

Research Article

Work Participation and Status of Women in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes a humble attempt to examine the work participation of women in Manipur, and it also examines their economic status in contemporary society. The improved status of Manipuri women can be explained by increased literacy rate, sex ratio, strong political force, entrepreneurship skills, multiple works including socio-cultural-political-economic activities, and skilled weavers. Although the increasing work participation of women is commendable, yet their participation is much lower compared to their male counterpart. The study finds that female labour force participation is much lower in terms of principal status, weekly status and daily status compared to male. Women are excluded and increasingly marginalised in terms of their decision-making process and right to inherit property with majority of them concentrates their work in vulnerable sectors. This study suggests an inclusive development to improve the economic status of women and their work participation by offering them a better opportunity and financial credit. This will include the number of non-female workers in the stream of female workers. There is a need to formulate a policy to convert the large number of women working in unorganised sectors into more organised sectors.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Gender, Culture, Religion

INTRODUCTION

One of the major issues of contemporary development economics is discrimination against women, exclusion and marginalisation. Studies on women showed that the work participation rate among women has been steadily increasing over the past few decades and that most women find jobs in the unorganised sector¹, which are outside the provisions of minimum wage laws or social security benefits. Technological change is often biased against

women, which lead to exclusion and marginalisation. This is indicated in women's work participation, health and education, and the end-result is poverty among women. The major issues associated with women and children in the north-east regions (NERs) are the persistently high infant, child and maternal mortality ratios. The other important concerns are feminisation of poverty and exploitation of women in low-paid, hazardous and

¹In the Indian National Accounts Statistics (NAS), the unorganised segment of the economy (CSO 1989, 2007) refers to all operating units whose activities are not regulated under any Statutory Act or legal provision and/or those that do not maintain any regular accounts. In practice, the non-availability of regular accounts has been the main criterion for classifying these units as unorganised. The organised segment of the economy in the NAS broadly includes all large mining enterprises, manufacturing enterprises registered under the Factories Act, 1948, as well as private and public corporations engaged in non-manufacturing activities. They are called organised because statistics on their activities are available regularly from budget documents, annual reports in the case of the public sector and through the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) in the case of registered manufacturing. All other operating units regardless of their kind of activity are in the unorganised segments.

Table 1: District-wise Literacy Rate and Sex Ratio of Manipur (2001 and 2011)

Sl. No.	District/State	Literacy rate 2001			Literacy rate 2011		
		Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
1	Senapati	67.9	51.2	935	80.85	68.80	939
2	Tamenglong	68.7	49.0	922	76.74	63.76	953
3	Churachandpur	77.7	63.1	944	88.34	80.13	969
9	Bishnupur	79.6	55.7	993	85.52	67.29	1000
8	Thoubal	80.4	52.5	998	85.90	67.57	1006
6	Imphal East	85.5	65.3	991	92.93	80.71	1029
7	Imphal West	89.2	71.3	1004	89.86	75.92	1011
8	Ukhrul	80.1	65.4	858	86.05	77.47	948
9	Chandel	64.3	48.0	981	77.93	63.26	932
10	Manipur	80.3	60.5	974	86.49	73.17	987
11	All India	75.26	53.67	933	82.14	65.46	940

Source: Census India 2001 and 2011.

insecure jobs in the unorganised sector (North Eastern Region Vision 2020). Manipur is a state situated in the north-eastern corner of India and has nine districts out of which five are in the hills and rest in the valleys². Manipur recorded a higher female population compared with the male population during 1901-61 with a higher sex ratio. It is believed that the high sex ratio was the result of Burmese invasion in Manipur for 7 years, which is popularly known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa*. There is a patriarchal form of society. While polygamy is practised in Manipur, child marriage is not performed. This paper makes a humble attempt to examine the work participation of women in Manipur and also examines their economic status in contemporary society.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study mainly uses data obtained from Census of India, 2001 and 2011. It also collected data from various studies performed on women in Manipur. The other sources of data are research papers, central and state government-published reports, journals, textbooks, seminars, conference papers, etc. Some primary data have also been generated by making field visits to women's markets, by conducting informal discussions and

interviews with key informants and through observations. This paper is organised into six sections. Sections I and II present introduction as well as data and methodology. Section III provides major indicators of women. Section IV and V present the status of women and work participation. The last section provides the conclusion of the study.

MAJOR INDICATORS OF WOMEN

District-wise literacy rate, sex ratio, distribution of workers and non-workers, female workers and non-workers, work participation rate of males and females and women's market in Imphal city are some of the indicators used in this study.

The district-wise literacy rate and sex ratio of Manipur (2001 and 2011) are presented in Table 1. It can be seen from the table that the literacy rate of women increased from 60.5 per cent in 2001 to 73.17 per cent in 2011, which is above the all India figures (of 53.67 in 2001 and 65.46 in 2011). All the districts of Manipur have also exhibited an increase in the literacy rate of women during 2001-11. The sex ratio of Manipur also increased from 974 in 2001 to 987 in 2011. For the districts in Manipur,

²Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel districts are in the hills while Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur and Thoubal districts are in the valleys.

Table 2: Distribution of Workers and Non-Workers of Manipur

Sl. No.	Category	1991	Percentage to Total	2001*	Percentage to Total
1	Main Workers				
(i)	Male	4,14,812	44.21	4,30,227	39.27
(ii)	Female	2,93,471	32.65	2,29,137	21.39
(iii)	Person	7,08,283	38.55	6,59,364	30.43
2	Marginal Worker				
(i)	Male	9,958	1.06	96,969	8.85
(ii)	Female	56,663	6.31	1,88,860	17.63
(iii)	Person	66,621	3.63	2,85,849	13.19
3	Total Workers				
(i)	Male	4,24,770	45.27	5,27,216	48.12
(ii)	Female	3,50,134	38.96	4,17,997	39.02
(iii)	Person	7,74,904	42.18	9,45,213	43.62
4	Non-Workers				
(i)	Male	5,13,589	54.73	5,68,418	51.88
(ii)	Female	5,48,656	61.40	6,53,157	60.98
(iii)	Person	10,62,245	57.82	12,21,575	56.38
5	Total Population				
(i)	Male	9,38,359	100	10,95,634	100
(ii)	Female	8,98,790	100	10,71,154	100
(iii)	Person	18,37,149	100	21,66,788	100

Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Imphal, Government of Manipur.

with the exception of Ukhrul, all the others have shown an increase in their sex ratio during 2001-11.

The distribution of workers³ for Manipur is summarised in Table 2. The table shows that the percentage of main workers for both males and females declined from 44.21 per cent and 32.65 per cent, respectively, in 1991 to 39.27 per cent and 21.30 per cent, respectively, in 2011. Similarly, the percentage of non-workers for both males and females decreased from 54.73 per cent and 61.40 per cent, respectively, in 1991 to 51.88 per cent and 60.98 per cent, respectively, in 2001. However, the percentage of marginal workers and total workers for both males and females increased during 1991-2001. The table clearly shows that female workers outnumber male

workers in terms of marginal workers and non-workers while male workers outnumber female workers in terms of main workers.

Table 3 shows data on female workers and non-workers in Manipur. The table clearly shows that the number of female non-workers is more than that of female workers. The highest number of female workers is found in the Thoubal district of Manipur (84,332), followed by Imphal West (75,441), Imphal East (64,766) and Churachandpur (42,615). The Tamenglong district recorded the lowest number of female workers (23,827). Female non-workers are found to be concentrated in Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Churachandpur and so on. This has resulted in a high dependency ratio in these districts. The

³Workers are broadly classified into two categories: 1. main workers and 2. marginal workers. Main workers are those who worked for a major period of the year (183 days), while marginal workers are those, who worked for less than 183 days in a year. (Economic Survey Manipur 2005-06).

Table 3: Female Workers and Non-Workers in Manipur (2001 Census)

Sl. No.	District/Sate	Workers	Non-Workers	Total	Dependency Ratio
1	Imphal East	64,766	1,31,739	1,96,505	203.41
2	Imphal West	75,441	1,47,160	2,22,601	195.07
3	Bishnupur	39,421	64,397	1,03,818	163.36
4	Thoubal	84,332	97,558	1,81,890	115.68
5	Valley Total	2,63,960	4,40,854	7,04,814	167.01
6	Senapati	31,607	44,676	76,283	414.35
7	Tamenglong	23,827	29,658	53,485	124.47
8	Churachandpur	42,615	68,058	1,10,673	159.70
9	Ukhrul	30,645	36,668	67,313	119.65
10	Chandel	25,343	33,243	58,586	131.17
11	Hill Total	1,54,037	2,12,303	3,66,340	137.83
12	Manipur	4,17,997	6,53,157	1071154	156.26

Source: Census of India 2001.

Table 4: Work Participation Rate of Manipur and All-India as per 2001 Census

	Population (in 2000)	Work participation rate	Rural	Urban
Manipur				
Persons	2,294	44.78	46.72	38.71
Male	1,162	48.91	50.07	45.17
Female	1,132	40.51	43.2	32.28
All India				
Persons	10,28,737	39.25	41.97	32.23
Male	5,32,223	51.93	52.36	50.8
Female	4,96,514	25.68	30.98	11.55

Source: Census of India 2001.

work participation rate⁴ of males and females has been presented in Table 4. From the table, it can be observed that the work participation rate of women in Manipur is less than that of men for both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, the work participation rate of males for rural and urban areas of Manipur is lower compared with the all India figure in 2001. However, the female work participation rate of Manipur is found to be higher than the all India figure for both urban and rural areas.

Data on women markets at Khwairamband Bazar in Imphal city are presented in Table 5. From the table, we can identify a large number of women working in different markets at Khwairamband Bazar. Among the markets, Purana market has recorded the highest number of working women with 1,873, followed by New Market with 1,818, Naga Nullah with 1,281, Laxmi Market with 740, Session Court Market with 234 and Linthoingambi Market with 111. The total number of women found in markets stood at 6,057.

⁴The work participation rate for both males and females is not available in Census 2011.

Table 5: Women Markets at Khwairamband Bazar at Imphal City

SL. No.	Name of Markets	Shed No.	No. of Women
1	Purana Market	1—28	1,873
2	New Market	1—14	1,818
3	Linthoingambi Market	1—4	111
4	Laxmi Market	1—14	740
5	Naga Nullah	1—9 (720), 11(444), 1 (117)	1,281
6	Session Court Market	1—3	234
7	Total		6,057

STATUS OF MANIPURI WOMEN

The status of women of Manipur may be better than that of women in the remaining parts of the country in most of the occupations. For example, Manipuri women rose up in protest against the reintroduction of Lalup (a system of forced labour, which had been abolished) in 1904 by the then political agent, Maxwell. Owing to this, the British could not succeed in introducing the Lalup system (Singh 1999-2000). Again, Nupi Lan (Women's Agitation, 1939), which was initially against the economic policies of the then Maharaj and Marwari monopolists and later on a movement for constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur, showed the position of women in the state (Yambem 1970). Nupi Marup (Women's association) has played active roles in banning intoxicants and in improving the law-and-order situation of the state. The status of women in the state is also clear from the worker's participation rate and percentage of main female workers in the service sector, which is the most important non-agricultural industrial category for the state and non-household industry. Before the British came to Manipur, women were relatively free and they constituted a strong political force in the society. According to a study by Kshetrimayum (2000), it is found that women could change the political decision of the then king if it affected the general interest of the people, and in those days, women had social and political consciousness, and they fulfilled all social obligations

and activities of their households without the presence of their husbands. A study on women in Manipur by Singh (1991) showed that women retained their legal status by participating not only in household work and socio-cultural duties but also in various forms of economic activities. The recent engagement of women in government services and private firms has widened the scope of mobility, familial and social networks. Inheritance of property has been a major issue for woman in Manipur society since early days. A study by Yumnam (2004) on women in Manipur found that the right to own and inherit property is determined by the traditions and customs of society, and the inheritance of property for women was ignored by the society. This study also found that Manipuri women mainly performed three-fold services: (1) domestic work in the house as a housewife, mother, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law; (2) service at workplaces as professionals; and (3) services at the social front as participants and representatives. A comparative study on women in the Imphal valley (Imphal) and hill valley (Ukhrul) by Rajkumari in 2000 found that male partners are more helpful to their female partners in the hill district than in the valley district, and that educated women play a vital role in creating awareness about HIV/AIDS⁵ among the groups of uneducated women. Although the working hours of women in their households are much longer than those of their male counterparts, the decision-making power of employed women is much less. The study by Chongtham (2002) also shows that there is no gender equity in Manipur society with the result that the male population dominates over the female population in decision making within the family and society. According to a study in Manipur by Brar (2009), it is found that women are respected as long as they remain in the form of pressure groups and enter the formal political arena. There is discrimination against women and much more against people of the tribal community, but they are subtle, hidden and coated with refined mannerisms. A loom is found in the outside corner of every household. Women in their spare time weave their own and family's garments. They also weave to sell in the exclusive women's market called *Ima Keithel*. Besides clothes, they sell goods ranging from fish, rice,

⁵ Human immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

vegetables and fruits grown in their own kitchen gardens, jute products, flowers, etc. Another case study at the Imphal district of Manipur by Meinam (1989) showed that there is a growing tendency among women that supremacy of males over females exists in the Manipur society. According to a study by Rajkumari Bidita (2006), the nature of participation for women in the contemporary society is generally an induced participation and the majority of women remain silent on the question of inheritance of property. This might be due to the patriarchal form society⁶. Another study in Manipur by Yumnam (2004) also showed that women are kept out of the decision-making process. According to the report of the National Family Health Survey-3, participation of women in decision making was found to be the highest in all NERs, except Tripura.

In summary, the status of Manipuri women is shown by their active participation in the social-economic-cultural duties of the society. Women have always been on the forefront of social movements. This may be because of them being courageous, sensitive, hard-working, responsive and non-violent as compared with their male counterparts. Women in Manipur are more organised at the household level, community level and at market places. Although at the household level, males may dominate their female partners in the decision-making process, women are nevertheless more responsible than their male counterparts in the society.

WORK PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

According to the Economic Survey of Manipur (2005-06), the goal of poverty alleviation cannot be achieved without an active participation of women, who constitute a major section of the workforce. Women in Manipur play a critical role in paddy production in the state. They are engaged in all operations related to production, namely paddy cultivation, harvesting, intermediate processing (which include husking, pounding, parboiling) and in the marketing of rice. In addition to the retail trade

in rice, women control a large proportion of the trade in other essential commodities. Handloom cloth, which is an important product of the state, is another activity in which women are almost exclusively engaged. Catering and the food 'industry' are dominated by women who run tea stalls, snack shops and hotels. Women participated in small trade and commerce and engaged in weaving, embroidery, handloom and handicrafts. They also participated in harvesting, collection of paddy from the field, collection of firewood and transactions in the market (Chongtham 2002). Manipuri women occupy an important place in the handloom sector with female workers dominating this sector. According to a study on women by Jain Devaki (1980), it is shown that the mainsprings of women's power in Manipur stem from two factors: their high economic participation and their mutual association in the market place (or their involvement with a non-family institution). According to the Handloom Census of India (2009-10), out of the total 9,14,135 handloom workers in Manipur, 3,38,381 are male workers while 3,51,178 are female. In urban areas, female workers accounted for 55,135 while male workers accounted for 50,721. In rural areas, female workers (2,96,043) also outnumbered male (2,87,660) workers.

In terms of labour force participation rate in Manipur, female labour force participation is found to be much lower compared to male counterpart. According to NSS 66th Round (2009-10), for every 1000 persons of age between 15-59 years in Manipur, 248 persons belonged to the female labour force while 787 persons belonged to male labour force based on Usual Principal Status⁷. (NSS 66th Round, 2011). According to weekly and daily status⁸, the female labour force participation rate was about 27 per cent and 25 persons respectively showing a significantly lower participation of female in the labour force compared to male population.

A study on women entrepreneurs by Chanambam (2002) found that 60 per cent of women entrepreneurs in

⁶Participation with the help of allurement and inducement of payment in kind.

⁷Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is the ratio of the number of employed and unemployed persons to total population. Usual Principal Status indicates the situation of chronic unemployment with a reference period of one year. While weekly status refer to a one-week reference period while current daily status shows daily activity pursued during each day of the reference week.

⁸Economic Survey Manipur 2005-06.

Manipur, 34 per cent in Tripura and 25 per cent in Nagaland faced a scarcity problem of raw materials. Furthermore, most of them started their entrepreneurial works with their own money because of lack of access to credit. According to a study by Thockchom (2002) on women entrepreneurs, it is found that there is a lack of proper production planning, scientific marketing and marketing infrastructure. This study showed that Manipuri women entered the field of weaving, knitting and embroidery not only for traditional practices but also for income generation. Most of the women entrepreneurs were found using obsolete tools and equipments. A large number of women in Manipur are engaged in management and ownership of small-scale industries (SSIs). According to the Final Results of Third All India Census of Small Scale Industry (2001-02), the total number of female employees, including registered and unregistered, was estimated at 26,065 in Assam, 23,338 in Manipur, 8,803 in Meghalaya, 7,619 in Tripura, 6,824 in Mizoram and 3,211 in Nagaland and 221 in Sikkim. Assam recorded the highest number of women enterprises in the north-east states, followed by Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. A study on self-help groups in Manipur showed that there was a less range of gainful activities of the industrial nature where female workers could be employed (Mohendro and Sancharani 2004). In a study on family welfare programmes of Manipur by Laishram and Ibempishak in 1992, it is found that female illiteracy, lack of medical facilities, low work participation of women and superstitions were the major factors for poor performance of family welfare programmes in Manipur. Women constitute a significant part of the workforce in Manipur. In urban areas, women workers are primarily employed in unorganised sectors, such as household industries, petty trades and services, construction works, etc. On the other hand, women workers are employed as agricultural labourers and cultivators⁹. Women as agricultural workers participate in almost all works like transplanting, weeding, applying fertilisers and harvesting. A large number of women are found engaged

in unorganised sectors. For example, out of every 100 persons in Manipur, 93 are engaged in unorganised sectors¹⁰. At times, women faced difficulty while returning home from their work sites and they were made to stay at the residence of their acquaintances or in rented rooms. It is also found that more than 500 children and adult women are engaged in stone quarrying at Sekmai, which is 20 km from Imphal city¹¹. They work for 7-8 hours a day and earn about Rs. 100-150 per day. They said they had chosen this work because it did not require initial credit/capital/investment. In Khwairamband Bazar, it is found that there are more than 2,500 female street vendors¹². A study by Ayekpam (2006) found a large number of Manipuri women working as street vendors due to poverty and unemployment of their male partners. Educated female unemployment has increased in Manipur over the past decade. According to Gender Statistics Manipur (2006), the number of female job seekers registered with the employment exchange in Manipur increased from 0.78 lakhs in 1996 to 1.60 lakhs in 2006. According to data available with the Manipur State Employment Exchange Department, Government of Manipur, there are about 7,08,717 educated youths who are seeking Government jobs, of which the number of male job seekers is 5,08,073 while female job seekers stand at 2,00,644 till the end of January 2012.

In summary, Manipuri women are traditionally engaged in handloom works. Apart from this, women entrepreneurs have emerged recently in the state. In fact, Manipur women have participated in all forms of work: organised or unorganised sectors. The high work participation of women may be the outcome of poverty in their households and unemployed male partners. There is still an alarming figure of female non-workers, who may be considered as excluded and marginalised, and at any time, they may come to work in unorganised sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

The improved status of Manipuri women can be explained by literacy rate, sex ratio, strong political force,

⁹The Sangai Express, February 14, 2008, Thursday, Vol. IX/146, Imphal, Manipur.

¹⁰This is based on the information collected from a field visit at Sekmai during 10-20 December 2010. This does not include other quarry workers at Thoubal and Bishnupur districts.

¹¹The information is collected from the Khwairamband Bazar during 10-20 January, 2010.

entrepreneurship skills, multiple works including socio-cultural-political-economic activities, and skilled weavers. Although the increasing work participation of women is commendable, yet their participation is much lower compared to their male counterpart. The study finds that female labour force participation is much lower in terms of principal status, weekly status and daily status compared to male. Women are excluded and increasingly marginalised in terms of their decision-making process and right to inherit property with majority of them concentrates their work in vulnerable sectors. The number of female non-workers is more than that of female workers, which we may consider in this situation as excluded and marginalised. The position of female workers can also be explained by increasing number of marginal workers, non-workers and less number of main workers. This also suggests that more employment opportunities can be created to include female non-workers in the work participation rate of women. This study found a complex interplay of economic, social, cultural, religious and familial, social network factors among female workers. Apart from household activities and socio-cultural obligations, Manipuri women are found to be engaged in all forms of economic activity. One distinctive feature of women in Manipur is that they occupy a dominant place in the handloom sector, which provides vast employment opportunities for women. The absolute welfare of women and girls is likely to benefit from economic development, when it is supported by efforts to provide jobs and micro-level credit to lower-income women and educational and health services to women and girls (Raj Felix *et al.* 2006). Therefore, inclusive development is the key to improve the economic status of women and their work participation by offering them a better opportunity and financial credit. This will include the number of non-female workers in the stream of female workers. There is a need to formulate a policy to convert the large number of women working in unorganised sectors into more organised sectors. This will help in increasing the share of women to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the state..

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