

Role of Women in Sericulture in India

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Abstract

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. The active involvement of women is very essential for the success of the any community development initiative. 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. It is conducted by the lightest labour. In fact, almost 90 percent of the Sericulture activities, except strenuous and hard jobs like land digging, ploughing and carrying heavy loads, women can carry on almost all works in mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, silk reeling, weaving, printing, etc. They also share the tasks of weeding, levelling, inter-cultivation, pruning and irrigation, raising of mulberry nursery, planting and establishment of mulberry also involve more women.

Introduction

Sericulture is one of the most labour-intensive sectors, combining activities of both agriculture (sericulture) and industry. It suits both marginal and small-scale land holders because of its low investments, high assured returns, short gestation period, rich opportunities for enhancement of income and creation of family employment round the year. It being an agro-based enterprise, plays a predominant role in shaping the economic destiny of the rural people. In India, women are mostly found as the major activist in sericulture, Presently, about 60% of total working force contributing in sericulture as worker in raising food plants, leaf collection, silkworm rearing, reeling/spinning and weaving is women. It is an occupation by women and for women because women form more than 60% of the workforce and 80% of silk is consumed by them.

Sericulture is one of such activities which open up the scope of inclusive development through promoting the marginal sections, known as 'women'.

Here, most of the works are carried out by women alone, both in terms of operations performed and time invested. Thus, in a way, women contribute a significant role in different spectrum of work activities as well as in decision-making. While in general perception, women's role is mostly confined in silkworm rearing, in reality it goes beyond. (Rubia *et al.* 2019).

Sericulture is unique in its vast employment and income generating potentialities. From a mere traditional practice, it has now shaped into a viable agroindustry. India contributes about 20% to the raw silk produced in the world, ranking next only to China. It occupies only 2.4% of the world's land area but it supports over 15% of the World's population. In India, women constitute almost half of the population (men and women ratio = 1.0: 0.933). About 380 million labour forces (15 – 59 years old) are available in India, of which 51% is in agriculture and agro based industry. Majority of labour force is village-based accounting for a total of about 264 million and rural women labour account for about 83 million, representing 31.5% of the rural labour force (Source: Census report, Govt. of India, 1991).

Role of women in Sericulture

As women has a crucial role in the activities of sericulture, it equally creates opportunities and make them independent socially, economically, politically. Women are mostly favoured 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. In the rearing house, it is not

uncommon to find women folk assisting men in feeding the silkworms. Feeding is an art very aptly done by the fair sex, though men do chopping of leaves. Women assist in bed changing and they do this with utmost tenderness, so as not to hurt the delicate worms.

Women have become experts in Chawki rearing, which is a highly delicate operation that needs to be performed with a great deal of care and patience. Good harvests depend on good Chawki rearing. When the silkworm matures and time is ripe for spinning the cocoons, it is again women who are employed for picking the ripe worms and putting them on the chandrikas (bamboo mountages on which silkworms are placed when they are just about to spin their cocoons).

Any overcrowding will lead to an increase in the spinning of double cocoons, which would be unsuitable for the production of high-grade raw silk. When the cocoons are ready for harvesting, it is mostly women who sort out the flimsy, stained, double, and deformed cocoons from the Chandrikas (Eswarappa, 2013).

Conclusion:

Sericulture also creates gainful employment for women and aged persons at homes at minimum

risk. Women has patience, perseverance, caring attitude and adaptability to new technologies have made her activities more dominant in sericulture and silk production. It 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. It is providing stable income to many rural agricultural families and a livelihood to scores of landless farm and non-farm women labourers 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.

References

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