

Women Entrepreneurs in Sericulture: Insights from Chikkaballapur District, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

This study emphasized on the various enterprise undertaken by women in the sericulture sector and their socio-economic status as well as the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC). Primary data was collected from 180 entrepreneurs in Chikkaballapur district. Post-classification was made based on the enterprises the women are taking up in these taluks and two major enterprises were selected to work out the SWOC. Results of the study showed that Cocoon production and reeling were the major enterprises undertaken by women. Majority of women entrepreneurs, fall within the middle-age range of 35 to 50 years. It was found that majority of them belonged to SC/ ST category (46.67%) followed by OBC and minority category. The families of majority (68.33%) of the women entrepreneurs were nuclear in nature while the rest (31.67%) were joint families. The strengths of women entrepreneurs indicated 83.33 per cent women strongly agree that sericulture is a woman-friendly occupation. 56.67 per cent and 38.33 per cent of women entrepreneurs strongly agreed and agreed with statement sericulture positively impacts the economic status of women. The weakness of women entrepreneurs highlighted that, 48.67 per cent of women agree and 16.67 per cent strongly agree that there are insufficient training opportunities and skill development programs. 53.33 per cent of women agreed and 36.67 per cent strongly agreed that small sized land holdings was a weakness. Regarding opportunities of women entrepreneurs, 73.33 per cent women agreed growing demand for silk world wide is an opportunity. 61.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs agreed regarding the sericulture's role in providing an extra income source along with traditional agricultural activities emphasizing its diversification benefits. 61.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs strongly agreed and 28.33 per cent agreed that urbanization was one of the major challenges. 73.33 per cent of women entrepreneurs agreed and 13.33 per cent strongly agreed that a price fluctuation was a challenge.

Keywords : Cocoon production, Silk reeling units, Women entrepreneurs, Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Challenges

SILK production has become more widespread, with various countries embracing sericulture and silk manufacturing. China remains to be the world's biggest producer of silk, followed by India and a few

other Asian countries. Silk production has become more efficient and cost-effective as a result of technological advancements and innovations. Furthermore, silk has found its place in an array of

industries, ranging from fashion and textiles to medicinal and industrial applications. The growth continues to be influenced by changing consumer preferences, sustainability concerns and emerging technologies. With an increasing focus on eco-friendly practices, many sericulture operations are adopting organic and sustainable farming methods to cater to environmentally conscious markets (Dewangan 2013).

Sericulture or silk farming, is a significant agricultural and industrial activity in India. Karnataka, particularly Chikkaballapur district, is known for its thriving sericulture industry. The role of women in this industry has been noteworthy, as they contribute significantly to the various stages of sericulture, from silkworm rearing to the production of silk yarn. Women often excel in tasks like mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing and silk weaving. Their participation not only economically empowers women but also strengthens the sericulture supply chain. Through precise skill and careful attention to detail, women-led sericulture firms can improve the quality of silk products. Women entrepreneurs has made a significant economic and social impact on India's silk industry. Their innovative practices, dedication to sustainability and initiatives that promote women have not only changed the sector, but have also helped India to maintain its place as a global silk powerhouse. These women have shown that entrepreneurship can be a powerful force for positive change in the silk industry and supporting economic growth and social development. Chandrakala *et al.* (2019) has mentioned in their study that women in sericulture in Karnataka play a critical role in the production and management of silk, yet they often remain marginalized in terms of access to resources and decision-making. Pattanaik and Sahoo (2020) highlight that while the sericulture industry in Karnataka has seen an increasing number of women entrepreneurs, challenges such as access to credit, gender bias and inadequate infrastructure hinder their full economic empowerment.

Sericulture stands out as an excellent agricultural choice for farmers who are looking for low investment and significant profits. Its potential to promote agricultural diversification and generate sustainable income sources makes it a beneficial farming practice, and the growing demand for silk ensures its profitability in the future. Women have a significant role in this industry. The micro-level picture clearly shows that women are active in the majority of sericulture practices like mulberry cultivation, rearing, reeling and weaving etc. Furthermore, because of sericulture's potential ecological benefits, it is a well-rounded option for both economic and environmental sustainability. Ravichandran *et al.* (2017) argue that there is a need for more targeted interventions that address the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, such as better access to training, technology and market linkages.

The important mulberry cultivation and cocoon producing states in India are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and so on. Among these states, Karnataka is having the highest mulberry area and cocoon production and Mulberry raw silk production. Karnataka accounts for about 32.68 per cent of the total output of silk in the country (Raju *et al.*, 2019). Chikkaballapur is one of the significant silk producing district of Karnataka. Sericulture is a major occupation for women in this area. The district's main cocoon markets are in Sidhlaghatta and Chintamani. These taluks are famous for raw silk and most of women entrepreneur's income depends on silkworm rearing and reeling. With this brief background a study was undertaken to address specific objectives like

- To examine the various enterprise undertaken by women in the sericulture sector
- To analyse socio-economic status of women entrepreneurs in sericulture and
- To document the SWOC of sericulture women entrepreneurs

METHODOLOGY

Chikkaballapur district of Karnataka state was purposively selected for the study as it is one of the

traditional sericulture district of Karnataka. In Chikkaballapur district, Shidlaghatta and Chintamani taluks of Chikkaballapur district were selected as these taluks are famous for raw silk and majority farmers' income depends on silkworm rearing and they are the leading taluks in the district with area of 7281.31 hectares and 5779.05 hectares, respectively. From both the taluks, 90 respondents were selected with sample size of 180 women entrepreneurs from all the different sericulture activities. However, data was collected from minimum of 30 women entrepreneurs involved in two major silk enterprises (Cocoon production and silk reeling) to analyse the SWOC of sericulture women entrepreneurs in the study area. Data utilized for the study was collected during the month of April, 2023 as detailed above and

was analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as averages and percentages.

Various Enterprises Undertaken by Women in Sericulture Sector

Table 1 provides an overview of the types of sericulture enterprises undertaken by women in Chintamani and Sidlaghatta taluks. It presents data on different activities related to sericulture, including cocoon production, reeling, weaving and biocraft. Among 180 women entrepreneurs, reeling enterprise was most prevalent activity in both the taluks. In Chintamani, 32 women were involved in reeling, while in Sidlaghatta, 48 women participate in this activity accounting to 44.44 per cent contribution to the total women entrepreneurs in the study area.

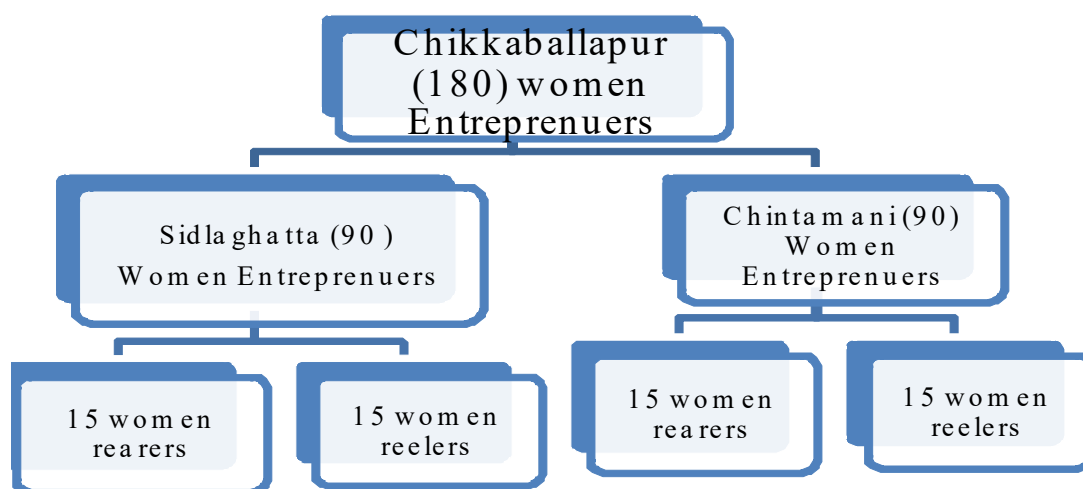


Fig. 1 : Map of sampling design

TABLE 1
Type of enterprise undertaken by women in sericulture

| Particular | Taluks | | Total | Per centage |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| | Chintamani | Sidlaghatta | | |
| Cocoon production | 39 | 34 | 73 | 40.56 |
| Reeling | 32 | 48 | 80 | 44.44 |
| Weaving | 10 | 8 | 18 | 10.00 |
| Biocraft | 9 | 0 | 9 | 5.00 |
| Total | 90 | 90 | 180 | 100.00 |

The higher percentage in Sidlaghatta suggests a relatively greater emphasis on reeling as compared to Chintamani.

The second major enterprise undertaken by women in the study area was cocoon production. In Chintamani, 39 women were involved in cocoon production, while in Sidlaghatta, 34 women participated in this activity accounting for 40.56 per cent to the total women entrepreneurs. Weaving and Bio-craft were the other enterprises undertaken by women with 10.00 per cent and 5.00 per cent, respectively. However, in industries like weaving and bio-craft there may be some obstacles or difficulties that discourage women from actively engaging. These obstacles may include cultural standards, lack of expertise or financial resources or fewer opportunities for women in weaving and biocraft.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Profile of Women Entrepreneurs in Sericulture

The socio-economic profile of women entrepreneurs engaged in sericulture, highlighting various aspects such as age, education level, caste and occupation is presented in Table 5. Majority of women entrepreneurs with 71.67 per cent, fall within the middle-age of 35 to 50 years. This suggests that women in their middle years are actively participating in sericulture activities. On the other hand, those aged below 35 years constitute 16.67 per cent of the group, indicating that there is a considerable representation of younger women entrepreneurs as well. However, women above 50 years of age account for 11.66 per cent contribution, which might signify the interest and engagement of more experienced individuals who might be leveraging their years of knowledge and expertise in the sericulture sector. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Shivananda Gowda *et. al* 2023 where majority of the farm women (63.34%) were of middle age, followed by 21.66 and 15.00 per cent of the farm women belonged to old and young age, respectively.

TABLE 2
Socio-economic profile of women entrepreneurs in sericulture
(n=60)

| Particulars | Number | Per cent |
|--------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| <i>Age (years)</i> | | |
| Young age (Less than 35) | 10 | 16.67 |
| Middle age (35- 50) | 43 | 71.67 |
| Old age (Above 50) | 7 | 11.66 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |
| <i>Education level</i> | | |
| Illiterate | 11 | 18.33 |
| Primary Education | 16 | 26.67 |
| High school | 23 | 38.34 |
| Pre- University | 8 | 13.33 |
| Degree and above | 2 | 03.33 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |
| <i>Caste</i> | | |
| OBC | 17 | 08.33 |
| Gen | 2 | 03.33 |
| Minority | 13 | 21.67 |
| SC/ ST | 28 | 46.67 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |
| <i>Occupation</i> | | |
| Sericulture as main occupation | 56 | 93.33 |
| Sericulture as subsidiary occupation | 4 | 06.67 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |

In the education level, the distribution is quite diverse. Notably, the highest proportion with 38.34 per cent completed their education up to the high school level followed by primary with 26.67 per cent and 12.22 per cent respectively, 3.33 per cent of women had completed degree and above. This suggests that a substantial portion of women entrepreneurs in sericulture have received at least a basic education which is encouraging because it enables them to manage their farm enterprises better and the women easily adopt new technologies in sericulture. In contrast, there are instances of low educational attainment, with 18.33 per cent being

illiterate. This could imply that certain women are engaged in sericulture due to traditional reasons, relying more on practical knowledge and traditional practices rather than formal education.

The caste distribution indicates SC/ST has major participation with 46.67 per cent, followed by Other backward classes (OBC) and minority with 28.33 per cent and 21.67 per cent respectively, which suggests that women from these communities are actively involved in sericulture entrepreneurship. This might be due to historical and regional factors that have favored their participation. On the other hand, General category women constitute only 3.33 per cent of the sample. This might be influenced by various socio-economic factors that have led to differing levels of access to sericulture-related resources and opportunities. In occupation 93.33 per cent of women entrepreneurs undertake sericulture as their primary occupation. This indicates that sericulture plays a pivotal role in the livelihoods of the sample respondents.

Family Type and Experience in Sericulture

In terms of family type, the Table 3, indicates that the majority of women entrepreneurs belong to nuclear

TABLE 3
Family type and experience in sericulture
(n=60)

| Particulars | Number | Per cent |
|----------------------------------|--------|----------|
| <i>Family type</i> | | |
| Nuclear | 41 | 68.33 |
| Joint | 19 | 31.67 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |
| <i>Marital status</i> | | |
| Married | 58 | 96.67 |
| Unmarried | 2 | 03.33 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |
| <i>Experience in sericulture</i> | | |
| Less than 10 years | 11 | 18.33 |
| 10 - 30 years | 44 | 73.34 |
| Above 30 years | 5 | 08.33 |
| Total | 60 | 100.00 |

families (68.33 per cent), while the remaining 31.67 per cent belong to joint families. This discrepancy could be related to changing society norms as well as economic issues. Lower family sizes and preference of independent life style, the nuclear families may be becoming more prevalent, letting women to focus more on sericulture because they have fewer dependents. Joint families may benefit from shared resources and work, but they might restrict individual decision-making. The marital status data demonstrates that majority of respondents are married individuals, constituting 96.67 per cent. In contrast, the unmarried individuals constitute a much smaller proportion at 3.33 per cent. This significant participation of married associated to factors such as household responsibilities and the stability that marriage often provides, which could make sericulture more appealing. Majority (73.34%) of women have 10 to 30 years of experience in sericulture, while a considerable 18.33 per cent of women have been engaged in sericulture for less than 10 years. Notably, smaller portion (8.33%) of women possesses experience exceeding 30 years. This distribution pattern showed that relatively higher proportion of individuals who have spent a significant time period in the sericulture industry, suggesting a degree of stability and sustainability in this profession.

Socio-economic Status of Women Entrepreneurs in Sericulture

Participation of Women Entrepreneurs in Social Activities

The Table 4 shows how sericulture women entrepreneurs participate in various social activities. It is evident that women in the sericulture sector are significantly more active in social activities. Women entrepreneurs are more involved in SHGs (Self-Help Groups), with 88.33 per cent, while 11.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs are non-members. This disparity may be explained by the fundamental nature of SHGs, which stress collaborative efforts, skill development and empowerment, all of which

TABLE 4
Participation of sericulture women entrepreneurs in the social activities

| Particular | (n=60) | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Member | | Non-member | |
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Gram panchayat member | 11 | 18.33 | 49 | 81.67 |
| NGO | 1 | 01.67 | 59 | 98.33 |
| Youth club | 2 | 03.33 | 58 | 96.67 |
| FPO | 5 | 08.33 | 55 | 91.67 |
| Cocoon market | 41 | 68.33 | 19 | 31.67 |
| SHGs | 53 | 88.33 | 7 | 11.67 |

connect with the goals and interests of sericulture entrepreneurs. SHGs are anticipated to give these entrepreneurs with a forum for information exchange, resource sharing and mutual support, hence propelling their growth.

The cocoon market has the second highest participation rate, with 68.33 per cent of women entrepreneurs who are members of the cocoon market who participate actively, while 31.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs are non-members. The cocoon market is a significant activity for women entrepreneurs in sericulture because it is where they sell their cocoons. They can earn a living and

contribute to the economy by engaging in the cocoon market. Lower participation per centages among non-members in various categories such as gram panchayat, NGOs and youth groups, on the other hand, could be attributed to limited access to networks and resources, thereby limiting their participation in these activities.

The Table 5 revealed that the extent of participation of sericulture women entrepreneurs in various extension initiatives. Krishimela (agricultural fair) had the highest participation, with 86.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs involved on a regular basis, 11.67 per cent attended occasionally and only 3.33 per cent never attended. The Krishimela is a large and well-attended event that serves as a comprehensive event for knowledge sharing, presenting innovations and providing networking opportunities, all of which connect with the desires of women entrepreneurs to stay informed and engaged in the agricultural sector.

Training programme is another important extension activity wherein 13.33 per cent of women entrepreneurs being regular participants and 78.33 per cent participated occasionally, while merely 8.33 per cent never attended. It provides women entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills they need to grow their enterprises. Demonstration and exhibition have 68.33 per cent and 30 per cent occasional women participants respectively.

TABLE 5
Extent of participation of sericulture women entrepreneurs in extension activities

| Particular | (n=60) | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Regular | | Occasional | | Never | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Training programme | 8 | 13.33 | 47 | 78.33 | 5 | 08.33 |
| Demonstration | 4 | 06.67 | 41 | 68.33 | 15 | 25.00 |
| Field day | 1 | 01.67 | 13 | 21.67 | 45 | 75.00 |
| Field visit | 4 | 00.67 | 16 | 26.67 | 40 | 66.67 |
| Exhibition | 2 | 03.33 | 18 | 30.00 | 40 | 66.67 |
| Krishimela | 52 | 86.67 | 7 | 11.67 | 1 | 03.33 |
| Exposure tour | 0 | 00.00 | 1 | 01.67 | 59 | 98.33 |
| Campaign | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3.33 | 58 | 96.67 |

Field days and field visits have average participation with 21.67 per cent and 26.67 per cent participants. On the other hand, Exposure tour and campaign have significantly lower participation per cent with just 1.67 per cent and 3.33 per cent. Exposure tours and campaigns may be more expensive than other extension activities and women entrepreneurs may not be able to engage due to financial constraints. Furthermore, exposure tours and campaigns may include long distance travel for women entrepreneurs, which can be difficult for those with family commitments.

SWOC of Sericulture Women Entrepreneurs

Table 6 provides a comprehensive look at the strengths of women entrepreneurs in the sericulture industry. The numbers of respondents with 83.33 per cent strongly agree that sericulture is a woman-friendly occupation. This is likely due to the meticulous and detail-oriented nature of silk production, which aligns well with women's skills and attention to quality. The occupation's compatibility with women's capabilities enhances their engagement and success in the sector.

The second statement emphasized on how sericulture positively impacts the economic status of women and for which 56.67 per cent strongly agreed and 38.33 per cent agreed. The respondents recognize that sericulture not only provides employment opportunities but also empowers women economically. These opinions underscore sericulture's ability to promote women equality and financial independence. 6.67 per cent of women

entrepreneurs agree and 43.33 per cent strongly agree that sericulture requires less initial investment. This means that women entrepreneurs will have easier access to the field, allowing them to enter even with modest financial resources. 38.33 per cent disagree and 11.67 per cent strongly disagree with less initial investment as women reelers need more investment for setting up the enterprise. On the other hand, the lowest level of agreement is observed in the statement related to mulberry leaves availability throughout the year with 18.33 per cent strongly agree and 53.33 per cent agree. The smaller agreement may be due to geographic variances and changes in the seasons encountered by some women entrepreneurs, which affect the availability of materials required for silk production.

For every unit of increase in area under mulberry, silkworm rearing intensity, experience in sericulture and self-reliance, education, land holding, yield of cocoon per year, mass media participation, extension participation, extension contact and level of aspiration of sericulture farm women there will be an increase in the entrepreneurial behaviour towards sericulture farming were the findings of Sushma and Lalitha, 2018, which is in line with the results of this study.

The Table 7 represents the perceived weaknesses of women entrepreneurs in the sericulture enterprise, as stated by survey results. A sizable proportion, 48.67 per cent women agreed and 16.67 per cent strongly agreed that there are insufficient training opportunities and skill development programs. Women entrepreneurs in sericulture often lack access to training and development programs that can help

TABLE 6
Strengths of women entrepreneurs in sericulture

| Statements | (n=60) | | | |
|---|----------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
| Women friendly occupation | 50 (83.33) | 8 (13.33) | 0 (0.00) | 2 (6.67) |
| Enhances economic status of women sericulturists | 34 (56.67) | 23 (38.33) | 1 (3.33) | 2 (6.67) |
| Require less initial investment | 4 (6.67) | 26 (43.33) | 7 (11.67) | 23 (38.33) |
| Mulberry leaves availability through the year | 10 (18.33) | 26 (53.33) | 4 (6.67) | 20 (21.67) |
| Proximity to avail various schemes and facilities | 13 (21.67) | 38 (63.33) | 2 (6.67) | 7 (11.67) |
| Women often have a keen sense of quality and aesthetics | 17 (28.33) | 40 (66.67) | 2 (3.33) | 1 (1.67) |

TABLE 7
Weakness of women entrepreneurs in sericulture

| Statements | (n=60) | | | |
|--|----------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
| Insufficient training opportunities and skill development programs. | 10 (16.67) | 28 (48.67) | 0 (0.00) | 22 (36.67) |
| Small sized land holdings | 22 (36.67) | 32 (53.33) | 0 (0.0) | 6 (0.00) |
| Rearing of smaller quantity due to limited resources | 19 (31.67) | 31 (51.67) | 0 (0.0) | 10 (1.66) |
| Hesitation among women to adopt new technology | 10 (16.67) | 26 (43.33) | 4 (6.67) | 20 (33.33) |
| Changing climatic conditions and unpredictable rainfall | 23 (38.33) | 29 (48.33) | 0 (0.00) | 8 (13.33) |
| Gender bias can lead unequal treatment in negotiations and contracts | 20 (33.33) | 31 (51.67) | 0 (0.00) | 9 (15.00) |

them to improve their skills and compete with male entrepreneurs who have more access to these resources. However, 36.67 per cent women disagreed with this statement, indicating that some people believe that Government is providing enough training and skill development programmes.

Around 53 per cent women agreed and 36.67 per cent strongly agreed that a small sized land holding was a challenge. Women entrepreneurs in sericulture often have small landholdings, which limits the amount of silk they can produce. This can restrict the scale of sericulture activities, affecting potential profits and expansion opportunities. A majority of 51.67 per cent, agreed that limited resources hinder women entrepreneurs from rearing larger quantities of silkworms. This barrier can impede their economic growth and potential impact on the industry. 43.33 per cent of women agreed and 33.33 per cent disagreed that women are hesitant to adopt new technology. This suggests that, while a significant percentage acknowledges a reluctance to use technology, a considerable proportion does not. This could be attributable to women entrepreneurs differing levels of comfort and involvement with technology.

A significant portion with 51.67 per cent of women agreed that gender bias affects negotiations and contracts, potentially putting women entrepreneurs at a disadvantage. This underscores the need for gender-sensitive policies to ensure equitable opportunities. However, 33.33 per cent disagreed,

indicating a certain level of optimism or different perceptions regarding gender bias.

Table 8 presents the opportunities for women entrepreneurs in sericulture. Among the statements, the highest level of agreement was for the growing global demand for silk with 73.33 per cent, indicating a recognized market potential. This aligns with the increasing popularity of silk products worldwide. Moreover, 63.33 per cent of women agreed that the role of sericulture as an employment-generating industry for women in rural areas underscoring its potential for empowering women economically. Additionally, 61.67 per cent women entrepreneurs agreed regarding sericulture's role in providing an extra income source alongside traditional agricultural activities emphasizes its diversification benefits. 46.67 per cent women have disagreed that sericulture is source of additional income apart from the income from crops and livestock as women entrepreneurs in Chikkaballapur majorly take up sericulture as their main occupation so they consider sericulture as their main source of income rather than considering it has additional income while, 38.33 per cent of women agreed thinking that sericulture is good source of income.

Conversely, 28.33 per cent women disagreed that sericulture does not involve much muscular hard work it can actively involve aged members and women. This indicates a need for further awareness and education about the accessibility of sericulture even for those

TABLE 8
Opportunities of women entrepreneurs in sericulture

(n=60)

| Statements | Strongly Agree | Agree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
|--|----------------|------------|-------------------|----------|
| Growing demand for silk worldwide | 44 (73.33) | 14 (23.33) | 0 (0.00) | 2 (6.67) |
| Due to increasing literacy in rural area young farmers are showing interest in adopting new technology | 19 (31.67) | 37 (61.67) | 4 (6.67) | 0 (0.00) |
| Sericulture is emerging has an women employment generating industry in rural areas | 2 (33.33) | 38 (63.33) | 0 (0.0) | 2 (3.33) |
| Sericulture is source of additional income apart from the income from crops and livestock | 7 (11.66) | 23 (38.33) | 28 (46.67) | 2 (6.67) |
| As sericulture does not involve much muscular hard work it can actively involve aged members and women | 16 (26.67) | 22 (36.67) | 17 (28.33) | 5 (8.33) |

who might not engage in strenuous labor. Overall, the table highlights the broad consensus on the prospects of sericulture-related entrepreneurship for women, particularly in meeting the global demand for silk and generating rural employment opportunities, while also suggesting the necessity of dispelling misconceptions around physical demands associated with sericulture.

Table 9 presents the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the sericulture industry. In the first statement, the challenge of urbanization and migration of farmers from rural areas emerges as a significant concern, with a majority 61.67 per cent of women strongly agreed and 28.33 per cent agreed that this trend affects the sericulture sector. This could be connected to a reduction in the availability of skilled

workers and traditional expertise required for sericulture in rural regions, which has a negative influence on productivity. The majority, 41.67 per cent of women agreed that the presence of alternative crops diverts resources away from sericulture. This could be due to variations in profitability and ease of cultivation when compared to sericulture, leading to a reduced focus on silk production.

A substantial proportion with 73.33 per cent of women agreed and 13.33 per cent strongly agreeing that price fluctuations make women entrepreneurs vulnerable to market uncertainties, affecting their financial stability and planning. 51.67 per cent of women entrepreneurs agreed and 31.67 per cent strongly agreed to the statement difficulty in

TABLE 9
Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in sericulture

(n=60)

| Statements | Strongly Agree | Agree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
|--|----------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| Urbanization(migration of farmers from rural areas) | 37 (61.67) | 17 (28.33) | 1 (1.67) | 5 (8.33) |
| Competitive agriculture crops | 4 (6.67) | 25 (41.67) | 2 (3.33) | 29 (48.33) |
| Price fluctuations | 10 (13.33) | 44 (73.33) | 1 (1.67) | 5 (8.33) |
| Difficulty in accessing wider markets due to transportation and language barriers. | 19 (31.67) | 31 (51.67) | 2 (3.33) | 8 (13.33) |
| Preference of synthetic fibers due to low cost | 41 (68.33) | 16 (26.67) | 1 (1.67) | 2 (3.33) |
| Moisture sensitivity of cocoon | 44 (73.33) | 13 (21.67) | 1 (1.67) | 2 (3.33) |

accessing wider markets due to transportation and language barriers, highlighting the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in expanding their market reach, potentially limiting their business growth and income.

Nearly 68 per cent who strongly agreed and 26.67 per cent agreed the preference for synthetic fibers due to their low cost stands out as a notable challenge. This inclination towards cheaper alternatives affects the demand for traditional silk products and poses a threat to the sustainability of sericulture. With 73.33 per cent highly agreed and 21.67 per cent agreed that moisture sensitivity of cocoons underlines the limitations of sericulture production under particular conditions. This could result in production losses and lower overall productivity among women entrepreneurs in the sector.

The study provides valuable insights into the socio-economic contributions of women in this traditional yet evolving industry. The involvement of women in sericulture has played a pivotal role in empowering them socially and economically. By actively participating in sericulture activities such as rearing silkworms, producing silk and engaging in value-added activities like weaving, women have gained financial independence, decision-making power and a more prominent role in their households and communities. This empowerment has contributed to breaking down gender barriers in rural areas. Further, Women entrepreneurs in sericulture have significantly contributed to the local economy of Chikkaballapur. Their entrepreneurial efforts not only provide them with a steady source of income but also stimulate the local economy by creating employment opportunities for other women.

Government initiatives, along with support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have been crucial in enhancing the capabilities of women in sericulture. Schemes providing subsidies for silkworm seed purchase, access to training programs and financial assistance have helped women entrepreneurs in Chikkaballapur to scale up their businesses. Even then, weaving and bio-craft enterprises which are least

undertaken by women, so government should implement specific initiatives such as accessible training programs, financial assistance and mentorship opportunities and create awareness campaigns to undertake these enterprises. Pricing challenges, preference of synthetic fibers and moisture sensitivity of the cocoons are the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Hence, the authority concerned may explore the possibility of fixing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for silk cocoons so as to ensure a remunerative price to sericulture farmers. Further, there is a need for more comprehensive and sustained interventions to improve women's access to resources, training and market linkages.

Despite the significant involvement of women in the sericulture sector, especially in rural India, there exists a limited body of research specifically focused on the entrepreneurial roles of women in sericulture and there has been a lack of region-specific studies that consider the local socio-cultural and economic conditions influencing women's participation in sericulture enterprises. This study addressed women as entrepreneurs, rather than just labour participants in sericulture activities and it is regional specific related to Chikkaballapur district. The use of a SWOC analysis provided a comprehensive and structured view of the internal and external factors affecting women's entrepreneurship in sericulture. Future Research can be undertaken by comparing women entrepreneurs in sericulture across different districts or states could provide broader insights into regional variations and best practices.

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