

Gendered Labour Dynamics In Sericulture: Evidence From Ramanagara District, Karnataka

Sowmya B¹, Manjula G K²

¹Research Scholar, Department of PG Study and Research in Sociology, Rani Chennamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka- 591156

²Associate Professor, Department of PG Study and Research in Sociology, Rani Chennamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka- 591156

Abstract

Sericulture is a significant rural livelihood in southern India, engaging large numbers of smallholder farmers, particularly women. This paper examines the gendered labour dynamics within the sericulture sector of Ramanagara District, Karnataka, where silk production has long shaped socio-economic structures. Drawing upon primary data collected from 250 households (with both male and female respondents), secondary government statistics, and scholarly literature, this study explores how labour roles are gendered, the division of work across the silk production chain (from rearing to weaving), wage disparities, and socio-cultural constraints faced by women workers. Findings reveal entrenched gender roles that assign women to low-wage and unpaid tasks, limited access to technology and training, and significant decision-making asymmetries within households and cooperatives. Despite policy initiatives by the Government of Karnataka and the Central Silk Board aimed at promoting sericulture and women's participation, structural inequalities persist. The research identifies gaps between policy intent and field realities, highlighting the need for gender-responsive interventions. Recommendations include skill enhancement programs tailored for women, gender budgeting within sericulture schemes, improved credit access, and strengthening of women's cooperatives. This paper contributes to literature on rural labour, gender economics, and agrarian policy by providing empirical evidence on the nuanced dynamics of women's work in a traditional agro-industry. Results have implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars interested in equitable rural development.

Keywords: Sericulture; Gendered labour; Women's work; Rural livelihoods; Ramanagara

INTRODUCTION

Sericulture, the cultivation of silkworms for the production of silk, is one of the most labour intensive agro based industries in India and plays a crucial role in sustaining rural livelihoods. India ranks among the world's leading silk producing countries, contributing nearly 30 percent of global silk output. Within the country, Karnataka occupies a dominant position, accounting for approximately 65 to 70 percent of India's mulberry silk production. Ramanagara District, situated close to Bengaluru, has emerged as a major hub of sericulture and is popularly known as the "Silk City" due to its extensive mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing units, and silk reeling centres. The sericulture economy of the district provides direct and indirect employment to thousands of rural households, particularly small and marginal farmers.

Despite its economic significance and employment potential, the benefits of sericulture are not distributed equally across gender lines. Women constitute a substantial share of the workforce, estimated at nearly 60 percent of total labour involvement, especially in activities such as silkworm rearing, feeding, cocoon processing, and reeling. However, much of women's work remains informal, unpaid, or poorly remunerated and is often unrecognised in official statistics and policy frameworks. Their contribution is largely confined to labour intensive and repetitive tasks, while access to income control, technological resources, training opportunities, and market interactions continues to be dominated by men.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the gendered labour dynamics in sericulture in Ramanagara District, with a specific focus on women's roles, work conditions, wage patterns, decision making power, and broader socio economic outcomes. By situating gender analysis within the larger context of rural livelihoods, labour markets, and agrarian transformation, the study seeks to highlight how traditional gender norms and institutional structures shape women's participation and position within the sericulture sector.

Background of the Study

Sericulture in India has undergone a gradual transformation from a subsistence oriented, family based activity into a semi organized rural agro industry supported by state intervention, cooperative institutions, and market linkages. Traditionally practiced as a household occupation, sericulture has increasingly been integrated into broader rural development strategies due to its capacity to generate year round employment with relatively low capital investment. According to the Central Silk Board, sericulture provides livelihood support to nearly 8

million people across India, making it one of the most employment intensive sectors in the agricultural economy (Central Silk Board, 2023).

Karnataka occupies a pivotal position in the Indian sericulture landscape, contributing approximately 65 to 70 percent of the country's total mulberry silk production. The state has over 1.2 lakh hectares under mulberry cultivation and hosts a dense network of reeling units, cocoon markets, and cooperative societies (Government of Karnataka, 2023). Ramanagara District, in particular, has emerged as a major production hub due to its favourable agro climatic conditions, availability of irrigation facilities, proximity to Bengaluru markets, and a long historical association with silk production. The district alone accounts for a substantial share of Karnataka's cocoon arrivals and houses one of the largest cocoon markets in Asia.

Despite the economic prominence of sericulture, its labour structure remains deeply gendered. Official estimates suggest that women constitute nearly 60 percent of the total workforce in sericulture, especially at the stages of silkworm rearing, mulberry leaf harvesting, cocoon sorting, and silk reeling (CSB, 2022). These activities are highly labour intensive, time consuming, and physically demanding, yet they are largely classified as household or auxiliary work. As a result, women's labour often remains unpaid or is remunerated at significantly lower rates compared to men's work.

The gendered nature of labour in sericulture is shaped by socially constructed roles and patriarchal norms that assign women to routine, repetitive, and seasonal tasks, while men predominantly control land ownership, capital investment, technology use, and market transactions. Studies indicate that men are more likely to be registered beneficiaries of government schemes, cooperative memberships, and training programs, even though women perform a greater share of day to day labour (Nagaraj, 2001; Rao, 2012). This unequal division of labour and control over resources limits women's economic autonomy, restricts their decision making power within households, and perpetuates long term socio economic vulnerability.

Within Karnataka, Ramanagara District has emerged as a crucial node in sericulture production due to its favourable climate, access to urban markets, and well-established infrastructure. The district is home to one of Asia's largest silk cocoon markets, where averages of 40,000 to 50,000 kilograms (40–50 tonnes) of cocoons are traded daily. This market operates nearly year-round and attracts Seri culturists not only from different parts of Karnataka but also from neighbouring states such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Thus, while sericulture is often promoted as a pro poor and women friendly livelihood, the underlying gender relations within the sector reveal persistent inequalities. Understanding these gendered labour dynamics is crucial for assessing the true developmental impact of sericulture and for designing policies that move beyond employment generation towards equitable and inclusive rural development.

Government Data and Present Situation

Sericulture in Karnataka benefits from strong institutional support through the Department of Sericulture, Government of Karnataka, and the Central Silk Board of India. These agencies regularly publish official data on silk production, mulberry cultivation, beneficiary coverage, cooperative societies, and market operations, providing a reliable basis for assessing both the scale of the industry and patterns of labour participation across gender.

State-wide Sericulture Context

Karnataka has consistently maintained a leading position in India's silk sector. Recent sericulture statistics indicate that the state contributes nearly two thirds of India's total mulberry silk production. Mulberry cultivation in Karnataka extends across approximately 1.2 lakh hectares, while annual cocoon production exceeded 90,000 tonnes during 2024–25. Raw silk output has also shown a steady increase, rising from about 11,800 tonnes in 2022–23 to over 13,200 tonnes in 2024–25. This sustained growth reflects the effectiveness of institutional support, favourable agro climatic conditions, and a well-established network of production and marketing infrastructure.

Ramanagara District: Production and Market Profile

Within this broader state context, Ramanagara District occupies a central position in Karnataka's sericulture economy. The district is widely recognised as one of the most important sericulture centres in the country due to its concentration of mulberry farms, silkworm rearing units, reeling establishments, and cocoon markets.

District level data indicate that Ramanagara has more than 20,800 hectares under mulberry cultivation, placing it among the largest mulberry growing districts in the state. In the agricultural year 2022–23, the district contributed over 22 percent of Karnataka's total cocoon production and nearly 22 percent of the state's silk output, with more than 2,500 metric tonnes of silk produced through local reeling and processing units. These figures underline the district's critical role in sustaining Karnataka's leadership in silk production.

The Ramanagara cocoon market is one of the largest in Asia and functions as a major trading hub for Seri culturists from within the district as well as neighbouring regions. During peak production seasons, daily cocoon arrivals range between 40,000 and 50,000 kilograms, indicating the intensity of sericulture activity and the strong integration of local producers into wider state and inter state value chains. Sericulture in the district provides livelihood support to more than 28,000 farming households spread across nearly 1,300 villages, with taluks such as Magadi, Kanakapura, Channapatna, and Ramanagara forming the core of production and trade.

Gendered Participation in Labour and Leadership

Despite the economic prominence of sericulture in Ramanagara, government records and field level observations consistently highlight its deeply gendered labour structure. Women constitute an estimated 60 percent of the total workforce involved in sericulture, particularly at the stages of mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, cocoon processing, and silk reeling. Their labour is essential to maintaining the continuity and quality of production, as these stages require sustained attention, precision, and manual effort.

However, women's extensive participation in labour is not matched by their representation in institutional leadership or decision making roles. Data from sericulture cooperatives and programme implementation records show that women occupy less than 30 percent of leadership positions, including cooperative board memberships and training committees. This imbalance reflects persistent structural and social barriers that limit women's access to formal authority, financial control, and institutional recognition within the sector.

Implications of the Present Situation

The sharp contrast between women's high labour participation and their limited visibility in decision making structures points to underlying inequalities within the sericulture system. While men are more likely to control land ownership, capital investment, reeling machinery, access to training, and market negotiations, women remain concentrated in lower paid, informal, and less recognised segments of the production chain. These patterns mirror broader gender disparities in rural labour markets and raise critical questions about the inclusiveness of sericulture led development. Addressing these imbalances requires policy interventions that move beyond employment generation to ensure equitable access to resources, leadership opportunities, and economic gains for women workers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

 **Agarwal, B. (1983). *Agrarian Relations and Economic Change in India*.** Agarwal's seminal work provides a critical examination of agrarian structures in India with a particular emphasis on gendered access to land and productive resources. The book argues that women's labour contributions in agriculture are systematically undervalued due to patriarchal property relations and inheritance patterns. Agarwal highlights how women's exclusion from land ownership weakens their bargaining power within households and labour markets. The analysis demonstrates that economic change in rural India has not translated into equitable outcomes for women workers. By linking agrarian relations with gender inequality, the study offers a strong theoretical foundation for understanding women's marginal position in rural industries. This perspective is highly relevant for analysing gendered labour dynamics in sericulture, where women's work remains largely invisible.

 **Srinivasan, K. (1991). *Women and Work: The Dynamics of Gender in Rural Industries*.** Srinivasan examines the complex relationship between gender and labour in rural industrial settings, focusing on how women's work is shaped by social norms and economic constraints. The book documents women's concentration in low paid, informal, and labour intensive occupations. It emphasises that women's participation in rural industries often occurs as an extension of domestic responsibilities rather than as recognised economic activity. Srinivasan also discusses wage discrimination and limited mobility as persistent barriers to women's advancement. The work provides empirical evidence of how gendered labour segmentation operates across different rural industries. These insights are directly applicable to sericulture, where women's labour is intensive yet undervalued.

 **Krishnaraj, M. (1998). *Gender, Population and Development*.** Krishnaraj's work explores the intersections of gender, demographic processes, and development policies in India. The book critically assesses how development interventions often fail to address structural gender inequalities. Krishnaraj argues that women's labour participation increases under economic pressure but without corresponding gains in autonomy or income security. The analysis highlights the gap between policy rhetoric and lived realities of rural women. By foregrounding women's unpaid and underpaid labour, the study challenges conventional development indicators. This framework is useful for examining sericulture policies that promote employment without ensuring gender equity.

■ **Nagaraj, K. (2001). Small Farm Households and Sericulture in South India.** Nagaraj provides one of the few focused studies on sericulture as a rural livelihood in South India. The book analyses how small and marginal farm households depend on sericulture for income diversification and employment. Nagaraj highlights the labour intensive nature of sericulture and the central role played by family labour, especially women. The study notes that while women perform a substantial share of rearing and reeling work, men dominate market interactions and income control. The author also discusses the vulnerability of sericulture households to market fluctuations and input costs. This work offers important contextual insights for understanding sericulture in districts like Ramanagara.

■ **Sudarshan, R. M., & Bhattacharya, R. (2006). Gender and the Labour Market in South Asia.** Sudarshan and Bhattacharya analyse labour market structures in South Asia with a focus on gender based segmentation and inequality. The book documents how women are disproportionately concentrated in informal, low wage, and insecure forms of employment. It highlights the role of social norms, education, and institutional barriers in shaping women's labour market outcomes. The authors argue that economic growth alone does not reduce gender inequality in employment. Their comparative analysis shows persistent wage gaps across sectors. This framework helps explain gendered labour patterns in sericulture, where women's work remains informal and poorly remunerated.

■ **Rao, N. (2012). Gendered Governance: Women, Work and Institutions in India.** Rao examines how governance structures and institutions influence women's access to work and decision making. The book argues that women's participation in cooperatives and local institutions often remains symbolic rather than substantive. Rao highlights the structural barriers that prevent women from assuming leadership roles, including lack of training and patriarchal norms. The study emphasises that institutional inclusion does not automatically translate into empowerment. By analysing women's limited voice in rural organisations, the book provides a useful lens for examining sericulture cooperatives. This perspective is crucial for understanding women's underrepresentation in leadership roles in Ramanagara's sericulture sector.

■ **Shylendra, H. S. (2015). Rural Labour and Agrarian Transformation in India.** Shylendra's work situates rural labour changes within broader processes of agrarian transformation and economic restructuring. The book discusses the diversification of rural livelihoods and the growing importance of non crop based activities such as sericulture. Shylendra highlights how labour intensification often increases women's workload without improving wages or security. The analysis draws attention to informalisation and feminisation of rural labour. It also examines the role of state policies in shaping labour outcomes. These insights are relevant for understanding how sericulture expansion affects women's labour conditions.

■ **Patel, R., & Singh, A. (2019). Gender Inequality in Agricultural Value Chains.** Patel and Singh analyse gender disparities across agricultural value chains, focusing on women's unequal access to assets, technology, and markets. The book demonstrates how women's labour is concentrated at the lower end of value chains where returns are minimal. It argues that value chain integration often reinforces existing gender inequalities rather than reducing them. The authors emphasise the need for gender sensitive interventions at each stage of production and marketing. Case studies illustrate how women remain excluded from high value segments. This analysis is particularly relevant to sericulture, where women's labour is central but undervalued within the silk value chain.

These works collectively provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for analysing gendered labour in rural industries. However, few address the specific socio-economic and institutional dynamics of sericulture in Ramanagara, especially relating to quantitative assessments of labour roles and economic outcomes.

Research Gap

The literature indicates widespread recognition of gender disparities in rural production systems. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on sericulture in Ramanagara District with disaggregated gendered labour data are scarce. Most research addresses broad agrarian issues or general women's labour without connecting them to sericulture's unique production chain, wage structures, and cooperative governance.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the roles and responsibilities of women in different stages of sericulture.
2. To assess wage disparities and economic benefits accrued by women compared to men.
3. To explore decision-making power and access to resources among women sericulture workers.
4. To analyse policy implications and recommend gender-responsive interventions.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative household surveys and qualitative interviews. A sample of 250 households engaged in sericulture across four taluks of Ramanagara District was selected through stratified random sampling. The survey collected socio-economic data, labour patterns, income levels, and perceptions of gender roles. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with cooperative leaders, government officials, and women workers.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic coding for qualitative data.

Area of Study: Ramanagara District, Karnataka

Ramanagara is situated approximately 50 km southwest of Bengaluru. Its proximity to urban markets, favourable climate for mulberry cultivation, and established networks for silk production make it a central node in Karnataka's sericulture economy. The district comprises diverse socio-economic groups, with both smallholder farmers and landless labourers participating in sericulture.

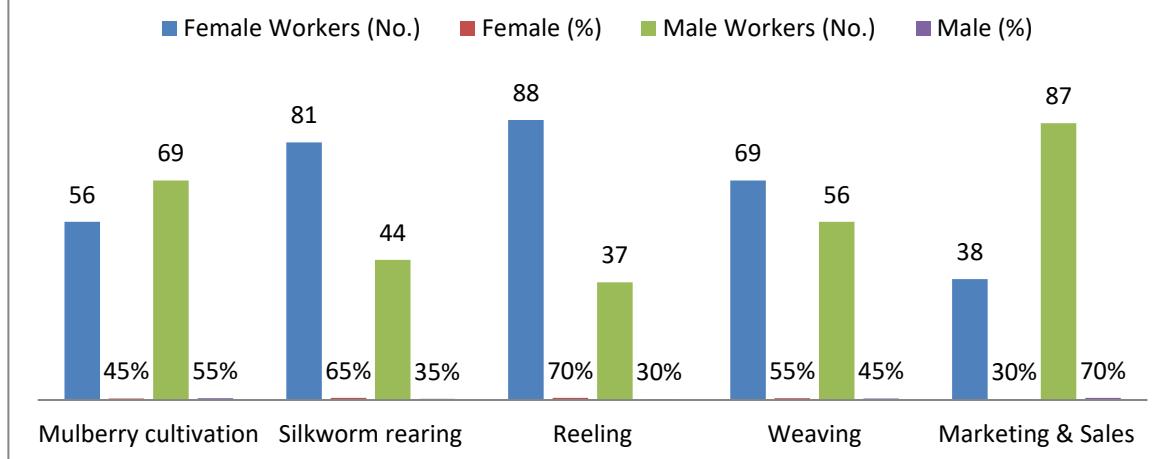
Statistical Tables & Interpretation

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Labour across Sericulture Activities in Ramanagara District (N = 250 Workers)

Activity Stage	Female Workers (No.)	Female (%)	Male Workers (No.)	Male (%)
Mulberry cultivation	56	45%	69	55%
Silkworm rearing	81	65%	44	35%
Reeling	88	70%	37	30%
Weaving	69	55%	56	45%
Marketing & Sales	38	30%	87	70%

Source: Primary field survey conducted in Ramanagara District, 2024.

Chart 1: Gender Distribution of Labour across Sericulture Activities in Ramanagara District (N = 250 Workers)



The table shows a clear gendered division of labour within sericulture activities in Ramanagara District. Women are predominantly engaged in labour-intensive and routine activities such as silkworm rearing and reeling, where their participation exceeds 65 percent. In contrast, men dominate marketing and sales activities, accounting for 70 percent of workers, reflecting greater male control over market interactions and income generation. The distribution highlights the concentration of women in lower-paid and less visible segments of the sericulture value chain.

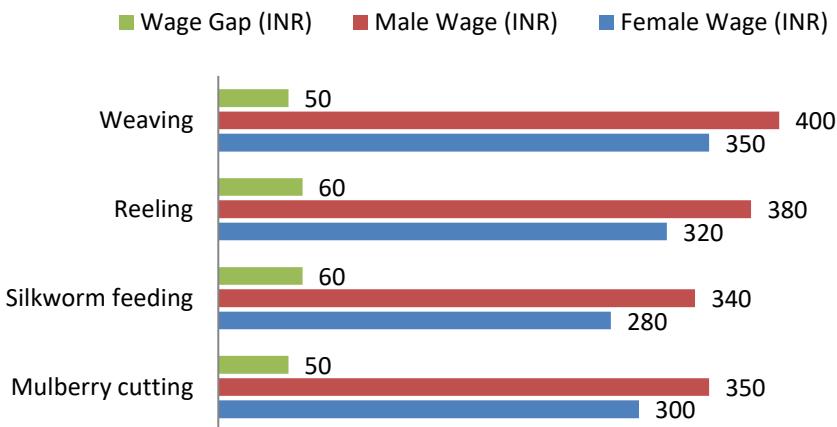
Table 2: Average Daily Wages by Gender in Sericulture Activities in Ramanagara District (INR)

Work Type	Female Wage (INR)	Male Wage (INR)	Wage Gap (INR)
Mulberry cutting	300	350	50
Silkworm feeding	280	340	60

Work Type	Female Wage (INR)	Male Wage (INR)	Wage Gap (INR)
Reeling	320	380	60
Weaving	350	400	50

Source: Primary household survey conducted in Ramanagara District, 2024.

Chart 2: Average Daily Wages by Gender in Sericulture Activities in Ramanagara District (INR)



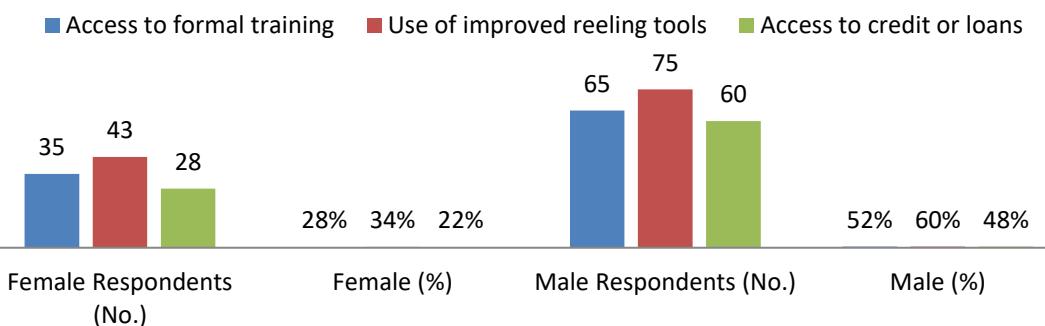
The table clearly indicates the presence of gender-based wage disparities across all major sericulture activities in Ramanagara District. Male workers earn between INR 50 and 60 more per day than female workers for similar tasks, reflecting systemic wage discrimination rather than differences in skill or effort. The wage gap is particularly pronounced in labour-intensive activities such as silkworm feeding and reeling, where women's participation is high but remuneration remains comparatively low. These disparities contribute to women's limited income security and reinforce economic dependency within sericulture households.

Table 3: Gender-wise Access to Training, Technology, and Credit in Sericulture Activities (N = 250 Respondents)

Indicator	Female Respondents (No.)	Female (%)	Male Respondents (No.)	Male (%)
Access to formal training	35	28%	65	52%
Use of improved reeling tools	43	34%	75	60%
Access to credit or loans	28	22%	60	48%

Source: Primary household survey conducted in Ramanagara District, 2024.

Chart 3: Gender-wise Access to Training, Technology, and Credit in Sericulture Activities (N = 250 Respondents)



The table reveals significant gender disparities in access to institutional support systems within the sericulture sector. Male respondents are nearly twice as likely as female respondents to receive formal training, adopt improved reeling technologies, and access credit or loan facilities. Limited access to training and technology restricts women's productivity and skill advancement, while constrained access to credit undermines their capacity to invest independently in sericulture activities. These disparities reinforce women's dependence on male household members and limit their opportunities for economic empowerment.

Table 4: Gender-wise Decision-Making Power in Household Sericulture Activities (Mean Scores on a 5-Point Scale)

(Scale: 1 = No say, 5 = Full control; N = 250 households)

Decision Type	Female (Mean Score)	Male (Mean Score)	Mean Difference
Purchase of inputs	2.1	4.0	1.9
Sale decisions	1.9	4.2	2.3
Income allocation	2.0	4.1	2.1

Source: Household decision-making survey conducted in Ramanagara District, 2024.

The table demonstrates pronounced gender disparities in household-level decision-making related to sericulture activities. Male respondents report substantially higher mean scores across all decision categories, indicating dominant control over input purchases, marketing decisions, and income allocation. Women's mean scores remain below the mid-point of the scale, suggesting limited participation and influence in economic decision-making despite their extensive involvement in production activities. The largest gender gap is observed in sale decisions, reflecting men's control over market interactions and financial outcomes. These findings reveal deeply embedded patriarchal norms that constrain women's agency within sericulture households.

Table 5: Gender-wise Participation in Cooperative Leadership in Sericulture (N = 120 Cooperative Representatives)

Position	Women (No.)	Women (%)	Men (No.)	Men (%)
Cooperative society board members	22	18%	98	82%
Committee chairs	14	12%	106	88%
Training committee participation	30	25%	90	75%

Source: Cooperative society records, Ramanagara District, 2024.

The table highlights the substantial gender imbalance in leadership and governance roles within sericulture cooperatives in Ramanagara District. Women's representation remains particularly low in positions of authority, such as committee chairs, where they account for only 12 percent of office holders. Even in training committees, which are more closely linked to skill development and capacity building, women's participation does not exceed one quarter of the total membership. This underrepresentation limits women's influence over institutional decisions, resource allocation, and programme implementation, reinforcing their marginal position within the cooperative structure.

Findings

1. Gendered Division of Labour: The analysis of labour distribution across sericulture activities in Ramanagara District reveals a highly gendered division of work. Women overwhelmingly dominate manual and routine tasks such as silkworm rearing, cocoon sorting, and reeling, reflecting traditional gender norms that associate women with caregiving and repetitive labour. Men, by contrast, are more involved in marketing, sales, and financial management, activities that are closely tied to income generation and bargaining power. From a sociological perspective, this division reflects the persistence of patriarchal structures within rural economies, where women's labour, though essential, is often rendered invisible in economic and policy frameworks. The concentration of women in low-status, labour-intensive roles underscores the social construction of gender roles and the ways in which these roles shape access to economic resources.

2. Wage Disparities: The study identifies consistent gender-based wage disparities across all stages of sericulture. Even when performing similar tasks, women earn significantly less than their male counterparts, with gaps

ranging from INR 50 to 60 per day. Sociologically, this wage gap is indicative of structural inequalities that devalue women's work and reinforce gender hierarchies. The unequal remuneration not only limits women's economic independence but also perpetuates the intergenerational transmission of poverty and dependence. Wage disparities are thus not merely economic phenomena; they are embedded within broader systems of social inequality and power relations in rural livelihoods.

3. Limited Access to Resources: Women in sericulture have limited access to formal training, modern reeling technologies, and credit facilities, which in turn constrains their productivity, skill development, and earning potential. The restricted access is both structural and cultural: formal institutions tend to prioritize male participation, and social norms often discourage women from attending training programs or handling financial transactions independently. This reflects the broader sociological concept of 'institutionalised gender exclusion,' where systemic barriers reproduce inequality across generations. Without equitable access to resources, women's contributions remain undervalued, and their capacity to negotiate better economic outcomes is curtailed.

4. Decision-Making Power: Decision-making authority in both households and cooperatives is overwhelmingly male-dominated. Men control critical economic decisions such as purchasing inputs, selling cocoons, and allocating income, while women's involvement remains limited to routine production tasks. From a sociological perspective, this demonstrates the persistence of patriarchal control over material and symbolic resources within rural households. Decision-making power is closely linked to agency; women's exclusion from these processes not only reduces their economic influence but also limits their ability to shape the social and developmental environment in which they live. This power imbalance perpetuates structural inequalities and affects women's long-term empowerment.

5. Underrepresentation in Governance: Women are markedly underrepresented in leadership roles within sericulture cooperatives, including board membership, committee chairs, and training committees. Such underrepresentation curtails women's influence over institutional policies, benefit distribution, and access to collective resources. Sociologically, this indicates how formal structures reproduce existing gender hierarchies: even when women's labour is central to production, decision-making and governance remain male-dominated. This underrepresentation undermines the potential of cooperatives to serve as instruments of women's empowerment and highlights the need for institutional reforms that prioritize gender equity in leadership and policy-making.

Recommendations

1. Gender-Responsive Training Programs: Government agencies and cooperative societies should develop and implement training programs specifically designed for women sericulture workers. These programs should focus on technical skills, modern reeling tools, mulberry cultivation techniques, and quality control. Beyond skill enhancement, such training can also increase women's confidence, agency, and bargaining power within households and cooperatives. From a sociological perspective, targeted training helps challenge traditional gendered divisions of labour by legitimizing women's roles as skilled contributors rather than unpaid helpers. Regular monitoring and evaluation of training outcomes can ensure that programs are effective and inclusive.

2. Fair Wage Policies: There is a need to enforce wage parity across all sericulture activities, ensuring that women are remunerated fairly for the work they perform. Policies should include statutory minimum wages and compliance mechanisms, particularly for informal work such as silkworm rearing and reeling, where women's labour is concentrated. Sociologically, addressing wage disparities can disrupt the structural undervaluation of women's work, promote economic independence, and reduce intra-household inequalities. Transparent wage systems can also empower women to negotiate compensation and assert their contribution to household incomes.

3. Access to Credit and Financial Services: Women's limited access to credit and financial services restricts their ability to invest in sericulture inputs and modern technologies. Microcredit schemes, low-interest loans, and tailored financial products should be made accessible to women, with simplified application procedures and minimal collateral requirements. By improving access to financial resources, women can independently manage production decisions, purchase equipment, and increase productivity. Such interventions are essential from a gender and development perspective, as they enable women to transform their labour contributions into tangible economic and social benefits.

4. Leadership Development in Cooperatives: To address women's underrepresentation in governance, cooperatives should adopt affirmative measures such as quotas for women in boards, committee chairs, and training committees. Capacity building programs focused on leadership, financial literacy, and negotiation skills will prepare women to participate effectively in decision-making. Strengthening women's representation in

cooperative leadership not only promotes gender equity but also ensures that policies and resource distribution reflect the interests of the majority workforce. From a sociological viewpoint, empowering women in institutional governance challenges entrenched patriarchal hierarchies and creates spaces for transformative change.

5. Gender Awareness Campaigns: Social and cultural norms continue to limit women's visibility, agency, and recognition in sericulture. Awareness campaigns should be conducted at village and cooperative levels to sensitize men and community members about the value of women's labour and the importance of equitable participation. These campaigns can include workshops, community meetings, and media initiatives highlighting women's contributions and successes. Changing societal attitudes is critical to supporting policy interventions and achieving sustainable gender equality. By addressing cultural barriers alongside structural reforms, women's participation in both production and decision-making can be normalized, fostering more inclusive rural development.

CONCLUSION

The present study of gendered labour dynamics in sericulture in Ramanagara District, Karnataka, highlights the complex intersection of gender, work, and rural livelihoods. Women constitute the majority of the labour force in critical production activities such as silkworm rearing and reeling, yet their contributions are undervalued, underpaid, and largely invisible in both household and institutional decision-making structures. Men, by contrast, dominate marketing, income allocation, and leadership positions, reinforcing a gendered hierarchy that limits women's agency and economic empowerment.

Sociologically, these patterns reflect the persistence of patriarchal norms and institutionalised gender inequalities within rural economies. Women's restricted access to training, technology, credit, and cooperative leadership constrains their productivity, earning potential, and voice in governance. The study underscores that employment alone is insufficient for empowerment; equitable access to resources, recognition, and decision-making power is essential for transforming women's socio-economic status in sericulture.

Policy interventions, including gender-responsive training, fair wage enforcement, improved access to credit, leadership development, and awareness campaigns, are crucial to redress these structural inequalities. By integrating women more fully into both production and governance, the sericulture sector can not only enhance productivity and income but also promote inclusive rural development. In conclusion, addressing gendered disparities in sericulture requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines institutional reform, socio-cultural change, and targeted empowerment strategies, ensuring that women's labour is recognized, valued, and rewarded equitably.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, B. (1983). *Agrarian relations and economic change in India*. Oxford University Press.
- Central Silk Board. (2024). Annual silk production report. Government of India.
- Government of Karnataka. (2023). Sericulture department statistical handbook. Bengaluru: GOK Press.
- Krishnaraj, M. (1998). *Gender, population and development*. Oxford University Press.
- Nagaraj, K. (2001). *Small farm households and sericulture in South India*. Routledge.
- Patel, R., & Singh, A. (2019). *Gender inequality in agricultural value chains*. Sage Publications.
- Rao, N. (2012). *Gendered governance: Women, work and institutions in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shyrendra, H. S. (2015). *Rural labour and agrarian transformation in India*. Orient Blackswan.
- Srinivasan, K. (1991). *Women and work: Dynamics of gender in rural industries*. Economic & Political Weekly.
- Sudarshan, R. M., & Bhattacharya, R. (2006). *Gender and the labour market in South Asia*. Routledge.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Gender equality in rural economies*. UNDP Publications.
- World Bank. (2020). *Women's economic empowerment in agrarian sectors*. World Bank Reports.
