



WOMEN WORKERS IN SILK INDUSTRY – A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

¹Dr. Marri Prema Jyothi and ²Kesarapu Govik

¹Forest Section Officer Huzoor Nagar Range, Suryapet District, Telangana, India

²Department of Sociology, University College of Arts & Social Sciences Osmania University, Hyderabad

ABSTRACT:

The silk industry is labour intensive and provides employment to a large number of workers combining both agriculture and industry, which provides for means of livelihood to a large section of the population i.e. mulberry cultivator, co-operative rearer, silkworm seed producer, farmer-cum-rearer, reeler, twister, weaver, hand spinners of silk waste, traders etc. Karnataka is in the first place among the states where sericulture has been the major occupation. An attempt has been made here to explain the correlation between the activities and living of the silk workers in general and women in particular. The study attempts to establish the relationship between the work and empowerment aspect of the women workers.

KEY WORDS: Silk Industry, Silk Workers, Sericulture, Occupation, Demographical Profile, Living Conditions

INTRODUCTION:

Silk is a way of life in India. Today, China and India are the two main producers of silk in the world, together manufacturing more than 60% of the world production each year. Sericulture is a cottage industry par excellence. The silk industry is labour intensive and provides employment to a large number of workers combining both agriculture and industry, which provides for means of livelihood to a large section of the population i.e. mulberry cultivator, co-operative rearer, silkworm seed producer, farmer-cum-rearer, reeler, twister, weaver, hand spinners of silk waste, traders etc. Karnataka is in the first place among the states where sericulture has been the major occupation.

Silk is one of the oldest fibres recognized by the human beings. The earliest existing references to silk production place it in China and that for nearly 3 millennia, the Chinese had a global domination on the production of silk. The Chinese kept the secret of the gorgeous and value added fabric they were producing from the rest of the world for more than 30 centuries. Tourists were searched thoroughly at border crossings and anyone caught trying to smuggle eggs, cocoons or silkworms out of the country were abruptly put to death. Demand for this exotic fabric ultimately created the lucrative trade route now known as the 'Silk Road' of which mention is made as early as 300 BC in the days of the Han Dynasty, taking silk westward and bringing gold, silver and wools to the East. Silk was exported along the Silk Road. This trade brought China a great wealth, but the Chinese did not give away the secret on how silk was produced. The Chinese could not keep their domination forever. The industry is said to have spread to Tibet when a Chinese princess, carrying silkworm eggs and mulberry tree seeds in her headdress, married the king of Khotan in Tibet. From Tibet the industry spread slowly to India and Persia.

OBJECTIVES:

- To study the socio-economic background of silk workers
- To study the role of women in silk industry in Sulibele



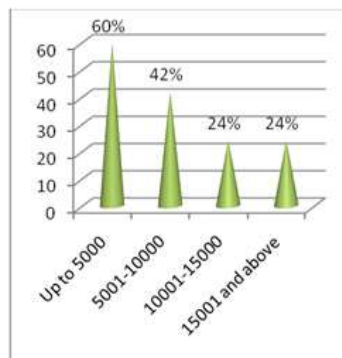
- To study the dimensions of empowerment among women through silk industry

METHODOLOGY:

- Primary data - Interview Schedule and Case study method.
- Secondary data - Library and Reference material, News Papers, Journals, e-resources etc.
- Data analysis and Interpretation based on the tables on different variables.

The sample has been selected on the basis of random-sampling method. Of the silk workers engaged in various activities, a sample of 150 people has been taken for the purpose of survey. Of the sample, 100 are women as they are mainly engaged in silk production at various stages. The poor and illiterate or less literate women have been known for engaging themselves almost out of necessity in certain economic activities which are predominantly manual, unskilled, and semi-skilled. These activities however are useful for them to earn the livelihood. An attempt has been made here to explain the correlation between the activities and living of the silk workers in general and women in particular. It also tries to establish the relationship between the work and empowerment aspect of the women workers.

INCOME			
Sl. No	Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
1	Up to 5000	60	40
2	5001-10000	42	28
3	10001-15000	24	16
4	15001 and above	24	16
Total		150	100



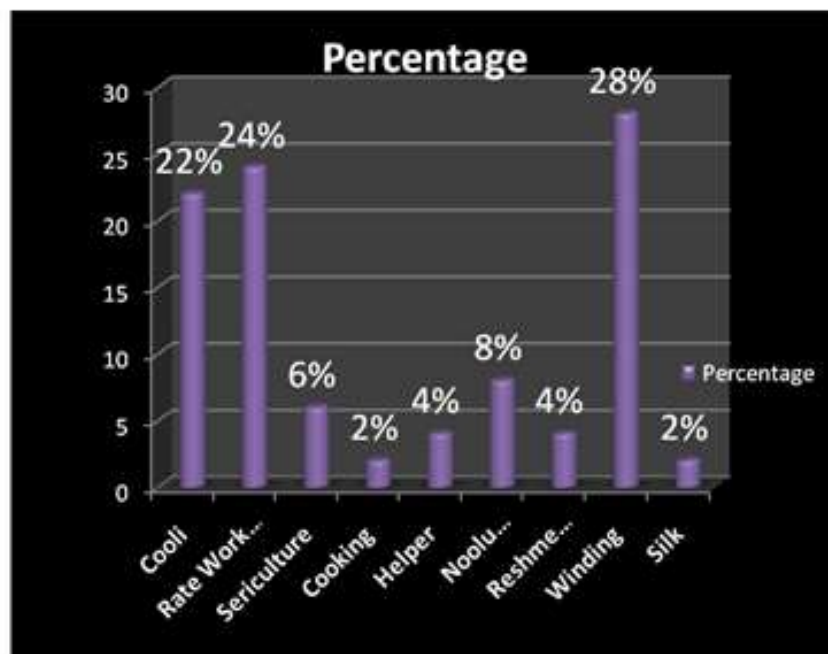
Low income group constitute 40 per cent of the sample and it is important to note here that about 70 per cent of the women workers come under the low income group and given the increasing the cost of living and the rise in prices of the essential goods and services, the income less than 5,000 is not sufficient. 28 per cent of the total sample represents the lower-middle income group of the sample and about 30 percent of the women workers fall in this category. This indicates the fact that women are mostly engaged in low paid activities and also they are less paid compared to their male counterparts.

THE NATURE OF WORK BEING DONE			
Sl.No	Nature of Work	Frequency	Percentage
1	Cooli	33	22
2	Rate Work (Spinning wheel)	36	24
3	Sericulture	9	6
4	Cooking	3	2
5	Helper	6	4
6	Noolu Tegeyuvudu	12	8

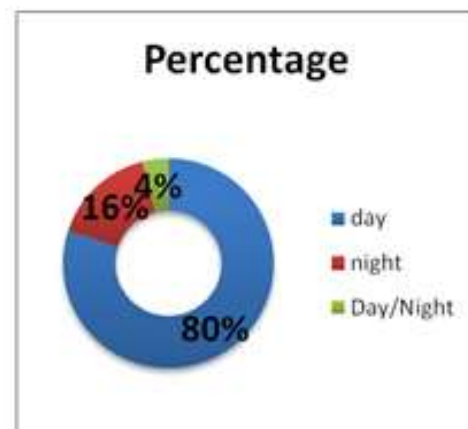


7	Reshme Thegeyuvudu	Goodu	6	4
8	Winding and reeling		42	28
9	Silk		3	2
Total			150	100

The above table tries to unfold various kinds of activities associated to this silk work. Of the sample, women are mainly engaged in activities like spinning wheel, cooking, helper, silk thread extraction, winding and reeling. These activities account for 66 per cent of the workers and of them, more than 80 per cent are women. These are also the less paid activities and women are still paid less when compared to that of men.



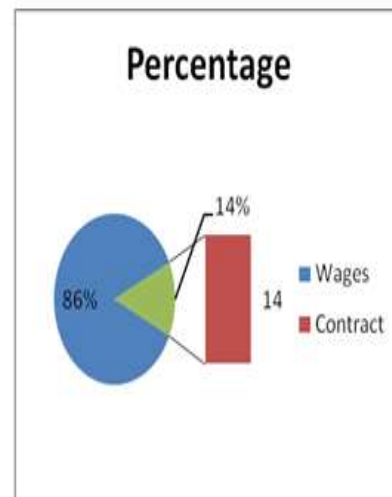
WORK TIMINGS			
Sl No	Time	Frequency	Percentage
1	Day	120	80
2	Night	24	16
3	Day/Night	6	4
Total		150	100





The working hours and time is another important aspect of any work. Here it is noted that majority of the employees work during day time that is about 80 per cent and only 16 per cent of them have said that they are working during night times. This can be attributed to the fact that of the sample, 2/3rd is women workers and hence they prefer to work during day time rather than night times.

WORK FOR WAGES OR CONTRACT			
Sl.No	Content	Frequency	Percentage
1	Wages	129	86
2	Contract	21	14
Total		150	100



Another important aspect of the work is that whether they are doing this work on daily wages basis or on contract basis. It is reported that 86 per cent of them work for wages as they would need the money for the daily maintenance of their families. Further, women depend on their wages as most of the times they alone would maintain the household expenditure because the husband would not give sufficient money for household expenditure or his earnings is used for his personal use like drinking, playing cards and the like.

FINDINGS:

- About 67 per cent of the sample is women.
- The socio economic background of the workers reveals that their standard of living is very low.
- This occupation involves lot of hard work with minimum returns.
- Women who are unskilled and illiterate are also able to get employed in the silk industry.
- It has also provided them employment in their surroundings so that they need not go far off from their residence to pursue their work.
- Women are able to support their families with supplementary income in general and subsistence income to their families in particular.



Women engaging in various Activities in the Production of Silk





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