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Exploring the involvement of women's participation in silk industry in Manipur, India

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Abstract

Silk is one of the most commercially and traditionally valued products in Manipur. It has a deep-rooted history in Manipur, practiced by farmers for generations, which benefits small-scale farmers with low investment and high returns. The present study was conducted during the year 2023-2024 in Imphal West District, Manipur, entitled "Exploring the Involvement of Women's Participation in Silk Industry in Manipur". A total of 120 respondents from four villages i.e. Khurkhul, Khonghampat, Loitang Khunao and Awang Potsangbam Khullen were selected using an *ex-post-facto* research design. The needed data were collected through a face-to-face structured interview schedule. Structured interviews covered varied independent variables such as age, education, family size, landholding, annual income, extension contact, year of experience, attitudes of women respondents, social participation, and type of house. Findings showed that majority of women respondents tend to be older (56.67%), educated up to high school level (34.17%) and come from small families (55.00%) with land holdings between 1-2ha (46.67%) and moderate incomes (64.17%). Many live in simple Kutcha houses (44.17%) and have an average amount of experience in silk industry (61.67%). Even with this background, these women respondents show a low interest in social participation (58.33%), medium attitudes towards the silk industry (50.83%). The respondents were classified into three categories as low, medium and high category based on their overall participation of women respondents in silk industry. It established that the majority (38.33%) had a medium participation rate, followed closely by 34.17% of high participation, and only 27.50% experienced low participation rates. Regarding decision making, once again, it emerged that medium category had taken the lead by 61.67%, and high category scored 36.66%, with only 1.67% belonging to low category. The study also identified constraints such as time consuming, pain in hands, legs and back, lacks of funds, subsidies by govt. agencies, discomfort in selling cocoon according to quality, unavailability of raw materials, etc. were some of the important challenges faced by women in silk industry.

Keywords: Silk industry, women, extent of participation, cocoon, market, respondent

Introduction

In ancient India, women had the divine status. Laxmi, Durga, and Saraswati are the three great Goddesses of prosperity, power, and wisdom, respectively. The ancient scriptures declared that God lives where women are worshipped.

Since the advent of human civilization the women plays a pivotal role in case of characterizing and giving impetus to the growth and development of agriculture as a vocation. Women have their inclination towards doing the household activities from the primitive era. Women have their efficiency in case of dealing the complex things in a multidimensional social situation. Till date, women are the critical workforce for the development of our economy and society.

Sericulture holds significant importance in Manipur, particularly for rural and semi-urban areas. Manipur, located in north eastern India, is renowned as the birthplace of Mulberry Silk. The industry's historical roots date back centuries and plays a pivotal role in uplifting communities, especially women. It is an important cottage industry,

supportive of welfare-based employment policies and enhancing socio-economic development. By its very intricate network of sericulture production, it ensures a livelihood base as well as keeps alive the richest cultural heritage imbedded deep within Indian society. Manipur silk is also known to have a rich quality not only at the state level but across the country. It is attributable to the favourable agro-climatic conditions of the region, which it provides an ideal environment for silk production. One notable aspect of sericulture is its strong association with women. Women comprise a significant majority of the industry's workforce, both in production and downstream activities. This trend underscores the role of women as key contributors to the sector's growth and highlights their economic empowerment through participation in silk production and trade.

The fact that women not only dominate the employment pool but are also the leading consumers of all the produced silk underscores the significance of their engagement with the sector. They handle key activities in rearing, feeding, as well as other related health management practices for

silkworms, and collect the cocoons. This hands-on work requires considerable dedication and knowledge, making women’s contributions indispensable to the success of the industry. Supporting women’s involvement in this sector can lead to enhanced livelihoods, greater gender equity, and the preservation of cultural traditions, making sericulture a key area for targeted development efforts.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the socio-economic profile of women respondents involved in silk industry.
2. To find out the extent of participation of women respondents in silk industry and their decision making abilities.
3. To know the constraints faced by women respondents in silk industry.

Methodology

This study was purposively conducted in Imphal West district of Manipur due to the significant role which the silk industry plays in creating employment opportunities and improving the socio-economic conditions of numerous families in the region. Imphal West district consists of four sub-division namely Lamphelpat, Lamsang, Wangoi and Patsoi. Out of these, only one sub-division i.e. Lamsang was randomly selected for the present study since it would not be possible to conduct an intensive study of the entire districts due to limited time. Out of 56 villages in Lamsang sub-division, four village viz., Khurkhul, Khonghampat, Loitang Khunao and Awang Potsangbam Khullen were purposively selected for the study. An equal number of respondents were selected from each village (i.e. 30 respondents each) and was made up a total of 120 women respondents as sample size.

The present study utilized an *ex-post facto* research design, as the independent variables had already occurred prior to the investigation, and the researcher had no direct control over these variables. To select the required samples, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed, and pre-tested well-structured interview schedules were created to gather data from a sample of 120 women respondents.

Methods used for data collection

The data were collected from the women respondents through a structured interview schedule. It was pre-tested with 20 respondents of the study area. Necessary changes were made in the schedule on the basis of the findings of this pre-testing. Following these changes, the final schedule was prepared and employed for the collection of data. The participants from the pre-testing phrase were not included in the final study. Although the schedule was prepared originally in English, the schedule was translated to Manipuri to ensure clear understanding of each question, aiming for valid and objective responses in the field.

Data statistical analysis

The data collected through the schedule were sorted out, tabulated, classified, analyzed and presented in tables in order to make the findings more meaningful and easily understandable. The study revealed significant variations among women respondents regarding their involvement in marketing activities related to silk. Interpretation of data

was made in accordance with the objectives of the study and inferences were drawn. The statistical tools and techniques used in the study are Arithmetic mean, Frequency, Percentage, Standard deviation, and Garrett’s ranking.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic profile of women respondents

Table 1: Characteristics of the women respondents (N=120)

SL. No	Attributes	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	Young (up to 35 years)	13	10.83
		Middle (36-55 years)	39	32.50
		Old (above 55 years)	68	56.67
2	Annual income	Low (Below 60000)	12	10.00
		Medium (60000 up to 100000)	77	64.17
		High (Above 100000)	31	25.83
3	Education	Illiterate	15	12.50
		Can read only	3	2.50
		Can read and write	4	3.33
		Primary (up to class V)	6	5.00
		Upper Primary (up to class VIII)	19	15.83
		High school (up to class X)	41	34.17
		Higher secondary	21	17.50
		Under Graduate	7	5.84
PG and above	4	3.33		
4	Extension contact	Low	53	44.17
		Medium	49	40.83
		High	18	15.00
5	Family size	Small (up to 5 members)	66	55.00
		Large (6 and above)	54	45.00
6	Landholding	Low (Up to 1 hectare)	29	24.17
		Medium (1-2 hectares)	56	46.67
		High (More than 2 hectares)	35	29.16
7	Social participation	Low	70	58.33
		Medium	50	41.67
		High	0	0
8	Year of experience	Low (1-10 years)	12	10.00
		Medium (10-20 years)	74	61.67
		High (20 years & above)	34	28.33
9	House type	Hut	0	0
		Kutchra	53	44.17
		Mixed	35	29.17
		Pucca	32	26.66
		Mansion	0	0
10	Attitudes of women respondents towards silk industry	Low	2	1.67
		Medium	61	50.83
		High	57	47.50

The data presented in Table 1, indicates that majority of the women respondents (56.67%) were found as old age (above 55 years), followed by middle age group i.e. 36-55 years (32.50%) and young age group i.e. up to 35 years (10.83%). It was evident that most women respondents appeared to belong to the medium income group i.e. 60000 up to 100000 (64.17%), followed by those in the high i.e. above 100000 (25.83%) and low income brackets i.e. below 60000 (10.00%). The data indicates that 34.17% of women respondents have completed education up to high school

level, and another 17.50% have finished higher secondary school, followed by upper primary (15.83%), illiterate (12.50%), under graduate (5.84%), primary (5.00%), PG and above (3.33%), can read and write (3.33%) and can read only(2.50%).The present research highlights the significant impact of education, as evidenced by the fact that most women respondents were from high school and higher secondary level up to PG and above. It was evident that majority of women respondents belongs to (44.17%) had low contact with the extension experts, followed by (40.83%) in medium categories and only (15.00%) in high categories. It is evident that 55.00% were found to be from the small family (up to 5 members), while 45.00% were from large size category (6 and above). The data shows that the largest group of women respondents (46.67%) owned land between 1 and 2 ha. This was followed by (29.16%) of respondents who had landholdings exceeding 2 ha. Only (24.17%) of respondents had owned land totaling up to 1 ha. It is seen that majority of the women respondents (58.33%) had low level of social participation, followed by (41.67%) medium level. No women respondent were found in high level of social participation. The result pointed out that majority of the women respondents (61.67%) had medium years of experience (10-20 years) followed by high i.e. 20 years & above (28.33%) and low i.e. 1-10 years (10.00%). The data indicates that most of the women respondents (44.17%) live in Kutcha house type, followed by (29.17%) in Mixed house, followed by (26.66%) in Pucca houses. It reveals that majority of women respondents (50.83%) were in the medium category which classified on the basis of their attitudes of women respondents towards silk industry followed by high category (47.50%) and only (1.67%) were found in low category. The findings regarding attitudes of women respondents are partly in conformity with the studies reported by Harisha *et al.* (2021) [4].

Extent of participation of women respondents in silk industry and their decision making abilities

Table 2: Distribution of women respondents based on their extent of participation in silk industry

SL. No	Attributes	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Participation in cocoon production	Active	39	32.50
		Moderate	46	38.33
		Passive	35	29.17
2	Participation in silk production	Active	40	33.33
		Moderate	55	45.83
		Passive	25	20.84
3	Participation in marketing activities	Active	32	26.67
		Moderate	52	43.33
		Passive	36	30.00

The data shown in Table 2, reveals that the majority of women respondents (38.33%) engage in moderate participation in cocoon production, while (32.50%) are actively involved and (29.17%) exhibit passive participation. It showed that the largest group of women respondents (45.83%) reported moderate participation in silk production, followed by (33.33%) active participation and (20.84%) were passively participating. It reveals that a significant majority (43.33%) engaged at a moderate level in marketing activities. Passive participation was reported by

(30.00%) of women respondents, while (26.67%) participated actively in marketing activities. The findings regarding marketing activities are in concordance with the findings of Miranda (2018) [7].

Table 3: Distribution of overall participation of women respondents in silk industry

SL. No	Attributes	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Overall participation in silk industry	Low	33	27.50
		Medium	46	38.33
		High	41	34.17

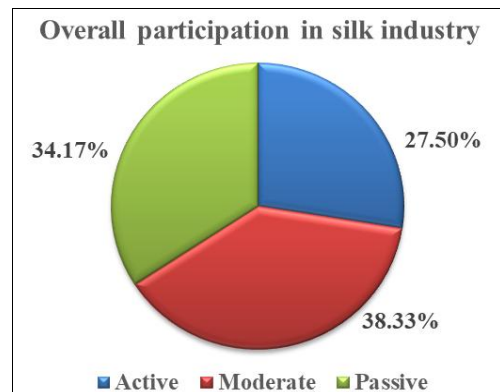


Fig 1: Distribution of overall participation of women respondents in silk industry

In Table 3, the overall findings indicate that 38.33% of women respondents exhibited medium participation, while 34.17% had high participation and 27.50% demonstrated low participation.

Table 4: Distribution of women respondents based on their decision making abilities

SL. No	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	2	1.67
2	Medium	74	61.67
3	High	44	36.66

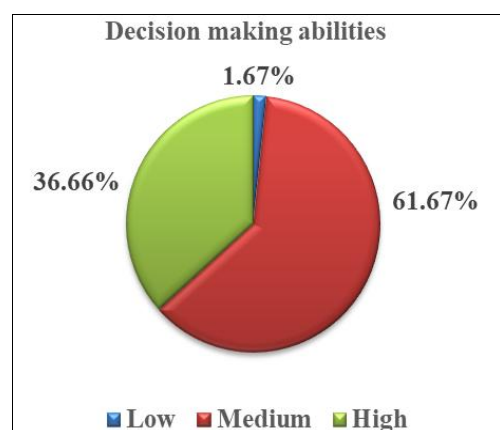


Fig 2: Distribution of women respondents based on their decision making abilities

It is evident from Table 4, that the majority of women respondents (61.67%) displayed a medium level of decision-making abilities, followed by those with high ability at (36.66%) and a small percentage (1.67%) with low ability.

Constraints faced by women respondents in silk industry**Table 5:** Constraints faced by women respondents in silk industry

SL.no	Constraints	Mean	Percentage	Garret's ranking
1	Time consuming (in weaving / silk rearing).	108	90.00%	I
2	Pain in Hands, legs and back (in weaving /silk rearing).	102	85.00%	II
3	Lack of funds, subsidies by govt. agencies.	99	82.00%	III
4	Discomfort in selling cocoon according to quality.	90	75.00%	IV
5	Unavailability of raw materials.	84	70.00%	V
6	Yarn price is increasing day by day.	78	65.00%	VI
7	Shortage of yarn.	72	60.00%	VII
8	Adverse climatic condition.	66	55.00%	VIII
9	No separate rearing house.	60	50.00%	IX
10	Lack of technological knowledge	54	45.00%	X
11	Lack of family labor.	48	40.00%	XI
12	Pest and diseases of silkworm.	42	35.00%	XII
13	Competition from machine made products.	36	30.00%	XIII
14	Land located at distances.	30	25.00%	XIV
15	Landlessness.	24	20.00%	XV
16	Inadequate access to credit.	18	15.00%	XVI
17	Lack of basic education.	12	10.00%	XVII
18	Absence of proper market.	9	7.50%	XVIII
19	Is non-profitable activity.	6	5.00%	XIX

The findings from Table 5, showed that the most significant problems reported by the women respondents was the time consuming nature of weaving and silk rearing. In fact, 90.00% of them indicated that this was a major issue they faced followed by pain in hands, legs and back while weaving and silk rearing (85.00%), lack of funds, subsidies by govt. agencies (82.00%), discomfort in selling cocoon according to quality (75.00%), unavailability of raw materials (70.00%), yarn price is increasing day by day (65.00%), shortage of yarn (60.00%), adverse climatic conditions (55.00%), no separate rearing house (50.00%), lack of technical knowledge (45.00%), lack of family labor (40.00%), pest and disease of silkworm (35.00%), competition from machine made products (30.00%), land located at distances (25.00%), landlessness (20.00%), inadequate access to credit (15.00%), lack of basic education (10.00%), absence of proper market (7.50%) and non-profitable activity (5.00%).

Conclusion

Based on the study, it can be concluded that most of the women respondents participated at a medium level in silk industry, viewing it as a cultural and traditional activity rather than a formal profession. The participants tend to be older, educated and come from small families with large land holdings and moderate incomes. Many live in simple Kutcha houses and have an average amount of experience in silk industry.

Even with this background, these women respondents show a moderate interest in social participation, hold a generally positive attitude towards the silk industry, and display a moderate capacity for decision-making. The main challenges they faced were time consuming in weaving and rearing, pain in hands, legs and back, etc.

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