

Sericulture Industry - A Women Dominated Industry: Case Study in Purulia District

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Abstract

Purulia district has years old heritage of sericulture industry. Likewise other countries and other parts of our country sericulture industry are also women dominated in the district. In present write up the role of women in sericulture industry in Purulia district has been highlighted in terms of physical and economic contribution in different stages of activities of the industries.

Keywords: Sericulture, women dominance, net income.

The reduction of rural poverty continues to be a mission and goal of the developing countries like India as the majority of the poor population still resides in the countryside. The World Bank, for example, estimates that more than 70 % of the world's poor live in rural areas¹.

The main reasons for backwardness are lack of application of technology, higher rate of illiteracy, small land holding size, insufficient capital, low rate of investments, poor incentives, the inadequate farm infrastructure, limited market, stagnant prices of agricultural products, over dependence on climate and lack of information network etc. It is therefore necessary to focus on a broader spectrum of the rural economy. The establishment of rural based industries like sericulture, in particular, can be very effective in creating new job opportunities and providing supplemental income. Being a rural agro-based labour intensive industry sericulture industry can play vibrant role in improving a rural economy and society.

Sericulture, among other counter parts of weaving industry has its origin in our ancient history. Rearing of silkworms in order to get silk and silk items is gone through several phases. These are cultivation of food plants for silk worms, rearing of silk worms, and production of cocoons (Pre-Cocoon stage), reeling of silk yarns, weaving of silk cloths and finally marketing of silk products(Post Cocoon stage). The activities involved in above mentioned phases are known as sericulture industry. In simple words the activities involved in order to get silk items is known as sericulture industry.

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Generation of employment is a burning issue to the national planners. Since our early days of independence sericulture industry has become a moderate source of employment generation.

Numerous studies have brought out the vital role that women have been playing in all farm-related activities—ranging from land preparation to marketing. They constitute a higher proportion of the labour force in the agricultural sector than men. However, they are generally not active in decision making in the community

Sericulture, as a crop enterprise, has emerged as one of the dominant fields in the theoretical and methodological understanding in the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology in India. Thus, sociological analysis of sericulture and its emergence in the development literature gives us an idea of the activity which would trigger further theoretical and critical studies. Here an attempt has been made to understand the sociological view of sericulture and women's role in the development of the enterprise and also the community.

It has been seen that the sericulture activity brings regular income to the community without any bias of caste, creed, gender, or religion. A remarkable feature of this activity is its egalitarianism—sericulture farmers, rich and poor, earn the same income from it. As women have a crucial role in the activities of sericulture, it equally creates opportunities and make them independent socially, economically, politically, and otherwise.

Sericulture is an agro-based cottage industry involving interdependent rural, semi-urban and urban-based activities in which estimated participation of women is about 60 %. Thus, in contrast to any other agro-based profession the role of women in sericulture industry is dominating which will be helpful for improving the status of women in family enterprises. Thus another burning issue of the day, empowerment of women can be moved forward to a reasonable extent with the development of sericulture industry.

Reeling silk and spinning were always considered household duties for women, while weaving and embroidery were carried out in workshops as well as the home. In every silk-producing province the daughters, mothers and grandmothers of every family devoted a large part of the day for six months in a year to the feeding, tending and supervision of silkworms and to the unraveling, spinning, weaving, dyeing and embroidering of silk.

As per nature of activities basically four types of engagements are found in sericulture industry viz. farmer cum rearer, reeler, weaver and traders. Engagement of women as farmer cum rearer, reeler and even weaver is years old practice all over the globe. There is also ample scope for women to be directly involved in the industry as traders as sales girl if not otherwise. On the other hand, differently able persons are engaged in the industry as rearer, reeler and weaver from ancient days.

We may refer 1st sloka of 23rd chapter named as Textile Officer of Arthya sastra written by Channkya the minister of Chandra Gupta Mourya at about 300 B.C. In the said sloka the great minister directs the textile officer that widow, physically challenged women, temple lady, saint, convict, prostitutes, old aged maid servant of king and unfit as well as sent away temple ladies are to be engaged in reeling from wool, fine silk, cotton, rough mulberry silk etc.

The district, Purulia has proven track record of rich expertise in this industry. The district, Purulia is basically a tasar silk district. A negligible engagement is found in mulberry culture only in Government plants. Out of twenty blocks of the district 16 blocks have engagement in sericulture either in pre-cocoon stage or in post cocoon stage. In 2014-15 respective total plantation area, production of commercial cocoons and production of raw tasar silk were 5516.18 acres (2nd in the state following Bankura), 8254.36 kahan (3rd in the state following Bankura and Midnapore), and 8.833 M.T. (3rd in the state following Bankura and Birbhum).²

Against this unique feature of the industry in the following table we would like to show employment in different stages of the industry and employment of women and differently able persons as obtained from our field survey among the units in two blocks of Purulia District, viz, Raghunathpur-I and Manbazar-I. Respective joint engagement of Raghunathpur-I and Manbazar -I in pre-cocoon and post-cocoon stage are 62% and 96%. It signifies that these two areas may be considered as representative of the district.

Table No. 1: Table Showing Engagement of Human Resources in Different Stages in 2014-15³ (Unit: Man Days/Acre)

Years	Functions	RAGHUNATHPUR-I			MANBAZAR-I		
		Total	Women	Differently - abled men	Total	Women	Differently -abled persons
Pre-cocoon	Land preparation	27	13	0	27	12	0
	Planting saplings	9	5	0	9	4	0
	Application of fertilizers	9	0	0	9	4	0
	Irrigation	23	0	0	0	0	0
	Upkeep	16	8	4	12	7	3
	Collection of cocoon	43	22	0	34	18	0
	Sorting of cocoon	27	10	4	22	11	5
Post-cocoon	Boiling of cocoon	203	150	20	237	142	18

	Reeling of silk yarn	567	425	65	473	355	55
	Dyeing of silk yarn	57	12	0	47	10	0
	Spinning	38	20	7	32	17	5
	Weaving	47	5	7	39	4	5
	Printing and stitching	15	7	4	13	6	3
	Marketing	25	0	0	21	4	.0
Total		1186	677	111	975	594	94
% age			57%	9.35%		60.92%	9.64%

Source: Field Survey by the Author

The above table shows that women dominate the activities like preparation of land, planting of saplings, upkeep, collection of cocoon, sorting of cocoon, boiling of cocoon, reeling of silk yarn and spinning of the same. It is not the inability of women which restricts their dominance over other activities, but the male dominance over the social structure and conservativeness of the society of Purulia.

The above mentioned table also shows that total man days generated per acre is considerably moderate. Engagement of women and differently able persons are notably high. Highlighting this unique feature of the industry it is appealed to the policy makers to make necessary arrangements for increasing involvement of women and differently able person in the industry. This can be used as an effective tool for providing economic independence to this section of the society.

Women engaged in sericulture make a considerable contribution in family income. The under mentioned table portrays the same:

Table No. 2: Table Showing Net Income of the Families Engaged In Sericulture in Sample Areas from Rearing, Reeling, Weaving And Trading In Last Five Years³ (Unit: Rs)

Year	Rearing	Reeling	Weaving	Trading
2010-11	521169	677613	2331364	2847080
2011-12	552555	755346	2569421	3271948
2012-13	755955	833687	2878146	3728753
2013-14	863298	918646	3156497	4211959
2014-15	1273947	1030662	3574643	4721007

Source: Field Survey by the Author

The above table shows a steady increase in the net income of the families engaged in sericulture in Raghunathpu-I and Manbazar-I. In spite of several hurdles the tasar culture of Purulia District is approaching its' golden era owing to following facts;

- Adoption of new technologies.

- Continuous support from both state and central government.
- Free supply of dfls at a larger volume.
- Reduction in the death ratio of dfls.
- Government intervention in the post cocoon stages in form of strengthening co-operative societies, establishing tasar cluster, running cocoon huts and direct purchase of cocoon, reeled yarns, weaved cloths and finished silk products.
- Export promotion.
- Stoppage of intervention of Chinese silk.
- Encouraging Afghans (popularly known as Kabuliwala) to come to the land of tasar as earlier.

In conclusion it may be said 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 as we have observed in the sample areas chosen. 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, reeling of tender threads, weaving and also trading.

The sericulture industry has opened up phenomenal employment avenues and helped women 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. 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 sample area under study, women are playing an important role in silk rearing and processing activities.

References

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