

Employment Generation and Role of Women in Sericulture

Anisha Satsangi

Assistant professor
Department of Applied Business
Economics
D.E.I Deemed University,
Dayalbagh, Agra

Abstract

"Sericulture is not to hurt any living thing". - Mahatma Gandhi

In developing countries like India, agriculture and agro-based industries play a vital role in the development of rural economy. The limited cash returns from a low per capita availability of cultivable land on the one hand, and serious seasonality effect in income due to the biological nature of agricultural production on the other, have made the rural producers to look for alternative opportunities for livelihood. Given both the off-farm and on-farm employment potential of the sericulture industry, it can nullify the seasonality impact in the rural economy. Accordingly, agriculture and sericulture are adopted simultaneously by the agriculturists in regions where the ecological conditions are favorable. Sericulture industry is more suitable to women as it largely requires in-house (off-farm) operations. Requirement of very less capital investment makes this industry more lucrative to the rural entrepreneurs in India. Thus, the sericulture industry plays a crucial role in the alleviation of rural unemployment and poverty. It is also a source of foreign exchange for the country. In any discourse on sociology and anthropology, one fact that clearly emerges is that women can generally be trusted to perform their duties with utmost care and attention. This is more so in the case of agriculture and allied activities. No wonder women are playing a very important role in the sericulture industry. Their qualities like maternal instincts and loving care of those under their charge prove to be very helpful in the successful breeding of silk worms. The sericulture industry has opened up phenomenal employment avenue's and helped woman to become important players' in the decision-making process whether in the household or in the community at large. The active involvement of women is very essential for the success of the any community development initiative. This has been proved on many occasions all over the world—more so in the developing countries. For instance, the success of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Andhra Pradesh and other states of India is all due to the active role played by women. Sericulture is an important means for generating employment, income enhancement crop enterprises, and is a most appropriate household activity. In all these activities, women have shown their mettle and performed their tasks most skillfully. In the village under study, women are playing an important role in silk rearing and processing activities.

Sericulture is a labour-intensive industry in all its phases namely, cultivation of silkworm food plants, silkworm rearing, silk reeling, and other post-cocoon processes such as twisting, dyeing, weaving, printing and finishing. It provides employment to approximately 7.63 million persons, most of them being small and marginal farmers, or tiny & household industry mainly in the hand reeling and hand weaving sections. Sericulture is widely practiced in three southern States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; in the North Eastern Region (NER); in the tribal areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa; and in Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal. The cocoons and silk processing industry has traditionally existed in clusters in areas not necessarily coinciding with the sericulture areas in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Bihar. Reeling of silk is more widespread, with different clusters/traditionally producing distinctive designs and weavers, mainly in sarees. India has the distinction of cultivating all the four commercially known varieties of silk, namely, Mulberry, Tasar, Eri and Muga

Keywords Sericulture, women, agro based industry, mulberry, taser, eri, production, demand, role of women, weaving etc.

Introduction

Employment Generation in Sericulture

Sericulture is an agro-based industry. It involves rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk,

which is the yarn obtained out of cocoons spun by certain species of insects. The major activities of sericulture comprises of food-plant cultivation to feed the silkworms which spin silk cocoons and reeling the cocoons for unwinding the silk filament for value added benefits such as processing and weaving. 60 lakh persons are engaged in various sericulture activities in the country. It is estimated that Sericulture can generate employment @ 11 man days per kg of raw silk production (in on-farm and off-farm activities) throughout the year. Out of which more than 6 persons are women. More than 60.00 lakh persons are employed as full time workers in the production chain out of which 35-40 lakh persons are women. This potential is *par-excellence* and no other industry generates this kind of employment, specially in rural areas, hence, sericulture is used as a tool for rural reconstruction.

Sericulture was found to be the top sector in generating jobs while yielding profitable income, when compared to other agro sectors in India, according to a field study conducted by Central Silk Board (CSB). In the study conducted in select agro clusters in Tamil Nadu, the CSB has compared sericulture with major crops such as paddy, sugarcane, turmeric, maize, and vegetables. According to a recent study by the scientists in Central Sericulture Research and Training Institute (CSRTI) in Mysore, Sericulture generated 532 man days from a one-year period in its activities such as garden establishment, leaf production, silkworm rearing, and marketing. Of this, 319 man days were utilised from own family source and 212 man days were hired. Sugarcane stood in the second place by one-acre of sugarcane field generating 296 man days, of which 26 man days were from own family sources and 269 man days were hired. Turmeric followed, which offered employment to the extent of 133 man days, including 43 man days were from own family, while the remaining were hired. The employment generation for paddy plus vegetables from one acre was estimated to be 313 man days, in which 90 man days were from own family source.

The major advantage in sericulture was that five to six crops could be harvested from one acre of mulberry garden during one year, generating more jobs. The report also said that sericulture suits well to provide regular employment opportunities for marginal and small landholders under the union government promoted **Employment Guarantee Programme** in the rural areas. Sericulture would also achieve the twin objectives of providing employment and assuring periodical income to farmers throughout the year.

Women constitute over 60% of those employed in down-stream activities of sericulture in the country. This is possible because sericulture activities starting from mulberry garden management, leaf harvesting and silkworm rearing is more effectively taken up by the women folk. Even silk reeling industry including weaving is largely supported by them.

Role of Women in Sericulture

It is a very common scene in the rural areas that women by far shoulder more responsibility than men. All household work is done by women. They go every morning and afternoon to fetch water from villager

wells, rivers and minarets. Women do all the cooking and cleaning of the house, and in their spare time help men folk with farm work also. They generally do the planting, hoeing, reaping, carrying grain, winnowing, hulling and fitting the grain stores. They also milk the cows and the buffaloes.

Sericulture technique and operations are complicated it does not require hard labour silkworms being delicate have to be handled by delicate hands with proper care. Thus, the entire process of rearing needs expertise, high skill and patience. Women possess the above qualities and therefore are more suitable than men. Eighty per cent of the sericulture activities except strenuous and hard jobs like digging, ploughing and carrying heavy loads, can be carried out by women independently. They also share the tasks of weeding, leveling, inter-cultivation, pruning and irrigation along with men. Certain jobs such as moth testing and silk reeling are exclusively suited for women, as these jobs require sharp and keen eyes, high skill, patience and perseverance.

Deep seated social taboos traditions of the society do not permit the majority of rural women to work outdoors, and do not give an opportunity to contribute for the economic growth in the rural areas. Sericulture activities provide a perfect choice for the women because of the very nature of the activities that can take place close to the habitations. However the contribution of women in the sector is invisible due to various constraints and they can be summarized as follows.

- Lack of women oriented approaches in research, planning, implementation and evaluation of schemes.
- Lack of congenial marketing services in the farm and non-farm Sectors.
- Inadequacy of women extension workers
- Methodologies, time duration, location of training programmes put constraints on women's participation.
- Lack of consistency in the projects implementation
- Lack of access to infrastructure like land, water, electricity, machinery, credit for working capital, attitude of people working in the financial institutions pose limitations.

In order to overcome the limitations for women's participation, CSB constituted a study to empower women in sericulture. Initially an amount of Rs.10.00 crore for set a part for exclusive women's projects. The subcommittee studied the role of women in various activities of the sector and identified several implementation gaps. The committee has also recommended a 3- pronged strategy for improving the situation.

General guidelines

1. Include creation of women development cells in CSB and DOS offices.
2. Increased subsidies in the XI plan schemes
3. Research focus of women friendly technologies
4. GIS and MIS formats to assess the impact and concurrently evaluate the schemes.
5. Convergence approach with Forest / Rural development /Women and child welfare / Industries / Tribal welfare / Marketing / Finance / Insurance sectors / Energy departments to bring

in coordinated approach and action plans to maximize the benefits in favour of women.

Exclusive women oriented programmes / Schemes

1. Establishment of kisan nurseries in Government assigned lands by SHGS
2. Establish women TSCs (Technical Service Center's) and Sericulture technology parks and CRC's (Chawki Rearing Center's).
3. Solar power supply to women managed reeling units.
4. Health insurance to workers – Promotion of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides and non-chlorine disinfectants.
5. Training cum study visits to women and facilities for husbands to participate
6. Design market infrastructure to favour women's participation.
7. Create "Women development fund" and provide interest subsidies on credit.
8. 2008-09 to be declared as the year of Women in sericulture.

Integrated approaches for taking up exclusive projects for women

1. Plan for long term projects that are consistent
2. Externally aided projects integrating water Shed development / Agriculture department (ATMA) / Joint forest management / Waste land development / Tribal development / Bio-technology / Science & technology / Vanya silks projects etc.,
3. Public private participation in the post-cocoon sector and contract farming with NGOs and corporate participation.
4. Promote direct linkages between rearer / reeler / twister / weaver by modifying the stringent regulations and liberalization of labour laws.

Silk is considered as a luxury item along with gems and jewelry. It would therefore enjoy this support and patronage from the upper strata and growing middle class of the India society. Silk saree is an important bridal wear and hand woven silk are extremely popular in the west and there is no threat of quota like other fabrics. The light weight silk is gaining popularity amongst urban working women in India and in the fashion conscious western society. India holds monopoly in the production of yarn dyed silk fabrics. Campaign approach for promotion of Indian silk amongst Indians and International communities with slogan that "Sericulture and Silk for the women by the women" is the need of the hour. Micro credit campaign for the women self groups is equally gaining popularity and India has an advantage of having a large platform of well organized women self help groups / networks / associations who are always ready to receive new ideas and work with commitment to help themselves and thereby helping the society for the larger development of the nation. The CSB and DOS should utilize the women SHGs (Self Help Group's) as a launch pad for promoting women's participation in the sericulture sector.

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