



Status of Women in Manipur: A Comparative look

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Abstract

The present study is intended and undertaken in Manipur, a North-Eastern state of India. The study is based on secondary data collected from Census reports. As per the Census 2011, North-Eastern States having 45.59 million population, shares about 3.77% of National figure. The region continued to share about 3.80% of country's total female population (585.65 million) too. Decadal growth rate (SGR) of female population is slightly above (2.2% during 1991-2001 and 1.79% during 2001-2011) that of male (2.12% during 1991-2001 and 1.72% during 2001-2011) in India. Similarly growth of female population is outpacing the growth of male population in the Manipur with a clear cut margin (2.56 against 2.34% in 1991-2001 phase, 1.95 against 1.81 during 2001-2011 phase). The state shares about 5.97% of total population and 6.06% of female population of North-East. Share of female worker to the total worker is around 39% in Manipur but in National figure is sometimes less and around 25% over the decades. The percentage of female cultivator (37.9), household industry worker (14.1) and other worker (34.5) in the state are high compare to the national figure. The female literacy rate in the state is increasing with 39.6% (Census,1991) to 73.2% (Census,2011). Manipuri women's role in the socio-economic and cultural life is significant. They also do all the buying and selling of goods in the market. Women dominate the markets in the rural and urban areas. They are greatly involved in the agricultural and allied activities. There is also rise in the number of women entrepreneurs and women self-help groups. The numbers of working women in different sectors are increasing. Therefore women has to be given due honour for their service (to the Nation, to the family). Land records should be in the name of the women for giving due access to the farm family resources. Women have to be protected against rather discriminating treatment from their male. For the development of any society the status of women is a key factor determining progress.

Keywords: Women, share in population, growth, status

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. Rural women often manage and perform complex household/farm activities like producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food for family consumption, working (as hired labourer) for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family

members and maintaining their homes and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Unfortunately, many of these activities are not defined as "*economically active employment*" in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households. Today, women comprise just over 40% of the agricultural labour force in the developing world (<http://www.ifpri.org/event/women-agriculture-south-asia>). The global average is dominated by Asia. Within Asia, the sub-regional averages range from about 35% in South Asia to almost 50% in East and Southeast Asia (<http://www.ifpri.org/>

event/women-agriculture-south-asia). The female share in India has remained steady at just over 30% (<http://www.agnet.org/library/eb>). Women's contribution to agricultural output is undoubtedly extremely significant and it has often been claimed that women produce 60 to 80% of food in most developing countries and half of the world's food supply (Momsen, 1991; Mehra and Rojas, 2008). Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. So there is gender disparity.

Under this backdrop, the present study is undertaken in Manipur, a North-Eastern state of India where about 49.81% of total population are women (Census, 2011) and they contribute about 51.46% of total working force. Historically, the state is pre-dominated by matriarchal society. The state, which is relatively backward in agricultural development paradigm, has a glorious past regarding women's 'movement' for the state's cause. Manipuri women do not stay behind the veil. They are greatly involved in the agriculture and allied activities. They also participate in buying and selling of goods in the market (The *Ima Keithal* or Mother's market in Manipur has the internationally acclaimed repute). With their artistic and creative mind Manipur women participate in the field of handloom and handicrafts too. The number of women entrepreneurs and women self help groups are also rising (www.e-pao.net). The numbers of working women in different sectors are increasing. The question arises whether women in Manipur are really empowered or not? Or, over the years, any change has taken place or not? The present study has been undertaken to understand the status of women (especially, the farm women) in Manipur in comparison to other North-Eastern states and India.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary information collected from various sources (websites and Government Departments). Data pertaining to three consecutive decades i.e. 1991, 2001 and 2011 for North-Eastern states and India were tabulated for comparison. The culled data are subjected to time series analysis (wherever required) and simple statistical methodology is aptly applied for elucidating required precision.

Population is the most important asset and demographic indicator. A close perusal of Table 1 reveals that share of north-eastern states in national population hovers around 3.77% (in all the decades) though total

population in the region jumps from 31.95 million in 1991 to 45.59 million in 2011 registering a simple growth rate of 2.2% per annum during 1991-2001 period and 1.70% per annum during 2001-2011 period. But share of Manipur in north-eastern population is on the rise: 5.76% in 1991 to 5.97% in 2011. Both male and female population increase in the state but growth rate of female population is outpacing that of male population. During 2001-2011 period, female population has increased at 1.95 percent per annum in Manipur and in the previous decadal period (i.e. 1991-2001), this has increased at 2.6% per annum. This rate of growth in female population in Manipur is quite higher than that of corresponding regional (North-East) or national figure too. This has resulted in continuous rise in female share in Manipur population over the decades. The sex ratio for the state as a whole has improved from 957 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 992 in 2011. In reality, female population is increasing at quite a good pace in four north-eastern states namely, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Manipur. Now, question comes, where is the female population rising – in urban area or in rural area? A close look towards the decadal share of female population in Manipur, north-eastern states (as a whole) and India (Figure 1), it can be indicative that growth of female population, in general, takes place more in urban areas rather than in rural areas. Share of rural female population in Manipur comes down from 72% in 1991 to 69% during 2011. And, this decline in rural women's share in state's population took place after 2001 only. This is a general trend in the country but quite contrastingly, rural female population is still quite high in other north-eastern states. Naturally, work participation rate of female in farm work is bound to decline in the state. If we give a look on the caste-wise population statistics over the decades (Figure 2), it can be viewed that percentage of backward caste female population always remains above the male population and is on the rise in Manipur, north-eastern states and in the country too. Manipur is found to be a highly backward caste-infested state and it is a fact that there is probability of suffering from gender-bias and indignities (National Commission on Women, 1998). More than one-third population springs from backward caste in the state.

Education plays significant role in women's participation in farming activities as well as in farm family decisions (Kachroo *et al.* 2005). Level of education is assumed to be negatively associated with farm women's participation in agriculture or non-agricultural works (Farid *et al.* 2011). Also, lower level of education compels women to remain in subsistence agriculture

Table 1: Distribution of population and percentage decadal growth of India/ North-Eastern States, 1991-2011Census

North Eastern States/ India	Population (in millions)										Percentage decadal growth					
	1991			2001			2011			1991-2001			2001-2011			
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Overall	Male	Female	Overall	
Assam	11.66	10.76	22.41	13.78	12.88	26.66	15.95	15.21	31.17	18.18	19.70	18.96	15.75	18.09	16.92	
Arunachal Pradesh	0.47	0.40	0.86	0.58	0.52	1.10	0.72	0.66	1.38	23.40	30.00	27.91	24.14	26.92	25.45	
Manipur	0.94 (5.66)	0.90 (5.86)	1.84 (5.76)	1.16 (5.76)	1.13 (5.99)	2.29 (5.87)	1.37 (5.88)	1.35 (6.06)	2.72 (5.97)	23.40	25.56	24.46	18.10	19.47	18.78	
Meghalaya	0.91	0.87	1.77	1.18	1.14	2.32	1.49	1.47	2.96	29.67	31.03	31.07	26.27	28.95	27.59	
Mizoram	0.36	0.33	0.69	0.46	0.43	0.89	0.55	0.54	1.09	27.78	30.30	28.99	19.57	25.58	22.47	
Nagaland	0.64	0.57	1.21	1.05	0.94	1.99	1.03	0.95	1.98	64.06	64.91	64.46	-1.90	1.06	-0.50	
Sikkim	0.22	0.19	0.41	0.29	0.25	0.54	0.32	0.29	0.61	31.82	31.58	31.71	10.34	16.00	12.96	
Tripura	1.42	1.34	2.76	1.64	1.56	3.20	1.87	1.80	3.67	15.49	16.42	15.94	14.02	15.38	14.69	
North-East	16.60 (3.78)	15.35 (3.77)	31.95 (3.78)	20.13 (3.78)	18.85 (3.80)	38.98 (3.79)	23.31 (3.74)	22.28 (3.80)	45.59 (3.77)	21.27	22.80	22.00	15.80	18.20	16.96	
All India	439.23	407.07	846.30	532.22	496.51	1028.74	623.72	585.65	1209.37	21.17	21.97	21.56	17.19	17.95	17.56	

Source: Census Report 1991-2011, Government of India.

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage share of Manipur to North-Eastern states and N-E to All India figures.

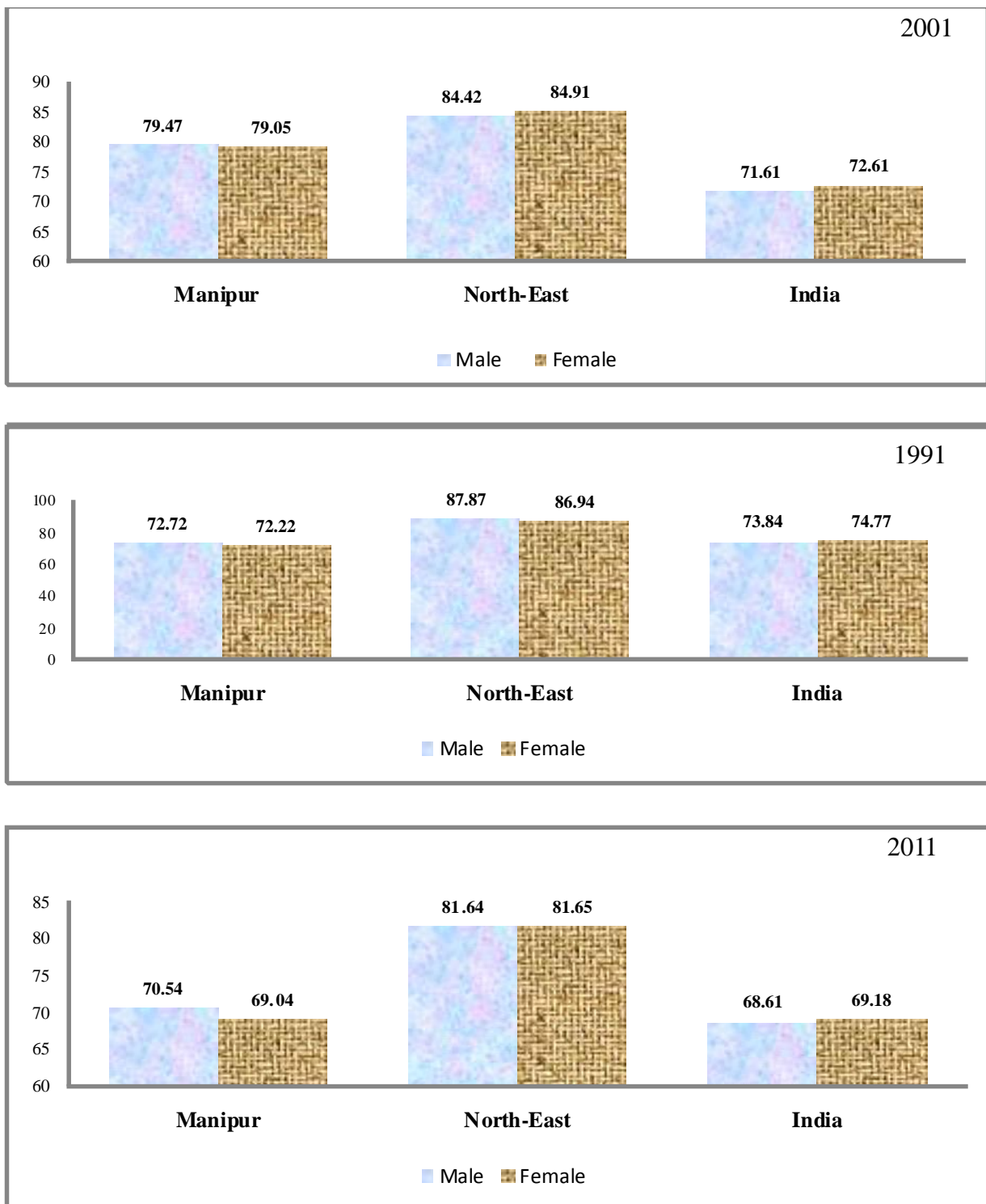


Fig. 1: Rural Population in Manipur, North-Eastern States and India – over the decades – A comparative look

(Lal and Khurana, 2011). A close perusal of Figure 3 depicts that rate of female literacy has been doubled (since 1991) in Manipur, other north-eastern states and in India as well. Presently, about 73% of female are literate in Manipur against 86% in male. So, there is a great probability of increased status of women in farm economy (though not in participation but in decision

making domain of farm family matters) in the state. This may have encouraging impact on developmental aspect especially, of women.

The goal of poverty alleviation cannot be achieved without the full and active participation of women who constitute a large section of workforce. Percentage of total working force (that includes cultivators, agricultural

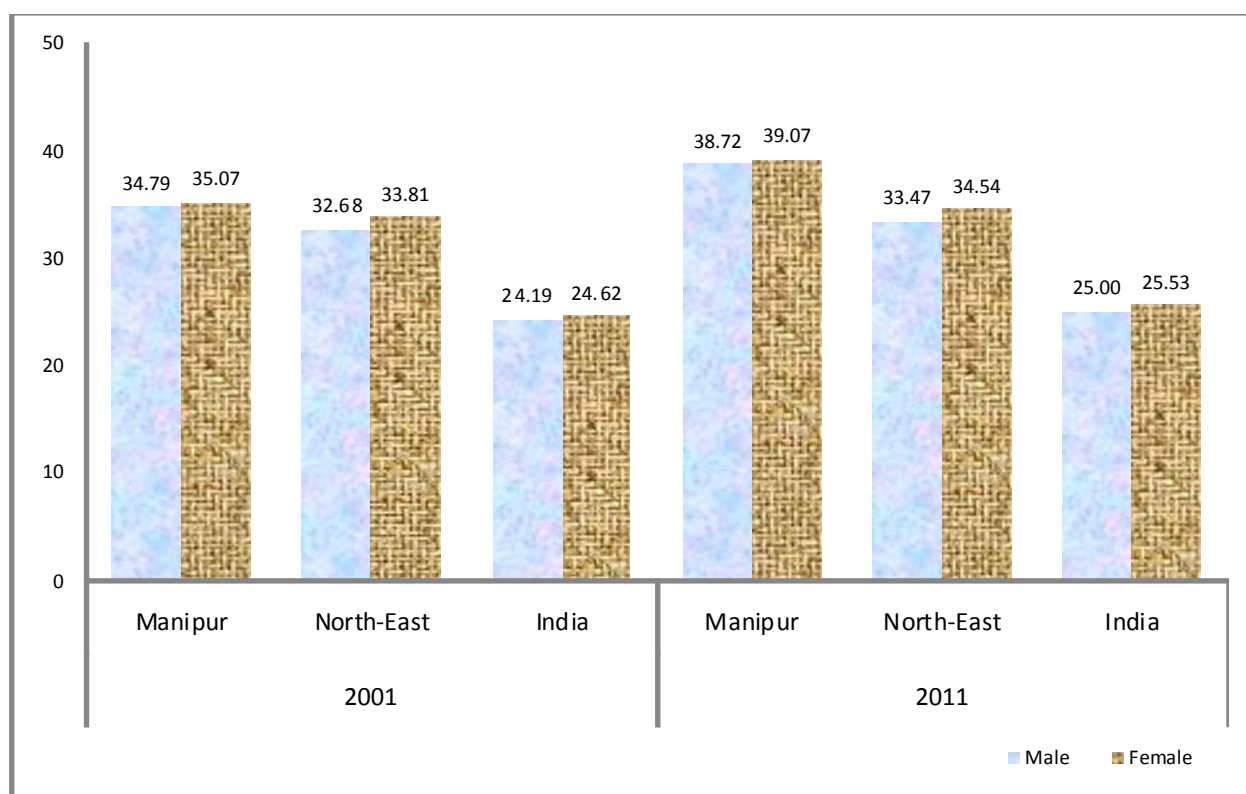


Fig. 2: Backward Caste Population: A comparative look

Table 2: Proportion of total workers and non workers

North Eastern States / India	Total worker (%)					
	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Assam	49.9	20.7	35.8	53.6	22.5	38.4
Arunachal Pradesh	50.6	36.5	44.0	49.1	35.4	42.5
Manipur	48.1	39.0	43.6	51.6	38.6	45.1
Meghalaya	48.3	35.1	41.8	47.2	32.7	40.0
Mizoram	57.3	47.5	52.6	52.4	36.2	44.4
Nagaland	46.7	38.1	42.6	53.4	44.7	49.2
Sikkim	57.4	38.6	48.6	60.2	39.6	50.5
Tripura	50.6	21.1	36.2	55.8	23.6	40.0
North-East	51.11	34.58	43.15	52.91	34.16	43.76
All India	51.7	25.6	39.1	53.3	25.5	39.8

Source: Census Report 2001 and 2011, Government of India.

labourers, household industry workers and other workers) increases in general and in accordance with the Census, 2011, it stands out to be 45.1% in Manipur, 43.76% in North-Eastern states and 39.8% in India. But increase in total working force is due to increase in male workforce rather than the female workforce which is noticeable Manipur, north-eastern states and India as well. That is to say that share of female workers in the total work force is on the decline. As for example, while percentage of male worker rose from 51.7% in 2001 to 53.3% in 2011 in Manipur, the corresponding female worker declined from 39.0% in 2001 to 38.6% in 2011

(Table 2). Greater ‘urbanization’ during this period may be the root cause behind this phenomenon.

Now, question comes whether this is a general declining trend in female workers’ participation or not? If the growth pattern of different categories of working force is judged over the decades (Figure 4), it can be observed that women constitute a significant part of the work force in the state. But while percentage of both male and female workers as agricultural labourers and household industry workers is on the decline, for other workers it is on the rise. Also, percentage of male

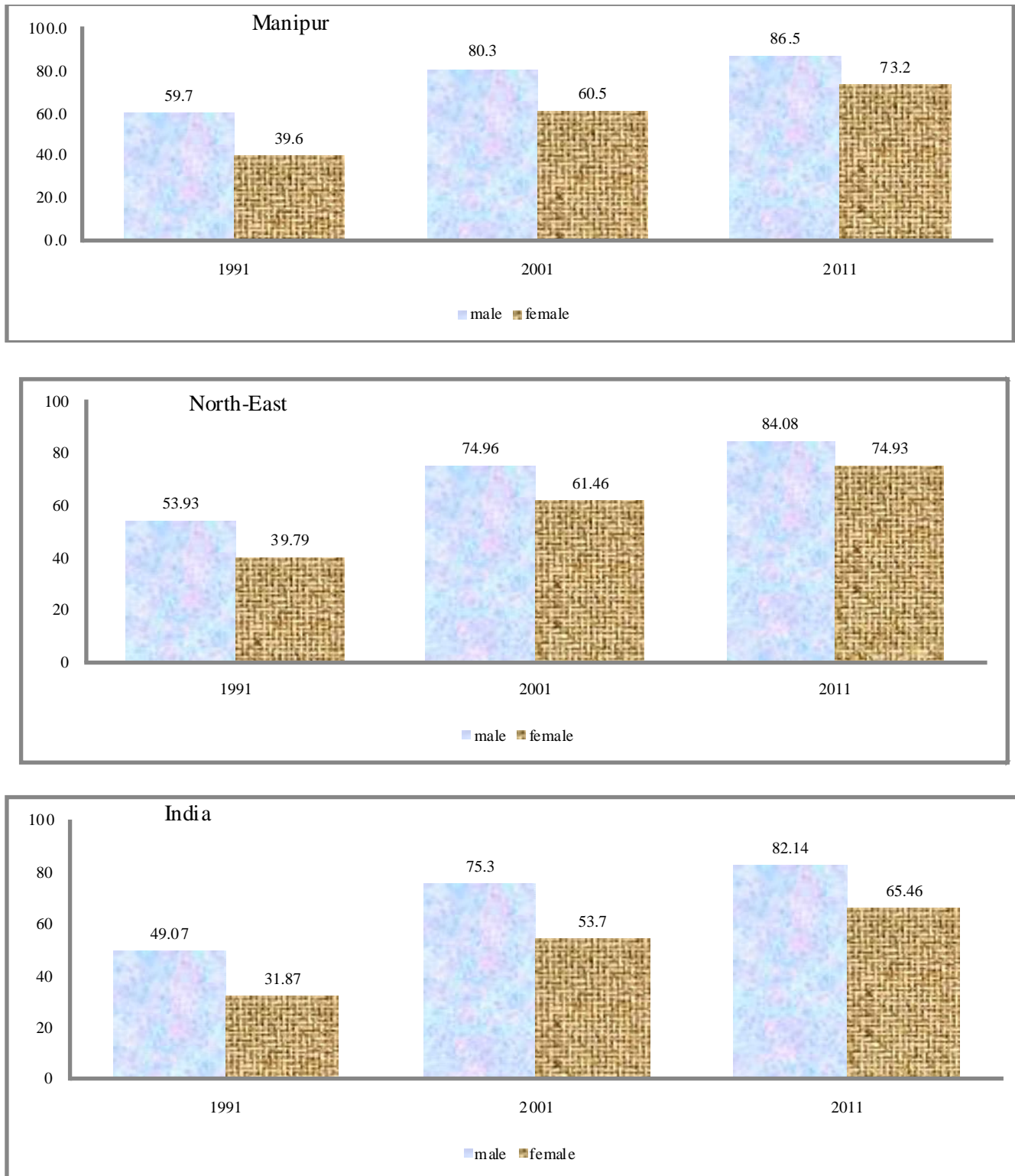


Fig. 3: Standard of literacy: Journey over the decades

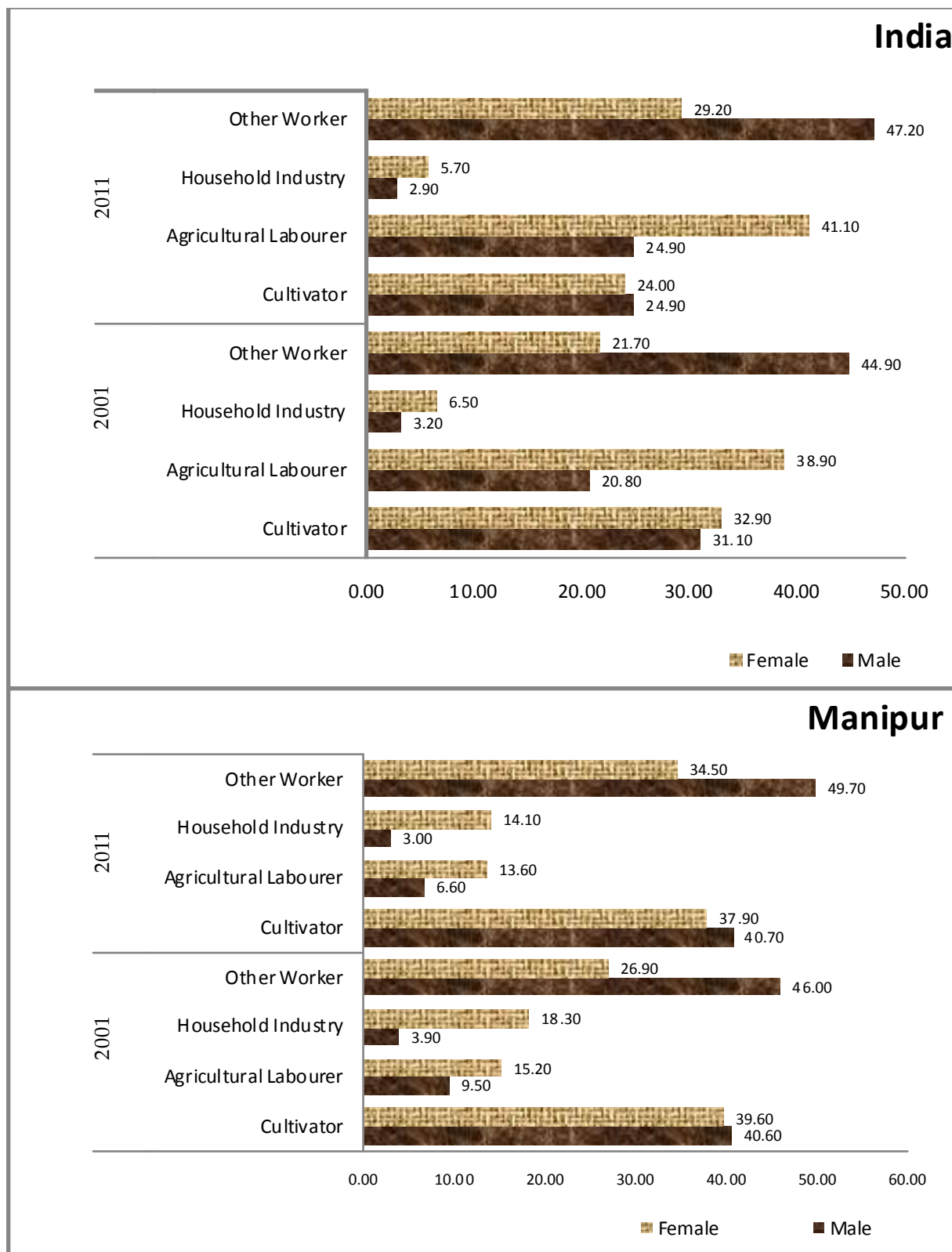


Fig. 4: Categories of Male and Female Workers: A comparative look

cultivators is increasing in the state. That is indicative of the fact that migration from the farming sector taking place and according to the 2011 Census, the state shares 45.10% of total workers of which 38.60% are females and 51.60% males. Among the rural female workers, a majority are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators.

Conclusion

Women play a significant role in agriculture, the world over. Although women do the majority of work in agriculture at the global level, men, for the most part, still own the land, control women's labor, and make agricultural decisions in patriarchal (or pseudo patriarchal, like that in Manipur) social systems. The work participation of women in Manipur has been fairly higher than the national average but it is in declining phase. Over the years, they have been increasingly marginalized. The traditional handloom industry, which was under the control of the women, is today facing stiff competition from industries that produce machine made clothes. Gender disparity prevails in the society. Women have limited access to decision-making processes too: both within the family and in the public domain. Women often do not have any say when men sit together to decide the affairs of the village, even when the decision involves the future of the woman herself. So, mere increase in the sex ratio or literacy rate may not improve the plight of women, especially the farm women. There is need for strict policy intervention for re-shaping the laws or enacting them in the field level. Land records should be in the name of the women for giving due access to the farm family resources. Women have to be protected against rather discriminating treatment from their male. For the development of any society the status of women is a key factor determining progress.

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