherjee, 2018), which argue that socio-economic marginalisation often predisposes communities to crime. In Manipur, not just the Scheduled Tribes but also economically deprived subgroups within the Meitei population, such as the Pangals, reflect this vulnerability. The mild positive correlation between theft and economic marginality (r= 0.341) further reinforces that poverty and lack of employment can push individuals toward property crime. This supports findings from Anser et al.(2020) on income inequality's role in increasing urban theft. However, the negative correlation with Scheduled Caste populations (r = –0.456) indicates lower theft rates in Scheduled Caste dominated areas. This contrasts with studies like Metz & Burdina (2018), suggesting regional variation. In Manipur, Scheduled Caste groups may live in more cohesive, regulated communities, where social integration discourages deviant behaviour—echoing Durkheim's theory on collective solidarity (Durkheim, 1951). Population density, although weakly correlated with theft (r= –0.091), shows a strong association with economic marginality (r=0.881), implying that densely populated areas tend to face deeper socio-economic stress. From a structuralist view, these patterns reflect the contradictions of capitalism. Drawing from Bonger (1916) and Marx (1887), Theft in Manipur—especially the stealing of essential items like two-wheelers—can be seen as a survival strategy amid exploitation. In suburban and rural regions, the erosion of traditional bonds creates vulnerability to crime. Private security in urban centres benefits the elite, while deprived groups face the brunt of criminalization. The theft trends reveal systemic alienation and inequality, not merely moral failure.

Theft cases reported across Manipur's Central Valley offer rich cultural insights into the changing moral economy, spatial insecurity, and community perceptions of safety and trust. Anthropologists have long viewed crime not merely as legal violations, but as embedded acts within cultural, spatial, and relational systems. In urban districts like Imphal East and Imphal West, the stolen two-wheelers (Cases 1–4) are not just objects of economic value. Within the Meitei middle-class household economy, scooters symbolize mobility, dignity, and modernity—especially for the younger working population and families accessing health and education services. According to Mary Douglas (1992), material objects are symbols of order, and their loss signifies the disruption of everyday structure. Jenil's case, where the theft occurred at a healthcare facility, highlights how public institutions fail to safeguard not just life but livelihood — deepening the sense of vulnerability in moral spaces. In cultural terms, the theft is a moral rupture—an act that violates both legal codes and local social norms. In the context of Wangkhei Angaom Leikai (Case-2), the act of stealing under stringent personal precautions points to a fracture in the assumed ethical bond within Leikai-based neighbourhoods, traditionally known for social cohesion and watchfulness. Drawing from the concept of *communitas* (Turner, 1969), such thefts disturb the informal moral orders that bind these kin-based and clan-sensitive communities. Cases 3 and 4 show how urban space is increasingly weaponized by criminal actors. Gyanendro's experience, where a scooter was stolen near an office gate. In Thoubal, Cases 5 and 6 highlight a deeply relational consequence of theft. For Nunghitombi and Shantakumar, thefts involve not just stolen items but disrupted livelihoods and psychological trauma. Anthropologist Veena Das (1995) reminds us that, violence is not

limited to the act itself but continues in the lives of people long after the event is over (Das, 1995). When identity documents and shop-side vehicles are stolen, the victim's social agency and bureaucratic legibility are also erased — pushing them deeper into marginality. In Kakching, the theft of educational and institutional items (Cases 7 and 8) reflects not individual victimhood but a collective vulnerability. From an institutional social view, such acts are attacks on state authority and community development. The stolen desktop from the IED office and the cash-mobile theft from GR Infra base camp serve as *cultural evidence of criminal adaptation* to emerging state-society gaps — especially in liminal development zones. Bishnupur's cases (9–10) reveal cultural trauma stemming from the violation of sacred household boundaries. The act of creating a hole in a wall (Case-10) is culturally significant — not merely an entry point but a ritual desecration of the domestic sacred space. The loss of medical equipment from a health centre (Case-9) shows how crime undermines communal resilience, turning health into a casualty of insecurity.

The cultural tapestry of thefts in Manipur's Central Valley exposes a gradual erosion of communal bonds, the emergence of new criminal ecologies, and the symbolic collapse of safety in public and private domains. Theft here is not merely an economic act but a cultural performance of power and helplessness—where the urban poor, the suburban self-employed, and rural households all confront different shades of victimhood. This qualitative inquiry underscores the need for spatial sacredness, symbolic property value, and social trauma rather than just policing statistics. As crime seeps into the moral architecture of Meitei and multi-ethnic Manipuri society, only a culturally grounded response can restore trust and resilience.

6. Conclusion

The consistent growth in the population of the Manipur Central Valley from 1951 to 2021, accompanied by a declining growth rate, signifies persistent demographic pressure. While the growth rate has diminished, the overall increase continues to strain resources, exacerbating issues related to infrastructure, healthcare, and education. The uneven population density across districts highlights regional disparities, with Imphal West and Imphal East facing higher densities and consequently more significant competition for resources. This strain is potentially link to higher rates of deviant behaviour, such as theft, particularly in high-density areas like Imphal East, which shows a disproportionately high incidence of theft. Across districts, recurring patterns of theft show a preference for two-wheelers and electronic devices as targets, with incidents often occurring during early mornings or nighttime. These patterns reflect not only the opportunistic behaviour of thieves but also highlight the vulnerabilities within personal and institutional spaces. Victim's narratives emphasize the breach of trust and safety, underscoring the broader social and psychological impact of theft. However, amidst the material losses, the community demonstrates resilience and an enduring hope for justice in an evolving social fabric. The correlation between non-worker populations and theft (r=0.341) suggests that economic marginality—evidenced by high non-worker rates and informal employment—may drive individuals toward criminal activities as a coping mechanism. The disparities in theft rates

and economic marginality across the districts underscore the need for targeted crime prevention strategies and economic development programs. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that integrates social, economic, and infrastructural improvements to manage the impacts of population growth and reduce the propensity for deviant behaviour.

Acknowledgment

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for their generous support towards this research endeavour. The assistance provided by ICSSR has been instrumental in the successful completion of this project under File No. ICSSR/RFD/2023-24/344.

References

1. Abeysinghe, T. (1986). Rising needs and falling family size: Implications from Marx on demographic transition. *Review of Social Economy*, *44*(3), 281–293.
2. Alamá-Sabater, L., Budí, V., Roig-Tierno, N., & García-Álvarez-Coque, J. M. (2021). Drivers of depopulation and spatial interdependence in a regional context. *Cities*, *114*, 103217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103217
3. Anser, M. K., Yousaf, Z., Nassani, A. A., Alotaibi, S. M., Kabbani, A., & Zaman, K. (2020). Dynamic linkages between poverty, inequality, crime, and social expenditures in a panel of 16 countries: Two-step GMM estimates. *Journal of Economic Structures*, *9*(1), 43. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40008-020-00220-6
4. Arunkumar, M.C. (2011). Society and Culture of Manipur. In Yumnam, Amar (Ed.), *North East India: Selected Regional Issues* (pp. 80–92). New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
5. Bhattacharyya, N.N. (2006). *Manipur Land, people and Economy*. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications.
6. Bonger, Willem Adriaan. (1916). *Criminality and economic conditions*. Boston: Little Brown and company.
7. Callo-Concha, D., Sommer, J. H., Kleemann, J., Gatzweiler, F. W., & Denich, M. (2014). Marginality from a Socio-ecological Perspective. In J. von Braun & F. W. Gatzweiler (Eds.), *Marginality* (pp. 57–65). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7061-4_4
8. Census of India. (2011). *District Census handbook, Imphal West, Series-15, Village and Town Directory Part XII-A*. Directorate of Census Operation, Manipur.
9. Das, V. (1995). *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. David, Harvey. (2001). *Space of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. Edinburg: Edinburg University press.
11. Directorate of Economics & Statistics. (2017). *Statistical Handbook of Manipur* [Statistical Report]. Government of Manipur.
12. Douglas, M. (1992). *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge.

13. Durkheim, Émile. (1951). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (George Simpson, Ed.; John A. Spaulding & George Simpson, Trans.). New York: Free Press.
14. Gatzweiler, F. W., & Baumüller, H. (2014). Marginality—A Framework for Analyzing Causal Complexities of Poverty. In J. von Braun & F. W. Gatzweiler (Eds.), *Marginality* (pp. 27–40). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7061-4_2
15. Metz, N., & Burdina, M. (2018). Neighbourhood income inequality and property crime. *Urban Studies*, *55*(1), 133–150. JSTOR.
16. Mishra, S.N. (2022). Chapter XVII of Offence against Property of Theft. In *The Indian Penal Code* (pp. 791–799). Allahabad: Central Law publication.
17. NCRB. (2011). *Crime in India*. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs.
18. Saito, K. (2020). Marx's Theory of Metabolism in the Age of Global Ecological Crisis. *Historical Materialism*, *28*(2), 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-20202802
19. Sengupta, R., & Mukherjee, S. (2018). Crime, Deprivation and Social Sustainability—Evidence across States in India. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, *12*(3), 354–377. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703018811173
20. Singh, Nabakumar, Th. (2014). *Geography of Manipur*. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications.
21. Sivamurthi, A. (1982). The Spatial-Temporal Variation in the Incidence of Theft in Madras City. *Indian Journal of Criminology*, *10*(2), 108–115.