

Transition of Occupational Structure in Manipur: A Sectoral Analysis of Post-Census

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ABSTRACT

This study dives into the traditionally agrarian state of Manipur's economy, which is increasingly witnessing a shift from primary to informal services and non-farm employment. Skipping manufacture or secondary sector could be a huge problem for a state like Manipur resulting in the dependence on unstable informal service sector, neglected value addition of raw agricultural produce, etc. This paper aims to examine these changing occupational trends by conducting a sectoral analysis across the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of employment in Manipur from 2011 to the present using secondary data from Census 2011, Periodic Labour Force Survey, and the Economic Survey of Manipur. The findings indicate a relative stagnation in agricultural employment despite government interventions, a decline in formal industrial jobs, and a rise in informal service-sector specially in trade, transport, construction and agricultural works. The paper also pointed out the under-researched trends like seasonal unemployment, and increasing skill mismatches among the youth, and identifies key shifts in employment patterns, comparing gender-wise rural and urban trends. These insights, drawn from secondary data, reveal a structural transformation that is not supported by the present inadequate skill development programmes or job creation strategies. This paper summarized some important region-sensitive policy recommendations for informed decision making which focused on localised skilling, creating industrial parks with pre-approved land titles in non-conflict zones, incentivise investment that can extend benefits of the North East Industrial Development Scheme to micro-units. By highlighting that recommendation, this paper contributes to a larger insight into the shifting employment landscape of Manipur, helping build strong evidence for more targeted and region-sensitive employment policies.

Keywords: Occupational Structures, Periodic Labour Force Survey, disguised unemployment, seasonal unemployment, localised skilling

INTRODUCTION:

The occupational structure of a country or region refers to the distribution or division of its population according to different occupations (Gaurav Datt and Ashwani Mahajan, 2016). In short, it refers to the division of various activities that comes into play in all the different sectors of an economy and it is one of the most vital parts of a society or a region. Agrarian economies typically shift labour from farming to higher-productivity industry and services, but Manipur's transformation has lagged. A silent jump from a primary occupation to informal service sector is never a good sign for a State like Manipur. As a result, opportunities for industrial employment remain minimal, leaving skilled and semi-skilled hands either idle or underutilized in informal enterprises. Occupational structure determines the level of economic growth and development of a country or a region. Therefore, it is imperative to study and analyse the trends of occupational structure to fully comprehend the nature of economic development in a region. And for a state like Manipur, where the industry's share to Gross State Value Added (GSVA) is only 8.5 percent compared to the service sector having the share of 64.8 percent followed by agriculture with 26.8 percent during the period 2013-14 to 2022-23. These service sector grew by 5.0 percent, agriculture sector grew by 5.6 percent, and an industrial sector grew by 0.9 percent per annum (NITI Aayog Summary Report for the State of Manipur). As evident from the NITI Aayog report, there is a widespread disparity in the shares of different sectors which requires for a rigorous analysis to fully understand the dynamics of occupational structure in Manipur.

By 2011, 52.8% of the workforce were cultivators or agricultural labourers. As D'Souza and Ray (2014) note, a rapid fall in agriculture's GDP share alongside persistently high farm employment creates a "gap" that traps workers in low-productivity jobs. This pattern has been seeing in many North-Eastern states which can fuel unemployment, poverty and even social unrest. In short, most families remain tied to subsistence farming with little income growth. In Manipur, valley and hill regions show stark contrasts. From the field surveys report of Thangjahao Haokip and Marchang Reimeingam (2021) found that valley districts enjoy better infrastructure (roads, markets and services) e.g. villagers in the valley travel only about 9 km to a district headquarters on average, whereas it is about 32 km for hill residents and hence more government or private-sector jobs are available in the valley areas. In contrast, hill communities rely largely on self-employment and subsistence agricultures. Census data confirm this: only about 37% of valley workers were in agriculture in 2011, versus 71% in the hills. At the same time, low-productivity informal services (small trade, daily labour, informal transport) have grown, especially in Imphal and other valley towns. These regional gaps, combined with stagnating farm incomes, can frustrate rural youth and drive migration, leading to the problem of carrying capacity in the valley

region.

We also analyse gender and valley/hill differences. By reviewing these statistics, we highlight how agricultural stagnation, the rise of informal services, and youth skill mismatches are reshaping Manipur's employment landscape. Ultimately, these dynamics have profound consequences for livelihoods, aspirations and social cohesion in the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine the trend in the occupational structure of Manipur.
2. To stress the importance of employment share in the secondary Sector
3. To provide policy recommendations

METHODOLOGY:

This paper examines how occupational patterns have shifted using secondary data available from different sources, such as books, census data, newspapers, and reports published by both government and non-government organizations. We draw on the 2011 Census (baseline), NSS Employment–Unemployment surveys and the Periodic Labour Force Survey as well as the Manipur Economic Survey to track sectoral and regional transition.

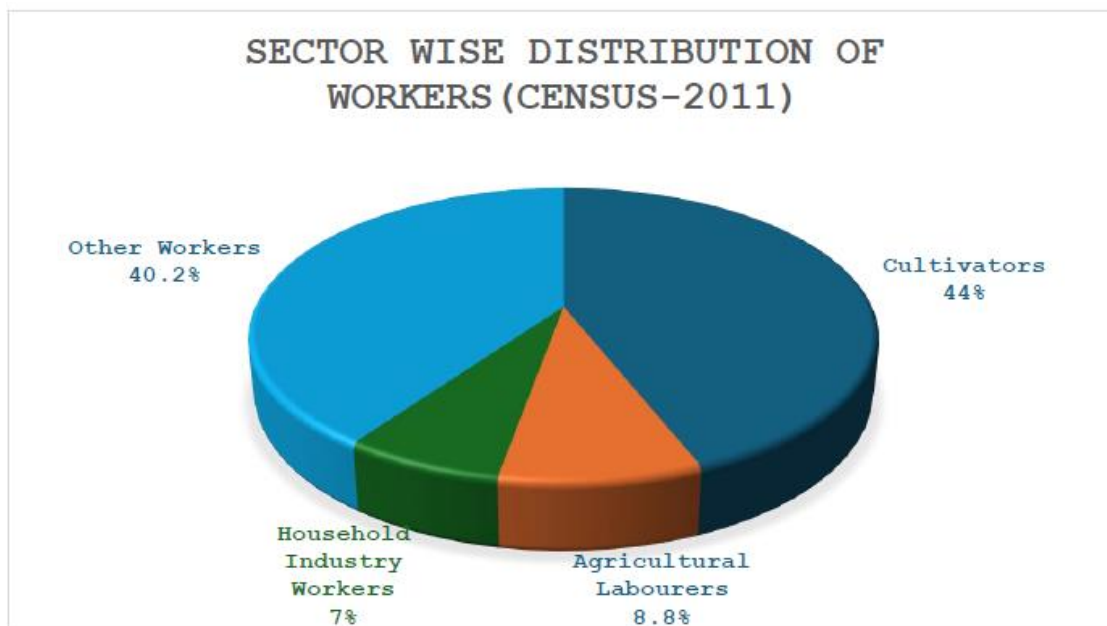
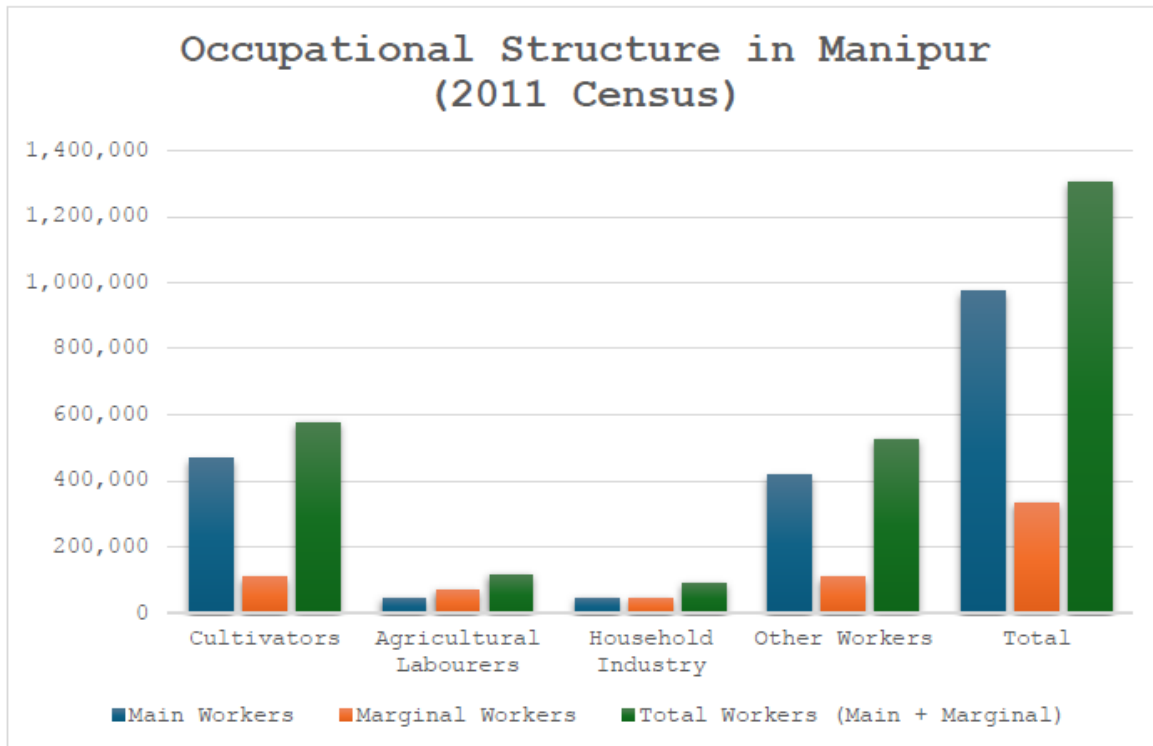
DISCUSSION AND RESULTS:

The Paradox (Plough to Marketplace):

In an age where industrialisation has been the engine of growth for much of the developing state, Manipur has been missing that train altogether, skipping the factory floor as indicated by the 2011 census. This neglect is not just a mere void but it reflects decades of policy oversight, lack of concerned institutions, infrastructural inadequacy, and logistical challenges. Industrial parks lie underutilized, transport bottlenecks persist, and energy availability remains patchy resulting in overall slowdown of secondary sector.

These below two figures display the occupational categorization of Manipur's workforce in 2011. Cultivators and agricultural labourers dominate, while a significant proportion is engaged in informal services under "Other Workers."

Figure 1. Sectoral Distribution of Main Workers in Manipur, 2011 Census



The 2011 Census data reveals a workforce concentrating in traditional primary sector yet slowly

drifting towards modernity. The most dominant category was that of Cultivators, occupying about 44 percent of the total workforce. The primary sector comprise of Agricultural labourers alone account for 8.8% absorbed over half of the working population. There is only a mere 7% of household industry workers of the total workforce, signifying an abysmal presence of the secondary sector. The figures shows a whopping 40.2% of Other Workers which mainly include informal services employed in the field of trade, transport, and other commercial activities. This signals the gradual emergence of the tertiary sector as a significant source of livelihood.

There had been a continued dominance of the agricultural sector in 2011, where over half the workers were either cultivators or labourers. While "other workers" (mostly in the informal services sector) formed a substantial portion, the formal industrial workforce remains a marginal player. This shows that Manipur, despite being a part of a Developing Nation, still operates under a heavily agrarian occupational framework. What happened to the promise of industrial and service-sector growth is indeed a question in mind.

SECTORAL WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION BY REGION (Valley Vs Hills):

Region	Cultivators (%)	Agri Labourers (%)	HH Industry (%)	Other Workers (%)	Total Workers
Valley	25.9% (185,151)	11.4% (81,335)	10.4% (74,328)	52.2% (372,677)	713,491
Hills	65.9% (388,880)	5.7% (33,583)	2.9% (17,028)	25.7% (151,628)	590,119

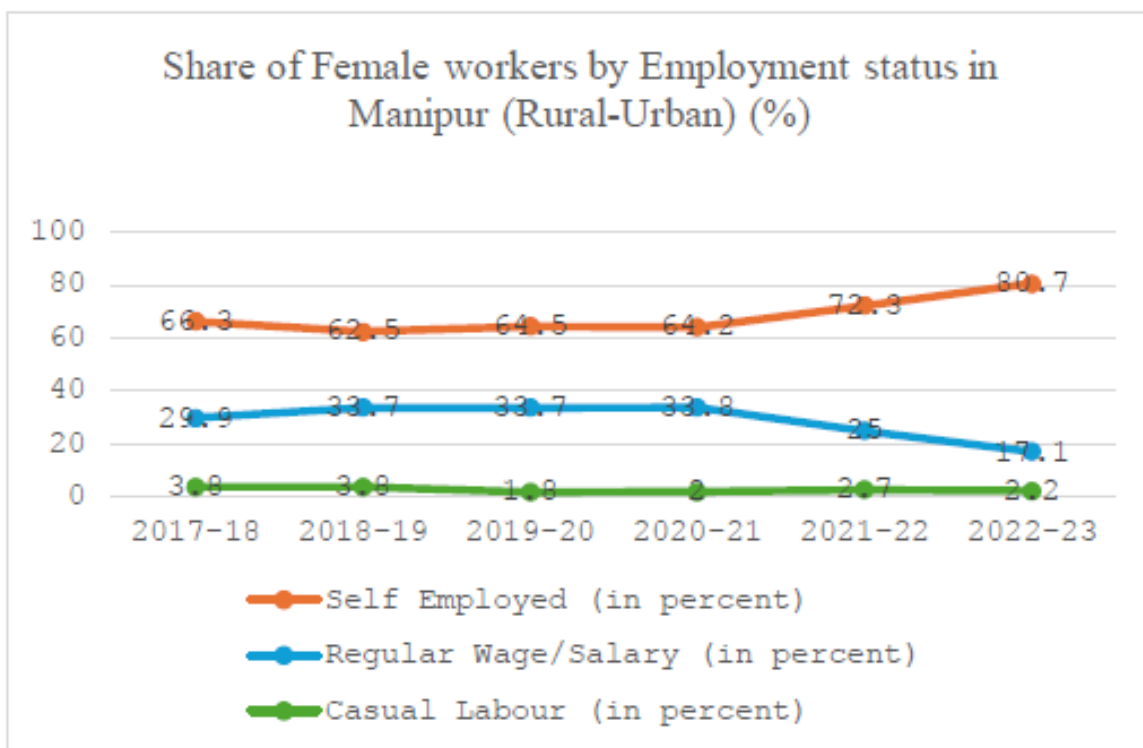
The disparities between the valley and hill regions are glaring. In the valleys, employment has gradually moved into informal services and household industries, while agriculture still dominates the hills. Infrastructure, education, and job market access explain much of this divergence. If you live in Imphal, you likely know someone working in retail, government, or transport. But in remote Ukhrul or Churachandpur, subsistence farming is still the norm. Without inclusive development, these divides are only set to deepen.

SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER (Main Workers Only):

Sector	Male Workers (%)	Female Workers (%)
Cultivators	63.1% (388,414)	51.7% (185,617)
Agricultural labourers	15.3% (93,843)	5.9% (21,075)
Other sectors	21.6% (132,878)	42.4% (152,336)
Total	100% (615,135)	100% (359,028)

The occupational profile of women reflects both empowerment and constraint. A significant share of women work in non-agricultural sectors, especially informal services and retail, pointing toward rising female entrepreneurship. The famed Ima Keithel (Mother’s Market) is just one visible example. Yet the majority still remain within agricultural confines. Without targeted support—childcare, credit, skilling—most rural women will not escape the trap of low productivity work.

Figure 2. Share of Female workers by Employment status in Manipur (Rural-Urban)

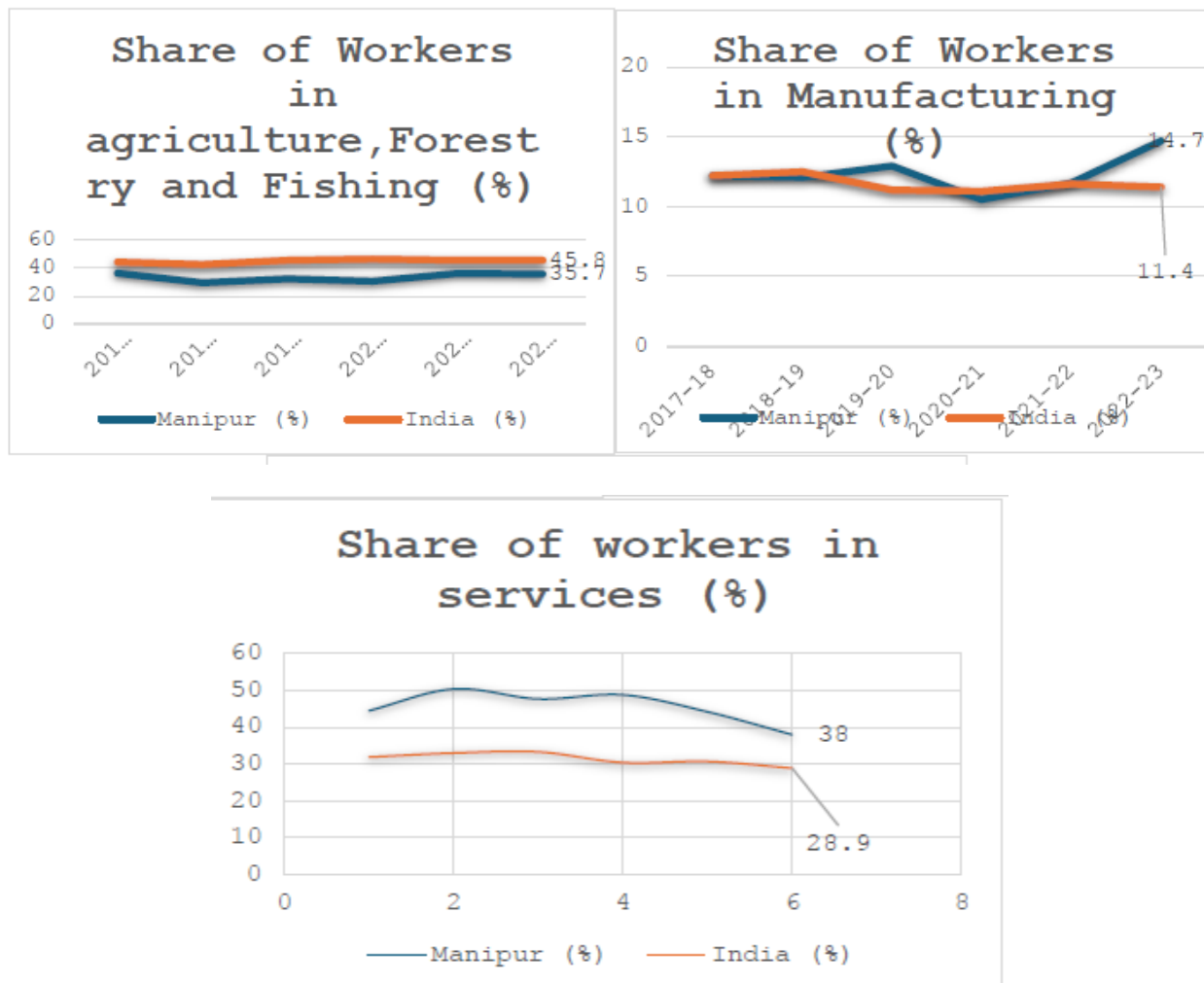


Looking at the PLFS annual report 2022-23, the share of female workers by employment status in Manipur (rural- urban) shows a pattern in the state's occupational structure concerning women in particular. From 2017-2018 to 2022-23, there been a shift in how women engage with the workforce. The proportion of self employed women has been increasing significantly from 66.3% to a whopping 80.7% in 2022-23. One may consider this is a sign of growing entrepreneurship or economic freedom among Manipuri women but one cannot help but wonder this surge is more of a force than a choice since regular wage/salary employment declined from 33.8% to 17.1% over the same period. This also indicates a strong possibility of pushing women to informal services, often in unorganised sectors. Even the casual labour segment, which one might expect to absorb displaced agricultural workers or underemployed youth, remains largely stagnant. Hovering around 2% to 3%, its insignificance suggests that neither infrastructure nor

public works projects have expanded in a way that could meaningfully impact employment figures. This again points to the missing industrial link in Manipur’s economic evolution.

OVERALL TRANSFORMATION TRENDS (based on Periodic Labour Force Survey, PLFS Annual Report 2022-2023)

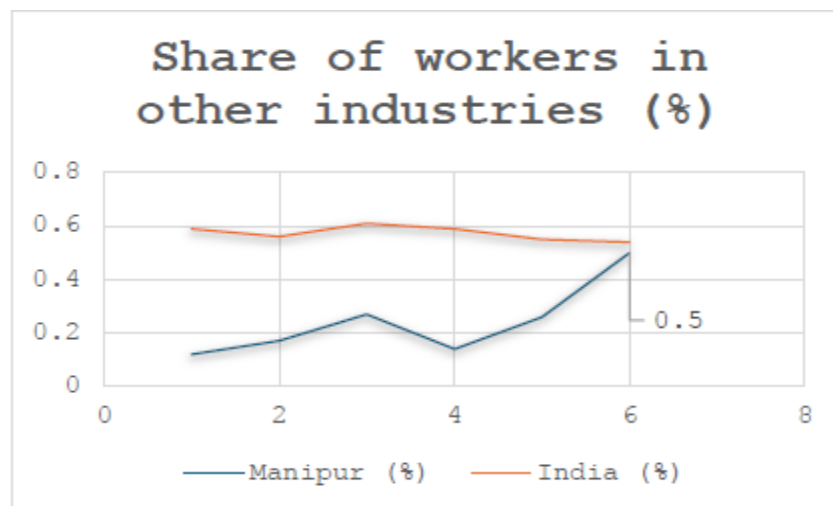
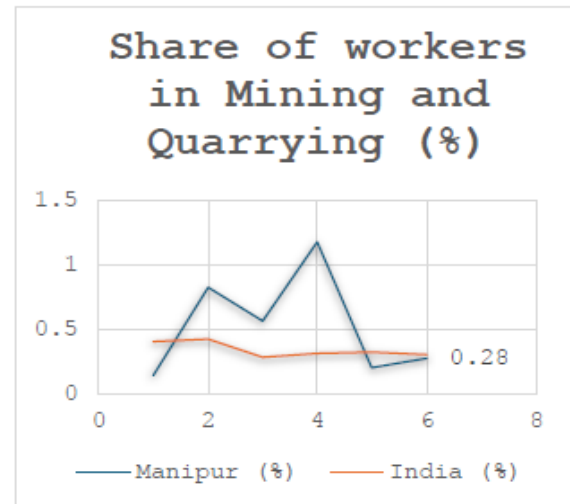
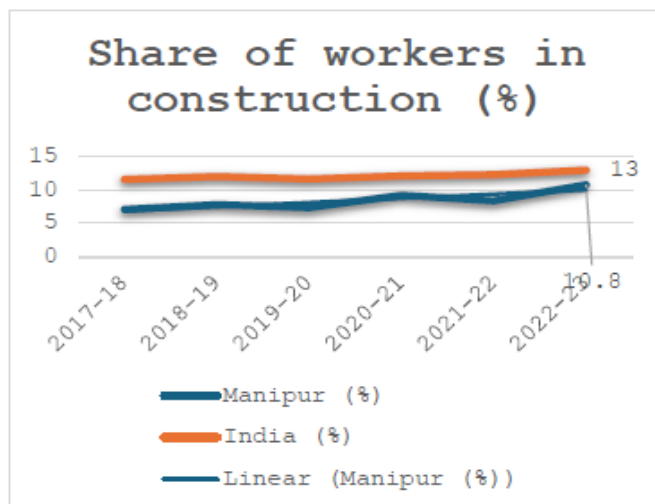
The annual report of PLFS (2017-2023) shows a disturbing and yet concerning shift. Looking at the overall share of workers in different sectors, first it seems that the state appears to be experiencing a positive transition following a decline in agricultural employment and a rise in both manufacturing and services. However this surface level narrative data masks a deeper structural vulnerabilities.



There is a gradual decline in the Primary Sector but it is still a prominent shift. Even though there irregularity in the trend, Agriculture, forestry and fishing continue to dominate Manipur

Workforce. It can be seen that from a share of around 36.8% in 2017-2018, employment in this sector drops to around 31.5% in 2020-21, before rising again to 35.7% in 2022-23. This oscillation is mainly due to economic instability driven by pandemic-related disruptions. Comparing with the all India share the state is still relatively less agrarian than the national average.

On the other, the transition in the service sector can be termed as a premature leap. As of 2022-23, the state share of workers in services is 38% which is far above the national average of 28.9%. This premature leap into services without a stable industrial base might be leading to underemployment or concentration in the informal services sector failing to provide a productivity gains associated with structural transformation.



The most deceptive trend lies in the manufacturing share of workers. There seems to be a whooping increase in the share of workers in the manufacturing sector surpassing the national average of 11.4% with 14.7% in the year 2022-23. This might suggest a strengthening this particular sector. However, looking closely, this growth is heavily bolstered by employment in the construction sector which is almost 11% in 2022-23. This increase in employment is basically consists of informal, unorganised, seasonal, disguised and low-skilled in nature which is being subsumed under manufacturing sector. This is mainly composed of unorganised daily wage earners. Thus the growth in the share of the manufacturing sector worker is not from the formal, organised industrial based manufacturing sector or value-added production. This kind of sectorial growth lacks sustainability and fails to lay the basic foundation for long term development of the economy. And thus the growth in this particular share of workforce is just a mere grim illusion of the sectoral transformation.

Policy Recommendation:

The above empirical evidence highlighted a huge disparity in the shares of different sectors of the economy resulting in unprecedented growth of the service sector and neglecting the manufacturing sector which is considered to be the backbone of the economy. Hence, to mitigate these issues and enable a robust hub of manufacturing industries in the state of Manipur, the following policy measures are proposed which are region-sensitive policy for informed decision making which focused on localised skilling, creating industrial parks with pre-approved land titles in non-conflict zones, incentivise investment that can extend benefits of the North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) to micro-units.

- Creation of a dedicated "Manipur Industrial Development Portal" for seamless online business approvals (licenses, environmental clearances), linkages of educational institutions with manufacturing firms, providing subsidies to local production units, promotion of agro- base enterprises and its allied activities, commercialization of agricultural products, etc.
- In addition, some of the concrete measures can come in the form of prioritising the credit flow to all Enterprises by Commercial, Co-operative, Rural Banks, State Financial Cooperation and Financial Institutions. Establishing a good mechanism to provide support and linkages for marketing.
- The State Government shall establish a “Land Bank” for industrial use.
- Increasing the number of specific Handicrafts Villages with common facility centres for the promotion of handicraft base on available local resources and skills. Single window clearance to all proposals from investors for establishing Manufacturing Industries.

- To create an Industrial Infrastructure Development Authority for the State of Manipur. Devise suitable schemes for self-employment of unemployed youths by setting up new ventures in manufacturing sectors. Priority to be given for establishment of market complexes and exhibition centres, design centre for handicrafts.
- The State government can extent the setting up of the industrial states in all the districts of Manipur not limiting only to Imphal West District at Takhyelpat, Bishnupur and Thoubal District, with financial assistance from the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium enterprises and the North East Council (NEC).
- Full and robust implementation of Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) and the State Government can increase the number of incubator centres and increase the package from Rs. 792.48 Lakhs in the year 2016-17 which was released by the Ministry of MSME under (ASPIRE) A Scheme for promotion, Innovation Rural Industries and Entrepreneurship.

By highlighting those recommendation this paper contributes to larger insight into the shifting employment landscape of Manipur helps build strong evidence for more targeted and region-sensitive employment policies.

Concluding Reflection:

We all must agree to conclude that without the growth in Secondary sector, there is little scope for value addition to raw materials, minimal job creation for technically skilled youth, and almost no buffer for absorbing those leaving agriculture.

The data is more than just numbers. While the state's occupational structure is changing, the pace and direction raise difficult questions. Without meaningful investment in skilling, entrepreneurship, and rural infrastructure, many will continue to be stuck in the twilight zone between tradition and transformation. Unless policies explicitly target the development of value-added industries, agro-processing units, and formal manufacturing, Manipur risks entangled itself in a dual economy: with one foot in unstable agriculture and another in low- productive informal services and construction. This model is unlikely to yield long-term gains in employment quality or economic resilience. Women leaving the paddy fields to sell vegetables in town markets, youth abandoning ancestral farms to drive auto-rickshaws or work in telecom outlets signifying a trend of unorganised working culture which are not the tales of economic transformation, but of survival in a stagnant system of economy.

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