

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SERICULTURE IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

The Indian economy is said to experience a significant prevalence of poverty in rural areas, as well as unemployment and underemployment. Rural poverty manifests in various ways and is a far more intricate issue. Addressing poverty necessitates effective policy measures and suitable technological choices that can enhance agricultural productivity while preserving the productivity of natural resources. The creation of rural industries such as sericulture can be highly beneficial in generating new employment opportunities and offering additional income. As a labor-intensive industry rooted in agriculture, this sector can significantly help to curb migration from rural regions to cities.

Keywords: Sericulture Activities, Economic Empowerment etc.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Sericulture" originates from the word "Su" (Si), which translates to silk. Sericulture, which involves the cultivation of silkworms, their food plants, the rearing of these silkworms, and silk production, is fundamentally an agro-industry and a lucrative venture encompassing numerous activities that significantly influences the economic future of rural communities. Sericulture involves breeding silkworms to create cocoons, which serve as the raw material for producing raw silk. Sericulture began in China, where it was kept confidential for more than 3000 years before spreading to India, Korea, and other countries in Asia and Europe. Women who are socio-economically marginalized encounter numerous challenges to their empowerment. Tribal women encounter difficulties and obstacles in achieving a sustainable livelihood and a respectable life because of environmental deterioration. Women participate in various activities within agriculture, dairy, poultry, beekeeping, mushroom farming, fish breeding, social forestry, and sericulture. Women are involved in numerous areas, but their participation is predominantly seen in marginal and casual jobs due to a lack of skills, illiteracy, limited mobility, and absence of personal status. Indeed, women typically encounter a dual burden during the development process, one related to household responsibilities and the other linked to economic activities. The ongoing rise in prices has driven women to pursue income-generating activities either at home or outside to ensure their families remain financially stable. India is home to 12.7 crore employed women, with 90% of them working in the unorganized sector. Women primarily work in the informal sector.

Karnataka is the top producer of silk in India, playing a significant role in the nation's overall mulberry silk output. Conventional farming practices frequently relegated women's work to unpaid or unacknowledged positions. Sericulture, on the other hand, particularly allocates

labor, offering an excellent opportunity for rural women to create independent sources of cash income in or around their homes. By shifting from passive workers to engaged economic participants, women greatly change household financial dynamics.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the participation of rural women in different activities of sericulture in the study area
2. To analyze the economic empowerment of women through sericulture activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will be planned to assess the participation of rural women in sericulture who are engaged in sericulture activities in Kolar district of Karnataka. To analyze the participation of rural women in sericulture aspects like participation of rural women in different activities of sericulture, share of work load carried out by women in different activities of sericulture, generation of employment for rural women through different activities of sericulture will be critically studied. Purposefully random sampling method will be followed to conduct the survey. According to Kolar district statistical report 6765 women have been involved in sericulture activities, out of 6765 women 5% sample will be selected for the field survey i.e., 338. The sample rural women those who are engaged in the following sericulture activities in Kolar District of Karnataka will be selected;

- Mulberry Cultivation
- Silkworm rearing
- Cocoon marketing
- Post-Cocoon process

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- **Kunal Sarkar, Mahasankar Majumdar and Arundhati Ghosh (2017)** in their study on “Critical Analysis on Role of Women in Sericulture Industry” have observed that Sericulture is providing stable income to many rural agricultural families and a livelihood to scores of landless farm and non-farm women laborers giving much economic strength. Unless these benefits also bring in social development and improvement in the lifestyle of these families, they cannot serve the very purpose of development.
- **Sarkar, Majumdar and Ghosh (2017)** conducted a study in few villages of Murshidabad district, West Bengal, to assess the role of women workers in sericulture which included observations on the share of work load borne by the women. For example, mulberry garden management needs higher share of women workers than establishment of mulberry garden. Silkworm rearing, reeling and twisting also require proportionately higher percentage of women workers.
- **Ninga Setty.H.H., Lasya Gopal and K P Chinnaswamy (2017)** in the joint study of “Empowerment of Women Through Tasar Sericulture Activities in Jharkhand State” have opined that Sericulture is a household activity and the involvement of family members and contributions of women in carrying out sericulture is widely accepted. As a cottage industry, sericulture provides ample work for women in rural areas, particularly in silkworm rearing and reeling, spinning, weaving, while men largely work in the field. The involvement of women in different activities of sericulture is

about 53 % and their contribution in the on-farm activities understandably is lower than that in post-cocoon activities.

- **Raghunathan et al. (2019)** opined that extension directed at women workers bears the potential to increase the technical efficiency and improve adoption of technologies which benefit women. Again interventions aiming to women getting updated with recent technical breakthrough may be achieved through empowering women and enhancing their decision making role. Increased decision making role can even reduce wage gap (Hertz et.al., 2009) and increase the adoption of drudgery reducing technology (Khan, Kishore and Joshi, 2016). Thus, productivity improvement seems to be impossible without empowerment in household industry like sericulture.
- **Rubia Bukhari, Himpreet Kour and Abdul Aziz (2019)** in the joint study of “Women and the Indian Sericulture Industry” have observed that the promoting women entrepreneurs in Sericulture will lead to economic development and empowerment of women. Sericulture is also providing employment for women in rural area. Sericulture is labour intensive activity and it also help to women ‘s for self-development. Sericulture is the best occupation for women ‘s in changing situation of environment. It is possible to have the women empowerment through sericulture industry. Sericulture is ideally suited for land and labour abundant economy like India, not only because it is low capital intensive but also because it is female labour intensive.
- **Roy, Chandan and Roy Mukherjee, Sanchari (2020)** in the study of “A study on productivity empowerment of women intensive sericulture sector of West Bengal” has observed that Sericulture is a women intensive sector where 60% of the workers are either family workers or hired female workers. Productive skill makes the presence of women invincible both in pre and post cocoon sectors. This larger participation is expected to raise their level of empowerment too. Higher level of empowerment is expected to induce the woman to usher improved productive technology. However, field survey in Malda districts of West Bengal reveals a complete bleak picture. Neither productivity level, nor the empowerment level has reached the desired level, which calls for an immediate intervention and revision of policies.

RESEARCH GAP

The review of literature related to the economic empowerment of women through sericulture sector in India has focused on different aspects of empowerment and performance of sericulture sector. However, these studies provide only some inputs of the trends of performance of sericulture sector and also empowerment of women. This has prompted the need for a detailed study with proper research methodology to evaluate the economic empowerment of women through sericulture sector. Only few studies have been conducted about economic empowerment of women through sericulture sector in Karnataka in general and in Kolar District in particular. In order to fill this gap, the present study will be undertaken.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF SERICULTURE

- **Home-Based Work:** Allows women to manage household duties while earning money near or inside their homes.
- **High Female Labor Share:** Accounts for nearly 60% of total labor, heavily featuring tasks like leaf harvesting, silkworm feeding, and cocoon harvesting.

- **Self-Help Group (SHG) Integration:** High participation in SHGs boosts financial literacy, savings, and community collaboration.
- **Financial Security:** Generates regular crop cycles that yield dependable cash flow for small and marginal farming families.

Challenges Faced by Women

- **Dual Workload:** Juggling intensive farm labor with heavy domestic chores leads to time poverty and physical strain.
- **Restricted Roles:** Limited participation in outdoor or technical tasks like pesticide application, land preparation, and open market cocoon trading.
- **Resource Gaps:** Unequal access to specialized training, credit facilities, and ergonomic tools.

Government Support and Schemes

- **Subsidies:** The Department of Sericulture provides up to 90% subsidies for women making cocoon handicrafts from pierced cocoons.
- **Financial Aid:** Offers a 50% interest subsidy on loans taken by women for sericulture activities.

INSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

To bridge these structural gaps, targeted policy measures are essential. The Department of Sericulture in Karnataka has instituted progressive frameworks, including a 90% subsidy structure earmarked for women entrepreneurs focusing on value-added cocoon handicrafts. However, recommendations for future development include:

- Establishing women-only localized cocoon trading sub-markets to ensure transparent transactions.
- Designing and distributing gender-friendly, ergonomic tools to reduce physical strain during rearing and leaf chopping.
- Implementing mobile-based training modules directly tailored to rural women through local SHG channels.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SERICULTURE

Karnataka has been the leading producer of mulberry silk—accounting for more than 50% of its production in the country. This state is now regarded as the “Silk Bowl of India.” Andhra Pradesh comes next to Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh, sericulture has proved to be a money-spinner for many middle-class families. Except for Hyderabad district, almost all the districts in the State have taken to sericulture activity.

Sericulture is an extremely labor intensive industry and occupies a pivotal position from the point of providing employment and additional income to weaker sections. In this context, the transformation of sericulture industry from subsistence type of operation to a modern scientific system requires the attention of all major players like policy makers, administrators, and personnel associated with the industry. Here, the word personnel mainly refer to women laborers who are the full-time workers and who look after silkworm rearing and management and whose contribution is more than that of men in this area. It has been reported that women contribute about 50% and 60% of labor to mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing, respectively.

Women are mostly favored because of their industrious nature. They are employed in a mulberry garden or silkworm rearing or in a grainage or in weaving or in a garment-making factory, and so on. As mentioned earlier, sericulture offers a vast scope to augment the family income. Women are actively engaged in the mulberry fields for the removal of weeds and in leaf plucking. The leaf plucking is a skilled and delicate operation. The workers must have full knowledge about which leaves to be plucked to suit different ages of silkworms. Women go to the fields in the morning for plucking the mulberry leaves and return to the rearing house before noon.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sericulture is essentially a village-based industry that provides employment to both skilled and unskilled labor. At present, it is estimated that every hectare of mulberry plants provides employment to about 16 persons. Although sericulture is considered a subsidiary occupation, technological innovation has made its cultivation possible on an intensive scale, making it capable of generating huge revenues. All family members, irrespective of gender and age, can contribute to the success of sericulture and, in this sense; it can be considered a home-based industry.

Today, mulberry is being cultivated in about 0.192 million hectares in India. Around 6 million people from around 800,000 farm families are engaged in sericulture activities, concentrated mainly in the three southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The 2020 Mulberry Silk Production Statistics estimated the world silk production to be 98,725 metric tons. China's contribution to world silk production is 80% (78,000 metric tons), and the share of Indian silk production is 16,245 metric tons (13%). China and India together account for 93% of world silk production. A total of 796,685 sericulture families from 53,814 sericulture villages contributed to the production of raw silk. Karnataka, followed by Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu, contribute to the bulk of production. Export earnings from silk and silk goods were Rs. 33,383,500,000. The market share of Indian silk exports in the global silk trade is 4% to 5%.

CONCLUSION

The present study will mainly explore the role of women in sericulture and includes the concept of work, division of labour, segregation of occupations, and dimension of labour and household activities. This study will further discuss the preparation of women toward silkworm, feeding and so on. Women are mostly favored because of their industrious nature. They are employed in a mulberry garden or silkworm rearing or in a grain age. Coming to the post cocoon technology, the involvement of the women is greater, commencing from silk reeling, weaving and garment manufacturing industry. However, their work has not always been properly recognized or suitably rewarded.

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