

CHAPTER: 8

An Empirical Analysis on Social & Gender Issues in Artisanal Silk Industry of West Bengal (A Case Study in Malda District)

8.1 Introduction

After an elaborative discussion on income and employment issues in artisanal silk industry of West Bengal, this chapter will focus on gender and social issues related to this sector. The discussion will begin with portraying family dynamics in this household industry followed by raising certain grave issues like child labour involvement in this specific industry. An extensive analysis will be carried out focussing on the role of women workers in the sericulture sector in the final section of this chapter. Sericulture is such an activity where most of the work is performed by women alone in terms of operations performed and time invested. However, despite showing tenacity and persistence, the women workers remain as unpaid family workers or low paid hired workers. This chapter will attempt to explore these hidden issues behind this so-called 'predominance of female workers' in this artisanal sector, especially in the context of West Bengal. This dominance is usually translated into distributive impact, which is also known as 'spillover effect of women employment'. Employment of women raise the nutritional level and educational level of their children irrespective of their sex at a greater level compared to that generated from male employment. Report of the working group on Empowerment of Women for the Tenth Plan (MWCD-GoI, 2006) states that lack of women's employment not only impedes growth and poverty reduction but also welcome a host of negative impacts including less favourable education and health outcomes of children. This prioritizes the core objective of this chapter, i.e., to identify the explanatory factors behind such female dominance in sericulture sector of West Bengal. However, before delving into the core analysis it is very much pertinent to carry on a rigorous analysis on family dynamics and issues of child labour in the context of artisanal silk industry of India.

8.2 Family Dynamics & Role of Gender in Sericulture Households of India

Being labour-intensive and productive household enterprise, sericulture poses a direct impact on the family structure of the artisans. It involves predominantly the family labour. Being a household industry, it naturally facilitates the involvement of womenfolk, to a large extent. Its frequent cash returns have the potentiality of changing the power equations within the family. Thus, adoption of sericulture is bound to disturb the existing structure and the functioning of family for better or worse. In this context, it is useful to look into the dynamics of the family system of the artisans.

Gregory (1997) made an interesting attempt to examine the changing features of Indian family system. He analysed the structural variations and implications in the context of sericulture. His analysis was based on the intra-family dynamics and authority relations along with a detailed analysis of gender relations. According to his sociological view-point, family in Indian society has occupied a central place in carrying over the traditional features of village life in India. For most part, the traditional system has survived for centuries without any major institutional alterations. Precisely, with the advent of British rule and the accompanied factors of industrialization and modernization, the structural features of different traditional institutions of Indian social fabric had started changing. With the passage of time, national liberation and consequently economic policies have further speeded up such changes, directly or indirectly, by various governmental measures initiated in the post-independent era.

Various regional studies have revealed a diversity of patterns in rural family structures (Morrison 1959; Desai 1956; Kapadia 1956). According to Madan (1983), the joint family system is now losing its ground because of increasing population, smallness of holdings, easy communication, education, employment opportunities outside and the emergence of individualistic spirit. Another factor that has a considerable impact on the changing structure of the family system in India is family planning, which has helped to reduce the size of the family considerably. Some studies (Singh, 1970) have

noted a difference in family structure with caste-class variations. Accordingly, the structure of the family among the lower castes is said to be just the opposite of the pattern observed among the upper or intermediate castes. This pattern is related to the significance given to conformity to the traditional family ideal. This is also positively correlated with joint ownership of wealth and property. Moreover, agricultural occupation and land-holding is seen as sustaining the motivation for togetherness among the upper castes. No sufficient land and substantial property are discerned among the lower castes to hold the interest of the members to the joint family norm. As a result, it allows their young to behave more independently and break away from the parental family authority at the slightest provocation.

Sericulture provides a challenging environment to the family system and potential stimulation for alterations in its structure and functioning. Sericulture, by its very nature, has its own characteristic features that necessarily affect the family relations. It necessitates certain interaction-patterns and social responses to fit into the prevailing conditions and for a better deliberation of the activity. For successful and sustaining returns, there needs to be a perfect understanding and high dedication and commitment to the work among the attendees. Most part of the work is carried out within the household premises. So, there is bound to be changing role-allocations and work involvement. All these are naturally expected to be reflected in family dynamics of the social system. The requirements of sericulture activity necessitate naturally certain alteration in the structure of the family.

Roy, Roy Mukherjee and Ghosh (2012) have made a case study on the sericulture sector of Malda district of West Bengal and have shown that joint households have lower employment generating capacity. This justifies why the poor rural artisanal joint-households in the artisanal silk sectors are gradually becoming nuclear in structure. Gregory (1997) observed an interesting case in one of his surveyed village family at Seripura of Tamil Nadu. He observed in one single family which had fallen under its own weight with conflicting interests and differential involvement that it ultimately resulting in four nuclear families, with the unmarried brother left with the parents. This was true of other similar situations too when, for instance, one of the siblings was involved in the farm activity while another had a salaried job. There were also a few cases of lineal extended families engaged in sericulture. In the case of lineal extended families, there seem to be no parties to act with conflicting and self-motivated interests. The father generally takes care of family activities if he is capable of doing it and if there are larger land-holdings and crop diversification, son becomes the main sericulturist while his wife plays the active supporter role in sericulture. Mother becomes an asset in taking care of the household work while extending a passive support to the sericulture activity. Generally, in such type of family, the married son assumes a greater responsibility in the management of the family, especially in the context of sericulture. 'Matrilineal-nuclear' families usually conform to the general distribution of the family types in the village of Tamil Nadu, with a marginal variation, in favour of sericulture.

There are quite a few cases of widowed mothers who are left alone to take care of themselves in Indian agronomy. However, this hardly happens in a sericulture family where an extra female is always an asset. While surveying in the villages of Kaliyachak Block of Malda district, we also observed higher concentration of female labour in sericulture, especially at later phases of the rearing as well as reeling. At the same time, household work continues to be women's inevitable and taken-for granted attribution. So, the presence of an additional family woman becomes an additional advantage for sericulture families. When an extended sericulture family is broken into multiple nuclear families, in such cases, sericulture generally becomes expanded as it is generally adopted by a majority of the newly formed nuclear units in the place of a single extended unit. There are also cases in which, in the process of break-up, even some sericulture-interested persons may have to give it up. There are also instances of families comprising of one of the parents, either widowed or separated along with unmarried children.

Gregory (1997) talked about one such family in Tamil Nadu with a separated woman with children. After a gap of about five years, her husband joined her again. There are also many instances where SC woman-headed households are successfully running sericulture. The story is same for the sericulture families of Jharkhand and Bihar, as explained by Madhabanand Ray, Managing Director of MASUTA

(a tasar yarn producing company situated at Jharkhand). He explained a case of a widow who was sent back to her mother's place and provided with only a house to live with. She was left all alone to earn her livelihood and take care of the education of her child. She started tasar yarn reeling work and ultimately survived and sustained well (Ramesha et al., 2009). In our primary survey areas at Malda district of West Bengal, we have come across with innumerable single and widowed women who are living happily making sericulture as their mainstay of livelihood (Roy and RoyMukherjee, 2014).

Thus, sericulture has been adopted by all types of families but under specific conditions. Moreover, the adoption of sericulture itself tends to alter the structure and functioning of the family. Intra-family dynamics consists of different role statuses within the family. These include the number of adults in the family, their intensity of participation in sericulture. It also concerns authority relations among the recognized dyads that are traditionally involved in unequal power relations. For instance, the number of adults in a family is an important variable in understanding the internal dynamics of family in the context of sericulture. The sericultural adoption and intensity in different family types can be better understood, if this is seen in the context of the number of adult males and females available in the family.

Researchers showed that in families where there are just two adults alone, sericulture leaves much work-stress (Gregory, 2007). In such families, sericultural activities are kept to the minimum. For the same reason, it is hard for large farmers with less number of adults, especially where there are less than two adult males, to adopt sericulture. It is not the case with other households where there are some additional hands, even if they happen to be children, to extend some assistance especially during peak days of rearing. This enhances the uses of Child Labour even within the domestic arena., which will be discussed at length in the subsequent section.

To assess the nature and pattern of sericulture participation, it is important to understand the relationship status of main sericulturists to the head of the family. A main sericulturist is usually the one who would normally initiates steps to adopt sericulture in the household. The exception is among households that have come up following a division from parental family. It is also the main sericulturist who manages the sericulture work. He also usually takes an active part in its operation. Some of the key activities of silkworm rearing like chawki rearing and moult setting, which are believed to require high skill and personal care, are largely attended by main sericulturists.

In India, where traditional stereotypes are still persisting, subordination of the individual has been considered to be one of the characteristic features of this family (Desai 1984). In such a family system, the individual interests have been subjected to the tenets of the family and of the caste. The head of the family always possess the authority over every individual member of the family. Traditionally, authority rests with the older men of the caste and the man, as husband and father, has head-of-household rights (Hollway, 1994). The dominance of men over women and of the old over the young has been accepted as a norm over time and gradually become institutionalized. The cohesiveness of the family has still been given supreme importance. Though with changing circumstances, there has been a tendency for alteration in authority relations due to many factors, which, in turn, result in structural modifications. One of the major factors that operate in the loosening of such relations is the exposure of the individual members to the external world. The other major factor could be the increasing possibility of exercising or asserting one's control over income. Operation of an enterprise like sericulture requires wider linkages and involves wider exposure. This is because of its dependency on market forces, for procurement of layings and marketing of cocoons.

'Authority' necessarily involves two essential categories of people, namely, the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the powerless. Authority, control, power and autonomy are all related concepts. Lipman-Blumen (1994) defines power as a set of processes whereby one party (be it an individual, group, institution, or state) can gain and maintain the capacity to improve its will repeatedly upon another, despite any opposition, by its potential to contribute or withhold economic resources from the central task, as well as by offering or withholding rewards, or by threatening or invoking punishment. Here, the emphasis has been laid on the processes and on the critical resources.

In the context of gender autonomy, Mencher (1989) and Leacock (1978) defined 'autonomy' as the extent to which women hold decision making power over their own lives and activities comparable to the power men hold over their lives. Thus, authority basically implies the power to control resources and allocate the same at will and thereby deprive the autonomy of the others to be at their will. Authority is a relative concept. It implies two dimensions, reflecting the stand-points of the powerful and the powerless. The one relates to the extent of control, the dominant exercises over the dominated. The other is related to the extent of freedom the subservient enjoys. The extreme of control and total deprivation of freedom would be the result of a concentrated authority. The more one is able to partake in the control of the resources, the greater would be the devolution of power, which would consequently result in distributive authority. This process of transition neither occurs automatically nor voluntarily. It occurs only when it is accompanied by certain other processes that relate to the dominated. In the context of family, the members should undergo first a process of self-realisation about the individual's productive contribution that forms part of the collective resources of the family. This realisation is easily achieved when the contribution is economic and visible. Such a self-realisation instills a self-confidence in them, which is essential in the process of self-assertion. Once this is complete, the so-far subjected individual begins to assert his/her freedom in the areas of decision-making and social behaviour. In such a situation, either the stability of the system itself is threatened or the 'subjected', if failed to achieve the intended freedom, would lose interest in the generation of productive resources, which the dominant may dislike. Thus, the authority-holder is forced to yield to the demands of the subjected individual as the processes of decontrolling and controlling of resources occur simultaneously. In the process, the powerless become empowered, notwithstanding the extent of empowerment.

Sericulture becomes an effective tool in the hands of the subordinates within the familial situation. A majority of the heads in sericulture households, who are traditional authority holders, are either main sericulturists themselves or playing active role in sericulture. In such cases, though they may not feel the pressure to transfer the authority, they are rather more likely to exercise the distributive authority. The extent of distribution would again depend on the nature of support from other participants, which is also crucial to the success of the enterprise. As usually seen the sons in these households are in an unenviable position, either as main sericulturists or active sericulturists or employed outside. Moreover, in about less than fifty percent of the sericulture households in India, wives play an active role in sericulture. So, authority relations are seriously altered in these households. The husband-wife dyad is present in almost all the sericulturist families. Moreover, this is the only dyadic relationship of authority relations found in sericulture households. The relaxation of traditional authority among the dyads mainly depends on the processes along the extent of sericulture involvement and participation. Sericulture being an enterprising and a challenging agro-industry with a high productive potentiality, it becomes a more suitable activity for the youngsters. Prevalence of child labour is a very common phenomenon in all most all the study villages in Malda district. Sericulture, being a household industry, also provides greater opportunity for women to increasingly involve in the operation of such productive enterprises. This too is evident in the study villages, as there is definitely a higher participation of women (as compared to their participation in other agricultural operations). Their participation is still intensive in households with more than one woman and among small and marginal landholders. All these are not without their impact on the social and authority relations. In the succeeding sections, we will try to explore the reasons of predominance of women workers in sericulture activities. But before exploring the gender dominance and gender empowerment through sericulture operations, we intend to discuss the issues of child labour in artisanal silk industry, which is unambiguously a major concern for the policy makers of our country.

8.3 Child Labour Issues in Indian Artisanal Silk Industry

Indian artisanal silk Industry is such an employment generating household sector where instances of both child labour and bonded labour are prevalent. Maximum amount of work of this artisanal industry is carried out by the children, who are employed in all stages of the silk

processing, making sericulture a child-based industry. Child labour, other than being a curse, curbed the possibility of Indian silk exports in the foreign market. In international arena, Germany reacted out to this social clause and proposed certification schemes that would satisfy the customers where no child labour has been used in the producing market. Given the fact that Germany is the largest consumer of Indian silk, this ban on the product which used 'child labour' in its process of manufacturing caused deep concern both to the Indian silk exporters as well as policy makers.

In India, the machines utilised in this artisanal silk sector are designed in such a manner that children can work on them. In sericulture sector, the children are subject to exploitation - being denied to realize their potential and denied of their fundamental rights, like, Right to Education (which has become an Act in India, since 2010), Right to exist etc. This artisanal silk sector has witnessed a progressive and systematic marginalization of the poor during the last few decades. This situation has led to a total decadence of the social and cultural life of the people in this sector wherein, the children find themselves alienated from the social mainstream. The administrative structures, institutional machinery and attitude of the Government continues to overlook the problems, while the artisanal silk industry works at the cost of the health, education, and social opportunities of children. The gross violation of children's rights with regard to their health, social life, education and their lost childhood should be a matter of great concern for policy makers, economists, employers, voluntary organizations and other community members. The Central and State governments and agencies that fund sericulture development in India (e.g., World Bank, Swiss Development Council etc.) has also addressed the use of child labour in Indian silk producing sectors (Menon, 2001).

Artisanal silk sector consists of two important stages in the processing of silk, namely silk reeling and silk twisting. The third stage of production, namely weaving rarely involves child labour (Karnath et al., 2008). However, through a report of World Bank, it has been intimated that bonded child labour is prevailing at all stages of operation in India, like, reeling the silk fibers from the cocoons, fibers from the cocoons, twisting the fibers into thread, dyeing the silk, preparing the looms for weaving, weaving itself and assisting the masters with the complex work of weaving. According to another report, within the vertical structure of Indian artisanal silk industry child labour assists at the bottom to the master weaver. Besides that, the agricultural side, i.e., rearing of silk worms and growing mulberry also involves child labour. They are largely found as domestic unpaid child labour, and often as bonded agricultural child labour (Karnath et al., 2008). No agency, in the government sector or the private sector, has compiled statistics of child labour in various segments of silk industry as a whole. The Karnataka Human Development Report, 1999, quoting from a study conducted by Human Rights Watch, estimated that out of the 400,000 persons employed in the rearing of silk worms and production of silk thread, around 100,000 are children. Child labour under the condition of bondage is widespread in twisting sector.

Bonded labour is a situation arising from a pledge by a debtor of his or her personal services or those of someone under his or her control as security for a debt. Those in bonded labour find it often impossible to extricate themselves from their situation, and may be trapped indefinitely. Many children are given as a collateral for a loan by their parents and become trapped in bonded labour (IPEC 2004: 187). Bonded child labour occurs in more or less the same way as persons get bonded in agriculture. A parent borrows some money towards any expense that she/ he has to incur, in return she/he may enlist the services of a child to work in the production unit (silk reeling or silk twisting 'factory').

In a study among a sample of child labourers in silk reeling and twisting units, (See, Karanth and Vijayalakshmi 1998) in Karnataka, it was reported that the ratios of adult to child workers were 1:3 in reeling and 1:4 in silk twisting. Thus the tendency to depend on child labour was found to be much higher in the silk twisting units than in reeling units. The point to be noted in both, however, is parents indulge in enrolling their children, usually the females, as workers mainly with a view to raise hard-to-mobilise credit to meet a short-term need. Such needs may range from having to meet a contingent medical expense or raising capital for investment such as buying a house site or bribe their way through obtaining a government grant. Girl children worked in silk industry household in large proportions both in silk reeling and silk twisting segments of production (see, Charsley 1998; Karanth and Vijayalakshmi 1998).

There is, however, a tendency for scholars studying the problem of child labour, especially of the bonded kind, to focus on either of the dimensions: the household or the factories in which they are engaged. Likewise, there has been a tendency also to examine the effects of the state initiated measures almost in isolation of the changes that may be taking place in the very organisation of production that enables continued recruitment of child labour on changing terms. For instance, the industry in respect of silk twisting has undergone considerable changes over the years, not many of which are necessarily conducive to hiring child labour. Over the years there has been an increased and intensive activism by the voluntary organisations and similar other civil society institutions campaigning against child labour. Likewise, there have been much more intensive efforts by the state agencies to detect the incidence of child labour employment. Discussions with employers reveal several means with which they are able to revamp their endeavours.

Circumstances conducive for enrollment of child labour in the process of production are not necessarily uniform in both the sectors within sericulture, such as reeling and twisting. Karanth and Vijayalakshmi (1998) had found that 69 per cent parents of bonded child workers too had engaged themselves in the silk industry as wage earners. In contrast, an equivalent proportion of parents of children in twisting sector had been agriculturists, as either small and marginal farmers or wage labourers. Availability of labour, alternative means of livelihood, specific determinants of poverty among the workforce in rural and urban areas, therefore, become important in examining the occurrence of bonded child labour.

With the growing awareness of the concept of child rights, and proactive measures by the state besides concerted efforts of voluntary organizations to eradicate child labour, there have been considerable changes in the social and economic environment within which labour recruitment takes place. While on the one hand there has been efforts to encourage children from poorer sections to enroll in schools (educational and skill improvement programmes), there have also been efforts to mobilize savings and credit through self help groups among the vulnerable groups. The latter in particular has not only acted to provide the economic relief by way of cheap credit, they have also provided a social platform to advocate socially relevant issues such as campaign against child labour.

The industry too has not remained stagnant. Over the years, especially under the spell of economic reforms and liberalised market policies, silk industry has experienced considerable changes, some of which are not well received by those engaged in silk reeling and twisting sectors. Initially some of these measures were seen as welcome changes in the industry, but in due course the small-scale entrepreneurs found them to be taxing. For instance, the job

work that was undertaken in the reeling and twisting sectors were replaced by the entrepreneurs having to purchase the 'raw material', process them and sell the finished value added product in the designated market. Consequently, capital investment especially to purchase the raw material became a big challenge to the poverty stricken silk reelers and the twisting 'factory' owners. Workers began to experience fluctuating demand for their services during the mid 1980s and early 1990s. Even though they may have borrowed money in advance as wages from the employers, there was no certainty that they have assured employment. Consequently, there had begun a practice of workers bonding themselves to multiple set of employers, and if one of them had wanted the services of employees exclusively, she /he had to advance afresh the sum over and above what have been borrowed by the workers from another employer.

Demand for silk too underwent considerable fluctuation, especially in the light of import of raw silk from China, which was found to be much cheaper than indigenously produced silk. This affected adversely both the silk reelers and twisters, and in turn affected the wage conditions for the labourers and thus ultimately bonded child labour persisted. In other words, despite the efforts by the state and voluntary sector on the one hand, and adverse market conditions, the institution of bonded child labour continued to exist, if not flourish. Coupled with this continued trend was the near downfall of the state institutions in regulating the market. There are allegations of rampant nexus between the bureaucracy at the regulated markets and the established entrepreneurs who together violate the norms of transactions. Consequently, several feudal and semi-feudal relations of production continued to persist. It was reported that the 'merchants' continue to supply raw material on a job-work basis both to the silk reelers and twisters. During 2003, the amount allowed as wages was reduced by about 30 per cent. This reduction has been passed on to the workers rather than owning up by the job-working entrepreneurs. Workers faced temporary unemployment for indeterminate time-periods. Sometimes they were bound to work at reduced wages and also they have their children bonded so as to raise sums of money that they cannot raise as credit otherwise. A typical 'advance' for a novice child worker consists of Rs. 5000 to 15,000 in silk reeling, while it is much less in the case of twisting. Because the child worker is new to work, the first couple of months of work is unpaid, the duration being considered as 'training.' On the days that the employer has no work to be carried out either due to unavailability of raw material, or power shut down, the worker has now work and therefore no wages. Having been under bondage, however, the child labourer is not free to undertake any other work, for neither is certain as to when there is likely to be a call for their services from the master. The situation, therefore, reflects a form of labour which Daniel Thorner described in the mid 1960s as 'Beck and Call' labour. Case studies presented in recent research on bonded child labour describe the conditions involving them having to work as domestic servants when there is no work in silk twisting or reeling (Perodi and Jandhyala 2002; Chamaraj 1999).

Work-conditions and consequent health hazards in silk reeling and twisting sectors make the situation of the artisanal silk sector more precarious. The tender skin of the child silk reelers gets blistered and infected as a consequence of the constant immersion of cocoon in scalding water. In addition to the skin ailments, reelers frequently suffer from respiratory problems, caused by constant inhaling of sericin vapor. The child-workers in the silk twisting factories often suffer from backache and leg pain as they have to stand all day long without any rest. Some of them have found to develop leg deformities even. Cases have been found where boys and girls mentioned about their occasional injuries, mainly cuts from machines (Human Rights Watch, 1996). The rooms are often damp and poorly ventilated; children sit with their legs tucked under them or dangling down into the pit beneath the loom. Contagious diseases,

especially tuberculosis and digestive disorders, spread easily in the crowded rooms. Poor lighting and constant visual strain damages the eyesight. The fine silk threads cut the fingers, and the cuts are difficult to heal properly.

Besides these, abuses common to other bonded industries are found in silk production as well, which includes verbal abuse like threats and harsh language, physical abuse in the form of blows for arriving late, working slowly, or annoying the employer and physical abuse by denying the children adequate rest and recovery time. Girl child workers experience sexual abuse from their employees. Human Rights Watch (1996) reported that girls are preferred by owners because they are believed to be more obedient, docile and submissive. According to the activists and investigators in the area, girl child workers are frequently targeted by the owners inside the factories. The practice is so prevalent that the girls ultimately become recluses from the society due to this stigma of getting assaulted by the silk factory owners.

According to Human Rights Watch Reports (HRW, 1996), an estimated 1 lakh labour involved out of 4 lakh labour were child labours in Karnataka, which is the largest silk yarn producing state in India. Reeling is the process by which the silk filaments are pulled off the cocoon. The cocoons are cooked in boiling water in order to loosen the Sericin, a natural substance holding the filaments together. More than 80 percent of the silk reelers are under twenty years of age, with most of them between ten and fifteen years. The myth of children having natural advantages and skills is used to justify the exploitation of young girls and boys in dangerous work. The myth is perpetuated not only by the employers but also by the educated elite of the society (ibid, 1996). The children are not permitted to use spoons and instead of their hands when checking the boiling cocoons, as they believe that tender hands can more easily discern when the threads are ready to reel. These child-labourers are easily recognizable due to their palms and fingers filled with tracks of burns, scars, burns and blisters.

Silk twisting is another process where individual silk threads are twisted into a strong multiplies thread. Twisting usually takes place in small factories which use bonded child labour in large extent. Team of Human Rights Watch estimated 8 thousand child labour in one hundred twisting factories in one single subdivision of a district in Karnataka (HRW, 1996). The children tend to spindle, fitting them with thread, correcting deviations and performing other routine tasks. Many of the factories were found by the HRW team as shabby and dark with closed windows and shut-doors. The child-workers, who are recruited from all the villages in the area, travel an average of twelve kilometers to the factories where they work. The work is difficult for them and takes along day duration to finish their task. They often face beatings and scolding due to their negligence and after being adult when they are entitled to get higher wages, according to the minimum wage legislation act, the employer fired them.

Silk handlooms are found in the states of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Maharashtra. Evidences of bonded child labourers have been found in those silk handloom industries of Kanchipuram at Karnataka and Varanasi at Uttar Pradesh. In Kanchipuram, 40,000 to 50,000 children work in bondage while in Varanasi 85,000 child-workers have been found as working under the assistance of adult master weavers. They stretch the warps for the looms and fit the bobbins in the shuttles in preparation for the actual weaving. They sit beside the master weavers all day long, helping to lift the warp threads and manually feed the weft threads for the intricate designs of the silk saris. Children commonly enter the hand weaving

industry between the ages of six to nine and continue to work in that occupation through out their lives. Sometimes, their entire families are bonded, while set of siblings were found to be bonded somewhere else. These ill-fated artisans do not know even when their servitude would end.

Human Rights Watch prepared its reports on Indian silk industry in 1996 and 2003 consecutively, because the sector has received relatively less attention by the NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) and the international community other than industries such as handwoven carpets as it has an export market prospect. At every stage of the silk industry starting from boiling cocoons, hauling baskets of mulberry leaves, to embroidering saris, children are working everywhere. During 2003, it has been found that more than 3.5 lakh children are producing silk thread and helping to weave saris. These stages are most reliant on bonded children. The children work twelve or more hours a day, six and a half or seven days a week, under conditions of physical and verbal abuse. Starting as young as age five, they earn from nothing at all to around Rs. 400 a month, some or all of which is deducted against loans ranging from around Rs. 1,000 to 10,000 (HRW, 2013).

Both boys and girls are bonded in the silk industry. However, girls' work tends to be less visible. Girls, especially in Muslim families, may have the work brought to them in their homes instead of going out to work; this places them outside the protection of the child labor law. Girls typically perform household labor in addition to income-generating work; household labor is typically not shared by boys and is often not considered to be work at all. Where girls do go out to work, as in Karnataka, they are more likely to remain lower-paid assistants, less likely to become weavers. Girls are also less likely to be sent to school and may be less likely to access remedial programs, such as night schools, that do not take into account additional barriers including limitations on their ability to travel at night or for long distances to reach a school. Abuses against girls, including sexual abuse by employers, are noted throughout the report of Human Research Watch (HRW, 2003).

In 2003, Human Rights Watch's investigation covered three states prominent in the silk industry. In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, most attention has been paid to child labor in the carpet industry, but the limited attention to silk has pushed the child labor that was in factories into individual homes. In Tamil Nadu in the south, which has identified more bonded laborers than any other state, the state government has simply abandoned the Supreme Court's rehabilitative framework for any children found working in hazardous occupations after 1997, in clear violation of the Court's order. In Kanchipuram, a major silk sari weaving area in Tamil Nadu, child bondage is open, and the district collector, instead of prosecuting employers, has opened night schools for working children. In the southern state of Karnataka, silk thread production still depends almost entirely on bonded children. The state government has promulgated a plan to eliminate all child labor; this plan was not in operation at the time of Human Rights Watch's investigation.

One of the foundations of bonded labor is the caste system, through which a traditional expectation of free labor, lack of land, and the threat of violence and social and economic boycotts from upper castes conspire to keep many so-called untouchables, or Dalits, in bondage and a perpetual state of poverty⁵. While education and poverty-reduction programs are extremely important, if the caste aspects of bonded labor are not addressed, these programs will not change the actual power dynamics and economic relationships that perpetuate bonded labor in artisanal silk industry of India.

Indian laws prohibit the use of bonded child labor including debt bondage, child servitude, and forced labor. As per constitution, the government of India is obliged to take affirmative actions protecting children from economic exploitation and hazardous work especially for their tender age. Bonded child labor is also specifically identified as among the "worst forms of child labour" by ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which India has not ratified. Indian law has long prohibited bonded labor, and regulated and restricted child labor up to age fourteen. However, the practice of child labour as well as child-slavery is still continuing within its social fabrics⁶ without any hidden manner. This practice of bonded child labor violates various provisions of Indian law too. Labor by children under age fourteen in industries deemed hazardous, including all aspects of the silk industry, is expressly forbidden. Since the Indian Supreme Court's December 1996 decision in *M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu & Others.*, states have been obligated to identify children employed illegally, including those in work the Child Labour Act deems as "hazardous" and prohibits entirely; to remove the children, fine the employer Rs. 20,000 and deposit the fines in a rehabilitation-cum-welfare fund; to use the income from the fund to rehabilitate the child; to either employ an adult family member or contribute an additional Rs. 5,000 to the fund; and to prosecute employers. The Court ordered the Ministry of Labour to monitor the *M.C. Mehta* decision's implementation.

This report is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of all bonded child labor or implementation of the law in all of India. Rather, it is based on field investigations of bonded child labor in the silk industry in three states: Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Human Rights Watch chose these three states because they are major silk thread and sari producing areas, they illustrate varied involvement of the National Human Rights Commission, and they are geographically diverse. While the report focuses on silk, it could have been written about any number of industries. Additional research could also be conducted on progress made by states with higher literacy rates and lower use of bonded child labor, such as Kerala, and NGO initiatives such as the M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation in Andhra Pradesh.

However, Human Rights Watch conducted research and prepared a report on child labour involvement in artisanal silk industry along with other industries during March to April 2002. During their course of investigation, they interviewed 155 people, including fifty-four children, as well as teachers, parents, loom owners, traders, activists, academics, lawyers, and government officials at the district, state, and national levels. The youngest bonded child whom they interviewed was seven years old; and, children reported that they began work as young as age five. Almost all non-Muslim bonded children whom they interviewed belonged to Dalit and low-caste communities. As a whole, they found a very small change in elimination of child labour has taken place within 1996-2003 in Indian artisanal silk industry.

According to ILO statistics (2007), prevalence of child-labour is the largest at Malda district in West Bengal, which is also famous for artisanal silk industry in the state (Roy and Barman, 2012). From our own field surveys in several villages of Kaliachak blocks of Malda district, we observed widespread presence of child workers in the artisanal silk manufacturing households. These children are being used by their parents in the domestic silk manufacturing work. Although dropout children are not a very common phenomenon within the households, but lots of girl children spend their own time by sharing domestic work with their parents without attending school classes. As sericulture is mostly concentrated within the minority

blocks of Malda district, sending the girl children outside the domestic periphery is not a very acceptable phenomenon. But silk production definitely involves works of these children within the domestic arena. The following sections will explore the reasons behind the predominance of women workers in this particular vocation and whether their quantitative dominance is enhancing their empowerment in true sense.

8.4 Women workers in Indian Artisanal Silk Sector

Sericulture is practiced in villages of India as family-based occupation and thereby provides women a major role to play with in various activities of this household-industry. Nearly 60% of the labour requirement is met by the women (Acharya, 1993) in almost all the traditional sericulture agencies (Sandhya Rani, 2006) in the world. Here, by sericulture agencies we mean the nature of production organization, whether it is a small household unit or large corporate organization. Women's precision and patience make their presence more invincible in silk-worm handling. Since traditions and customs of society in Indian rural context do not encourage the majority of rural women to work outdoors, sericulture proves to be a boon. It gives a wide opportunity where women can carry all their contributory work even after attending to their regular household chores. Thus, sericulture is ideally suited for family women in the rural areas.

Jayaram et.al (1998) showed that every acre of sericulture practiced under irrigated conditions had a potential to employ 247 men and 193 women round the year. They also have shown that the small scale mulberry farms provided ample scope for employment of owned family labour and suggested its potential to solve the problem of seasonal unemployment. Lakshmanan et al. (1999) found that female labour is quite dominant in all sericultural activities, to an extent of nearly 50%. Saraswathi and Sumangala (2001) observed that in the indoor activity of silkworm rearing, women participation was as high as 94.67 % and that except for the peak period the entire sericultural activity is conducted using family labour.

Farm women have certain unique attributes, which are of special relevance to sericulture development and that these characteristics make the female dominance in sericulture indispensable:

- (i) A farm woman is the sheet anchor of the farm family. She is the foremost member who is concerned all the time about the well being of the family. So when women dominance is seen in any activity that has to be turned out to be a successful one. Silkworm rearing calls for intensive attention as well as mother's care, especially, for the larva stage. Identifying and then collecting mature silkworms and putting on spinning trays required a great deal of specialized skill and patience. Women members can ideally fit into the round-the- clock schedule of sericulture with intervals (Banerjee, 1990).
- (ii) Women are proved to be an efficient home-maker from time immemorial. So whether as an artisan or a household industrial worker, she is supposed to give her best as it is involved with her family. Sericulture is such farm enterprises that have a great share of indoor components and demand enough tenacity and sufficient attention (care & nourishment). Silkworm rearing calls for intensive attention as well as mother's care, especially during the later stage of the larva.
- (iii) According to the Central Sericultural Research & Training Institute, Mysore (See Guide to Sericulture Extension,), women have proven themselves to be better learners. The experts of the research institute at Mysore feel that women have better

capacity to concentrate, listen, integrate and recall. They are also easily adaptable which is important for a dynamic world where better sericulture technologies are about to pay better dividends.

Usha Rani (2007), in one of her studies have shown that the establishment of one acre mulberry garden for rearing 300 disease free layings (DFLs) of silk worms in two months generates 96.36 man days of employment, of which 72.70 percent are by women. She has also observed that cocoon cutting and sexing and egg incubation is exclusively done by women labour in villages of Andhra Pradesh. According to one statistical analysis, submitted at a National Conference on “Women in Sericulture” (held at Mysore on 16th and 17th March, 2007), sericulture can generate employment up to 11 persons (mandays) of every kg of raw silk produced, out of which more than 6 persons (mandays) are women. In India, more than 60 lakh persons are employed as full time workers in the production chain of this artisanal silk industry, out of which 35-40 lakh persons are women. In West Bengal, the farm sector of mulberry silk generated employment of 11259 in 2010-11 among which 6308 were women labour (DoS-WB, 2011-12).

On the other hand, so far as gender promotional aspect is concerned, sericulture is one of such activities where most of the activities are carried out by women alone, both in terms of operations performed and time invested. Ever-increasing demand to meet the domestic handloom industry requirements and equally increasing potentials for exports provide tremendous opportunity for the women to avail sustainable income generating activities in artisanal silk industry. The dominance of women workers in sericulture is historically evolved. Despite showing tenacity and persistence at work, their efforts remained unnoticed and they continued to work as unpaid family workers. However, this perception has changed for the better in recent years regarding the role of women in sericulture owing to the significance of the critical operations that they perform as well as their share in the production value although their participation in family income can hardly be observed as their increase in empowerment.

8.4.1 Objectives of the Study on Women Workers in Sericulture

Predominance of women workers in different artisanal activities of sericulture has been found in earlier studies. Studies indicated that around 60% of the aggregate work-activities in sericulture is handled by women in most of the sericulture producing states, irrespective of their regional variations (Acharya, 1993; Kumar 1993; Usha Rani, 2007; Sandhya Rani, 2006). However, determinants of female labour dominance in total workforce are perceived to be different from region to region depending upon several social and cultural criteria. Lakshman and Geetha Devi (2007) have explored women employment opportunities of sericulture vis-à-vis other agricultural crops in Tamil Nadu and have shown that 62.33% of workforce is shared by female labour force, where domestic women share has been seen as 34.06% while hired female workers share is 28.25% of the total workforce. Sinha (1989) asserts that women power in sericulture gets intensified as family labour employed in sericulture increases. But the contribution of unpaid family labour ultimately reduces intra-family power balance especially in the low income earning classes. Charsley (1988) pointed out that since middle-class domestic women have zero opportunity cost as wage-earners, their participation in the sericulture household industry does not affect their power balance, as in the case of lower income household. Regarding family power balance in lower income earning families, Charsley (1988) commented that if sericulture activities expand the scope of

paid employment opportunities (as hired female labour), then ultimately it improves the power balance in low income households.

In West Bengal, the reported female work-participation rate in agricultural work is substantially low due to ‘statistical invisibility’ of this class. This is particularly because neither the survey process includes the work of domestic women who are in household industry, nor are their productivities truly recognized inside the domestic space (Bagchi, 2005).

Even after being the third largest silk producing traditional state, adequate research work on women’s participation in sericulture activities of West Bengal has not yet been pursued. The specific objective in this section is to fill this research gap. Along with describing the condition of women workers in sericulture of West Bengal, this section will specifically try to shed some light on the issues of dominance of women workers in this sector. Census statistics or NSS surveys do not specifically cover the participation rate of women workers in sericulture. Therefore this situational analysis would be based on micro /pilot surveys attempted by various researchers in different course of time from different corners of the country as well as on primary survey in certain sericulture rich villages of Malda district undertaken during this course of study. The secondary data individually as well as in aggregate would help to portray a gendered overview of sericulture activity in the country. The core research work would hinge on the present primary survey analysis of Malda District that produces more than three-fourth of the raw-silk of the state. In this context, it is also important to determine whether female dominance in sericulture sector has been translated into female empowerment in this region.

8.4.2 Impact of Female Dominance in Sericulture

The impact of female dominance in sericulture against the perspective of poverty stricken rural mass is also enormous. With the increasing rate of participation in work force, women also become a decision-making agent. She can actively participate in decision-making activity without being a passive performer. Thus the income generated by the rural women can be utilized more judiciously for the socio- economic development of the family. Moreover, in the report of the Working Group on “Empowerment of Women for XI Plan” (2006), it was emphasized that empowerment of women has two fold benefits:

- (a) *Intrinsic Benefit:* A woman is gaining the benefit for sake of herself by joining in family workforce, other than household activity. It raises her self-dignity and self esteem. Her purchasing power and decision making power also rises.
- (b) *Spillover benefit:* Involvement of women workers also raises the welfare of her family members. Education level rises, nutrition level rises and thus the spillover effect helps in a holistic development of all the household members of her family.

Thus the spillover benefits from women-empowerment can broadly be categorized into following major heads:

- Rise in education level of children
- Rise in Nutrition level of family
- Rise in Health Awareness (especially among the girl child)

- Rise in the level of social resilience power against different social crimes like dowry, domestic violence, social abuse, illegal trafficking etc.

A study conducted by CARE (2009) for rural India reveals that economic empowerment via micro finance plan projects of women raises 125% of expenditure on education of their children and now they spend at least more than 43% on health care of their children. Micro surveys conducted by Ray (Ramesha & Sinha, 2009) also supported that women gaining employment from sericulture always take care of their families more than before. They are able to ensure better education for their children on one hand and help their husbands in running their occupation side by side.

Previous research activities also indicate that economic participation of women – their presence in the work force in quantitative terms – is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also a significant step forward towards raising household income and encouraging economic development of the society as a whole.

Through application of science and technology appropriate to the socio-economic condition of rural areas, rural women can be made economically self-dependent. There exists a preconceived notion that women do not want to learn new skills and techniques because they seem to be engaged only in primary household activities. This age-old belief acts as a bias against their inherent capability of adaptation. This notional bias itself contains some inbuilt contradiction and needs to be modified. Sericulture is such a family based occupation where the women can work along with their family responsibilities.

Empowerment of women always makes a match between economic opportunities and their capabilities. Most of the time due to lack of concern, economic opportunities are lagging behind the capabilities of women in different social sectors. Increased women's participation and earning have not only helped them to raise their confidence, but also it has helped in reduction of poverty and accelerating growth. It also has a favourable impact on education and health outcomes of children.

8.5 Involvement of women workers in Indian Sericulture

In India, four major states traditionally involved with mulberry silk production are (i) Karnataka , (ii) Andhra Pradesh, (iii) West Bengal and (iv) Tamil Nadu, the work-participation rate of women reveal that during the last decade the participation rate working women in all states were more than the national average besides West Bengal. However, participatory role of women worker in sericulture is mostly confined within their domestic territories and thus constitute a part of the informal and un-organized sector, which may not be exactly revealed through this picture as portrayed in Table 8.1

Table 8.1 Rural Female Work Participation in India during 1971-2001

Silk Producing States	1971	1981	1991	2001
Andhra Pradesh	31.9	44.9	34.22	34.93
Karnataka	19.0	30.8	29.39	32.0
Tamil Nadu	20.4	34.5	29.89	31.32
West Bengal	4.6	9.4	11.25	18.08
ALL INDIA	15.8	23.5	22.25	25.68

Source: Census of India 1981, 1991, 2001

Barring West Bengal, all three states revealed their prominence as well as growth in work participation rate of women workers. Within West Bengal, Malda, Murshidabad, Bankura and Cooch Behar districts are the prominent districts for sericulture, silk production and silk weaving. Murshidabad is famous for silk weaving, where female participation in household industry is 64.7% followed by Malda (37.17%) (Govt. of WB, 2001-02). Malda is the leading district in silk production and holds a golden legacy since the time of Mughal period. Women's participation as agricultural and marginal agricultural labour in the district is 31% and 53.5% according to 2001 census.

However, a study by Rajapurohit and Gobinda (1981), specifically on artisanal silk industry revealed a completely different picture of female labour work participation ratio in Bihar, West Bengal and Karnataka, while female employment (at over 58 percent) appeared to be the highest in West Bengal.

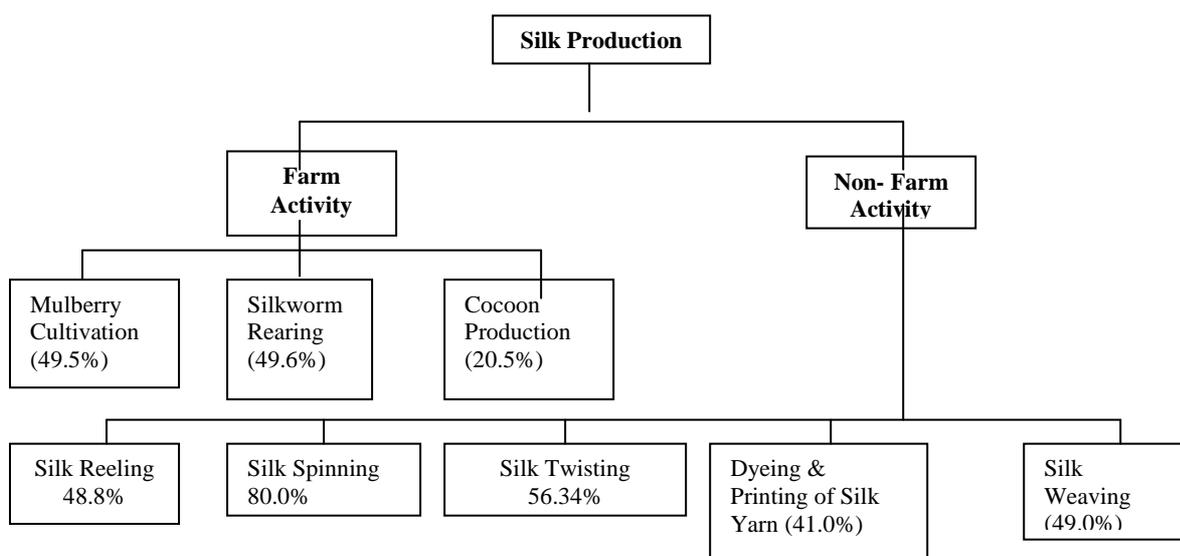
Table 8.2 Female Labour Ratios in Raw Silk Production (1981)

States	Female/ Male Labour Ratio
Bihar	0.14
West Bengal	1.42
Karnataka	1.15

Source: Raja Purohit et. al. (1981)

Sericulture creates the highest job opportunities compared to other principle crops. Further, in terms of women employment opportunities it creates greater man days from one acre of land compared to other food crops (Lakshman & Geetha Devi, 2007), where a substantial percent of workforce is drawn from own family source. Therefore, sericulture is often called as one such vocation where the members of the household can be utilized at a higher scale. Usually, the work participation of female rural labour is mostly obstructed by their domestic obligation; in this context, sericulture can break the barriers faced by women from participating as workers while continuing with their household activities.

Figure 8.1 Women's Involvement in Silk Production



Source: Central Sericultural Research and Training Institute, Mysore, Gangopadhyay (2008)

Few pilot surveys and studies help to reach the conclusion that women worker participation is nearly 50 percent in mulberry cultivation, silkworm-rearing, silk worm reeling and silk weaving, while it is 80 percent in case of silk spinning (Gangopadhyay, 2008). The chart furnished here (see fig 8.1) provides a schematic representation of involvement of women in various stages of silk production. Involvement of women is higher in all activities of sericulture except in field preparation of mulberry; cocoon cutting, sexing and egg incubation are done exclusively by women labourers. Weeding, transport of mulberry-leaves (which is food of silk worm) to the rearing sheds and rearing worms are the important activities where women involvement is also higher and these activities usually create employment of 11.18, 10.75 and 7.13 working-days respectively, per acre of mulberry crops. Feeding of worms and planting of mulberry creates employment of 6.93 man days and 6.49 man days per acre crop to the women. Transfer of worm to *chandrikas*, cocoon-sorting, leaf harvesting, chopping and other important activities that create employment of 6.01, 4.51 and 3.7 man-days respectively to the women. Preparation of field for growing mulberry creates an employment of 7.81 man-days of which 5.13 man-days are for men and 2.69 are for women. This is the only activity where employment of men exceeds women (according to the field survey report in Hindupur and Madakasira Divisions of Anantapur District in Andhra Pradesh, Usha Rani, 2007) [See Table 8.3].

Table 8.3 Women Labor Involvement in Sericulture

(Per acre of mulberry crop for rearing 300 dfls of silkworms in two months)

Operation	Male Labour (man days)	Female Labour (man days)	% of Female Labour Involvement
Field Preparation	5.13	2.69	34.4
Planting	4.09	6.49	62.0
Fertilizer Application	1.76	2.95	62.6
Weeding	3.08	11.2	78.3
Harvesting & Chopping	1.73	3.7	68.1
Transport (mulberry leaves)	2.15	10.8	83.7
Cocoon, Sorting of seed	0.16	2.11	97.6
Cocoon ,Cutting sexing	0	1	100
Egg Incubation	0	1	100
Rearing	1.78	7.13	80.0

Brushing	0.17	1.93	91.9
Feeding	3	6.93	69.7
Transport to Chandrikas	1.45	6.01	80.5
Cocoon Sorting	1.57	4.51	74.2
Mounting & Cooking	0.35	1.67	82.7
Total	26.3	70.1	72.7

Source: Usha Rani, Journal of Social Science 14(3), 249-255, 2007

Sandhya Rani (2006) explained that almost all activities of sericulture are carried out by women except for some which are mostly undertaken by male labourers (e.g., cutting of mulberry leaves, pruning, etc). There are certain activities like weeding, leaf harvest, silk reeling, which are exclusively handled by women labourers. She said that about 2562 women work-days are created in all activities of sericulture from one hectare of irrigated mulberry area per annum out of a total 4225 working days. During the first years of establishment, it generates about 5.8 work years for women out of a total of 9.5 work years per hectares under irrigated condition. On the other hand, after the establishment of irrigated mulberry (third year onwards) 7.0 work years are generated from women out of a total of 11.5 work years. Thus the female dominance in workforce as well as in employment generation is intrinsic to sericulture activities.

8.5.1 Involvement of women workers across variable scales of farms

Sericulture provides both the family female labour (who belong to mostly middle class) and hired female labour (who are drawn from lower class families) a wide opportunity of employment. Middle class female labour always bears a greater domestic burden. They do not suffer from acute poverty and thereby can never join the hired labour force as done by female worker belonging to lower economic classes. Therefore we can say paid employment opportunities of hired labour are much larger in the lower strata than the middle class housewives of sericulture families. So, Charsley (1976) pointed out that silkworm rearing represents a suitable domestic activity for the women folk of the middle class sericulture families, who would not be expected to work outside home.

Theorists of women studies state that economic empowerment can truly create an emancipating environment for the women, because it always helps the women to participate in all the decision making processes regarding household (Bagchi, 2005). Family labour in that case can be assumed as the second best option vis-à-vis wage labour, because monetary transaction remains invisible in case of family labour payment. In case of hired female labour, huge cases of exploitation has been observed in the literature. Wage discrimination is very commonly practiced and the laborers are often paid either in meager amount of cash or in kind (Lakshman & Geetha Devi, 2007; Sinha, 1989; Reddy, 1994; Nayyar, 1987; Chavan & Bedamatta, 2006; Mukherjee, 2004;). Thus regarding the question of economic emancipation as well as self-esteem, sericulture opens opportunity for this unskilled working force to claim wages from their working place and that will surely raise their intra family power balance (Charsely, 1988). Charsley also (1976) said that both mulberry cultivation and

silk worm rearing employ household labour, but the latter provides respectable, domestic occupation for ladies of the upper agricultural classes.

Again in the activities like reeling and weaving, scale of business varies widely. When a poor man operates a single simple machine using his family labour (i.e. his wife), the female labour gets attached with an artisan belonging to lower economic class. This particular woman attached to her small scale family firm is devoid of much opportunities and freedom. On the other hand, a wealthy businessman running 1500 or more complex machines employs hired labour from local communities, who are generally poor and of low traditional status. The women workers attached with this rich business class artisan enjoy access to greater economic opportunity and, thereby, enjoy greater spirit of freedom.

Amartya Sen(1999) has opined that Indian society wants to see women less as passive recipients of help and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, which is only possible through greater ways of emancipation. For this their self esteem has to be raised at much higher level. Empowerment of women should, therefore, be viewed as a catalytic element of social transformation.

8.5.2 Women in sericulture and health issues

Sericulture is, however, alleged to have various adverse effects on health; In other words, there are occupational hazards associated with sericulture. Women suffer from giddiness, burning of eyes, backache, fatigue, and other related problems. As a result, they are desperately looking for health insurance in sericulture. Reeling sector, where mostly women are employed, is one of the areas where the health problem is very intense. The major occupational health problems observed in this sector are asthma, infection, blisters on hand and burning of eyes. In seed production centers, due to high concentration of silk moth scales, dust and acid fumes, the workers are suffering from asthma, cough, dyspnoea (shortness of breath), skin allergy, abdomen pain etc. But other disciplines like host plant cultivation, silkworm rearing etc. are relatively free from occupational health problems.

Most of the health problems affect women more because of their greater involvement and the regular health related issues in the family also make them more vulnerable both physically and financially. Central Silk Board in association with respective State Sericulture Departments launched Health Insurance Program for women beneficiaries to address the health related issues in this sector.

8.5.3 Gender bias in wage differential

Discriminatory practices in the labour market of rural India are reflected in the actual low wages payment to women workers despite having provisions of minimum wage laws. On the other hand male wage earners are always paid above the stipulated wage. Due to existence of this marked wage differentials, these two different categories of labour respond to the wage rate in different ways. Official statistics like Agricultural Labour Enquiry and Agricultural Wages in India, which provide data on wage rates of male and female casual labourers confirms this phenomenon. (Pandy et. al, 2007). The increase in gender disparity especially in agricultural wages is quite marked in India through out the planning period. For majority of women engaged in paid activity, the fact being female means being paid less than men for same work. It is most evident in the cases of agricultural labourers. Agricultural daily wages

are, in general, low, though they vary by type of agricultural operations (ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting etc), by the typical nature of state and, most importantly, by gender. Some operations, like ploughing, do not involve women at all, whereas others such as weeding are women-intensive activity.

All the previous analyses bear the testimony that if men and women perform the same function, men will be paid at a much higher rate. For India, as a whole for each of the farm operations, the male wage rate is higher than the female one. Despite the fact that the wage rate for workers is lower, employers prefer to hire male workers due to pre-determined socio-cultural prejudices. Each state has a Minimum Wage Legislation, whereby wages are statutorily fixed. However, in the early 1970s, after much deliberation, some state governments deliberately fixed differential wage rates for men & women and two prominent silk producing states Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were two of these states. By 1980-81, the differentials seemed to have narrowed down, though the change was perhaps not the real one because despite a huge call for equal remuneration across gender, women are still less paid than their male counterpart. Sericulture and silk involves both agricultural and household industrial work. We have talked about the plight of the women in agricultural sector. In HHI sector women are exploited by intermediaries and middlemen who provide raw materials, machineries and market the final product, but pay the women very small amount.

According to NSSO (2004), among four traditional silk producing states, actual wage differential (for ploughing, weeding etc.) between men and women are highest in Tamil Nadu (i.e., Rs. 77.60), followed by West Bengal (Rs.34.85), Andhra Pradesh (Rs. 23.06) and Karnataka (Rs.27.17). The female work participation in all three major states (except West Bengal) reflects that higher wage differential always leads to lower work participation of female labour. However, we have to be aware about the exclusion of the family workers in the data collection which always gives rise to persistent problems of under counting and statistically invisibility of women (Mukherjee, 2004).

Wage of the labour depends on different terms and conditions of the work, duration of work, and nature of work. Though provisions of minimum wage legislation has been enacted to establish equality in terms of wage irrespective of sex, wage differential in unorganized sector depends on hard reality of different efficiency parameters, including physical labour, productivity. For example, hired female labour is more casual labour than permanent and therefore wage rate varies.

The mode of payment also varies across gender. While male labourers are paid in cash, or in kind or both, or even in the form of a share of the crop, payment to female labourers at least where there is exclusive female employment, is either solely in kind, or in 'cash and kind wages'.

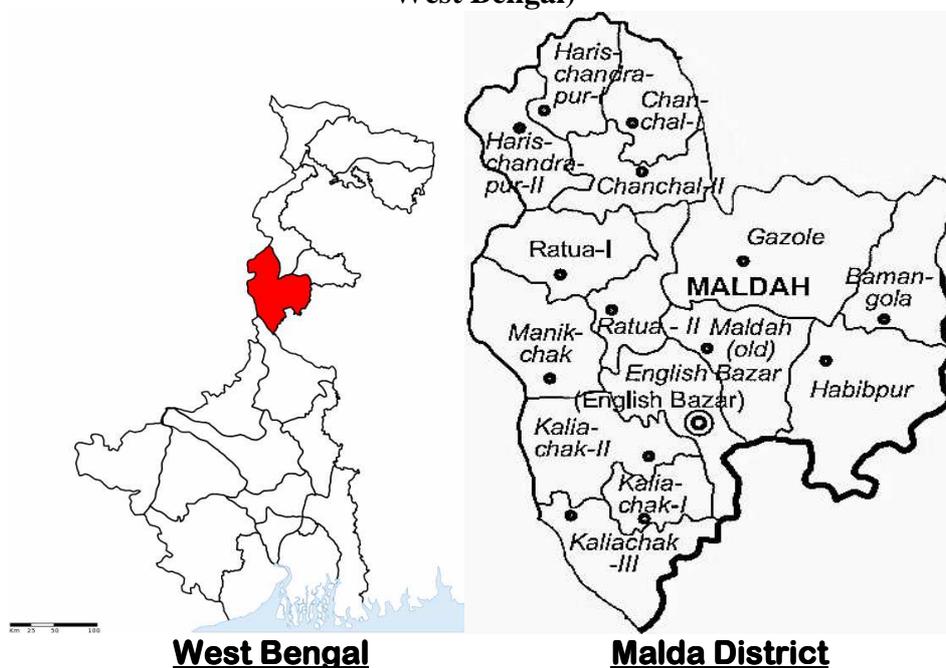
8.6 Women workers in sericulture: A case study of Malda district

The present investigation was carried out in Malda district where sericulture is a traditional vocation. With 75% of state's share and 6% of national share, Malda acquires a prominent position in raw silk production in West Bengal (Ali et al, 2008). Official Statistics provided by Deputy Director- Sericulture, Malda, 2010, justifies the reason of choosing this district. The district has more than 20,000 acres of land under mulberry cultivation and nearly 60,000 families are directly or indirectly earning their livelihood from sericulture. Out of total

sericulture farmers, reelers, traders, 80-85% belong to Muslim Minority. Women play a pivotal role in this activity as 60% of work force come from women members of the family or hired labour. The research queries in this section are related to the factors which cause this female dominance in sericulture sector of this region.

The Kaliachak Block was chosen for our primary survey area as mulberry cultivation and rearing and reeling farms are primarily clustered in this block of Malda district. Kaliachak-I and Kaliachak-II blocks are comprising 90% of the total mulberry cultivation area. Kaliachak-I itself occupies 61% of the total cultivated area under mulberry in the district (See Ali et al., 2008). Twenty percent of total sericulture farmers of the district live in this block (Official Statistics, Deputy Director Malda, 2010). Stratified random sampling is done to choose few sericulture rich villages namely, *Gayes Bari, Sujapur, Mothabari, Marupur, Alipur, Sershahi, Feranchak, Joshkabil* from this block, while stratification was done on the basis of participation in sericulture activities as prominent livelihood. Twenty five to thirty households involved with sericulture activities have been chosen from each village using stratified random sampling. Thus total 212 households constituted the sample size of our study. A list of questions regarding their age, education, religion, size of household, structure of household, annual earned income, occupied man-days, cost of instruments and raw materials, female participation, number of hired workers involvement, credit access, wages paid to male and female hired workers, degrees of freedom and power of decision making in various household as well as sericulture activities enjoyed by the female members of the households were asked to all respondents randomly chosen from these villages. Feedback received from the respondents helped to tabulate the data and carry forward the analysis in desired direction.

Fig 8.2 : Location of Primary Survey Region (Kaliyachak I &II in Malda District of West Bengal)



According to our pre-notional hypothesis (based on literature reviews) the major influencing factors behind the female dominance in sericulture workers are:

- (i) Wage differential between male and female: Higher the wage differential between male and female workers, higher is the chance of female dominance in poverty stricken household farms. Poor households will substitute costly male labour with cheaper female labour, causing higher female dominance. So greater the difference between male and female wages, greater is the chance of the sericulture labour activities of the household being female dominated.
- (ii) Ratio between hired female workers to domestic female workers: A general hypothesis is that as the number of domestic female worker rises, number of hired workers usually rises (as the field survey reveals) and the combined effect would have a positive impact on female dominance in sericulture- farm. If the ratio of hired to domestic female labour rises that is expected to dominate the whole labour force by female dominated one.
- (iii) Economic situation: Economic situation of a farm may also influence the female dominance of the farm. Wealthy farm households can afford to employ expensive male labour instead of its cheaper female substitute. Whether bigger and wealthy farms are affected by Veblen effect and may prefer costly male labour as better productive labour is subject to queries in this analysis. Therefore, economic situation of a farm can be expected to exert a negative influence on female dominance status of the farm.
- (iv) Household Size: The household size may have a greater influence in controlling the degree of female dominance in household industry like sericulture. Therefore, whether a smaller household has a greater or lesser degree of influence on female dominance in sericulture is an interesting point of study. It depends upon different sociological parameters too. Women in large households are often observed as captives where her freedom is restricted by many social factors.
- (v) Number of Female in Household: Higher numbers of females in household always act as a liberating factor for women. Therefore higher degrees of female dominance should be visible in those household.
- (vi) Mulberry Area: Women workers are supposed to dominate in rearing activity while the mulberry cultivation is performed by male members of the household. Therefore if the household possess greater area of mulberry field, it is expected that the female dominance in labour force would be declined.
- (vii) Education years of the Principal Earners: If the head/principal earner of the family has higher education back ground, it is expected that he would not allow her daughters to get involved with household business leaving educational activities. Therefore an inverse relation is the possible relation between education years of the head of the household and female dominance of sericulture farms.
- (viii) Number of Children in Family: Increase in number of children in the family makes their mother more concerned. She likes to dominate the workforce making the labour force female dominated, as she becomes more worried for the health and education of her children.
- (ix) Wage of male labour: As the wage of male labour rises, the obvious consequence is increase in demand of female labours. Therefore female dominance is the natural consequential outcome.

- (x) Wage of female labour : As the wage of female labour rises, the outcome is uncertain. Since female wage is much lower in this unorganized market that rise in wage rate may hardly affect any decision of changing labour composition. Besides most of the work in this sericulture activity requires mother-care.
- (xi) Man-days: If the total number of days of work of any farm is higher compared to another farm, it is likely that female dominance in labour force of the former farm will be lesser. We make this hypothesis on the basis of our experience in field survey. Women labour force is essential in this particular rearing and artisanal work. But when the income⁸ generation activities are expanded (say in number of days involved in it), female domination in labour force is lost.
- (xii) Cost of raw Material: Female labour forces are more associated with those household business activities where cost of implement is usually lower.
- (xiii) Loans: Loans taken in higher level implies a household aspiring for high income status, therefore female dominance is supposed to be lower in this household.
- (xiv) Daily Working Hours of Female: Where the female members are able to spend more time on household business activities, the obvious outcome would be female dominance in labour force.
- (xv) Family Empowerment Index: Following the construction of ‘Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Index’ (Alkire et. al., 2012), a similar index in sericulture has been constructed which can be called Family Empowerment Index (FEI) of Sericulture Women (C_f)

$$C_f = w_1I_1 + w_2I_2 + w_3I_3$$

Where, $I_1 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making of running daily family expenditure;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_2 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making about the health and education of her children in the family (including her own reproductive health);

= 0, otherwise;

$I_3 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making about her household business, i.e., sericulture.

$\sum w_i = 1, i = 1, 2, 3$ (w_i being the weightage)

We feel all three decisions in a sericulture family are equally important. So we assume equal weights to all three decisions, i.e.,

$w_1 = w_2 = w_3 = 1/3$

- (xvi) Social Empowerment: To assess the social and political position of a sericulture woman, an indicator namely Social Empowerment of Sericulture Women (C_s) has been constructed, here, following the computation method of ‘Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index’.

$$C_s = w_4I_4 + w_5I_5 + w_6I_6$$

Where, $I_4 = 1$, if the household women actively participate in NGO (Non-Government Organization) being a member of the NGO;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_5 = 1$, if the household women participate in any Self Help Group as a member of that group;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_6 = 1$, if the household women represents any political party either in local or zonal or in higher constitutional body .
 $\sum w_i = 1, i = 4, 5, 6$ (w_i being the weightage)

All three social fields are equally important for household women involved with sericulture for expressing and controlling her social views. So we place equal weights to all three social participation, i.e.,
 $w_4 = w_5 = w_6 = 1/3$

Female dominance has been specified in this section as share of female work force in total workforce and a separate regression equation has been framed for running the regression test using OLS. In the model, we assume the share of female workers (including both household and hired women labour) in total labour employed in a sericulture farm as a parameter of female dominance and interpret that dependent variable as

$$\text{Share of Female Workers} = (\text{Household Women Workers} + \text{Hired Women Workers}) / \text{Total Workers}$$

The econometric results of Model of Female Dominance are furnished below. The estimated F-ratio of the model is statistically significant, which ensures the goodness of fit of the model. The graphical inspection of plot between predicted dependent variable and the residuals reveals no discernable pattern and hence no heteroscedasticity problem is caused by these variables. The VIF ratios are indicating that there is no significant multicollinearity problem in the model and low standard errors are also indicators of good specificity of the model. The R^2 and Adjusted R^2 are 0.553 and 0.535, which implies even after taking into account the number of predictor variables in the model approximately 54 % variability of the dependent variable (i.e., share of female workforce) can be explained by the explanatory variables of the model.

Table 8.4 (a): Model Summary (Female Workers' Dominance Model)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.744	.553	.535	.1160	.553	31.249	8	202	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), Household Size, Educational years of the HoF, Man-days, Female Empowerment, Wage of Male Labour, Wage of Female Labour, Number of Child in family, Female members in family
b Dependent Variable: Share of female workers

Table 8.4 (b): ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.362	8	.420	31.249	.000
Residual	2.717	202	1.345E-02		
Total	6.079	210			

a Predictors: (Constant), Household Size, Educational years of the HoF, Man-days, Female Empowerment, Wage of Male Labour, Wage of Female Labour, Number of Child in family, Female members in family
b Dependent Variable: Share of female workers

Table 8.4 (c) Estimation of Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B		Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.661	.026		25.179	.000		

Educational years of the HoF	-4.448E-03	.002	-.118	-2.423	.016	.938	1.066
Female members of Family	6.634E-02	.009	.567	7.254	.000	.362	2.765
No. of Child in Family	4.790E-02	.008	.437	5.861	.000	.398	2.511
Wage of Male Labour	-1.039E-03	.000	-.548	-9.492	.000	.663	1.509
Wage of Female Labour	9.173E-04	.000	.230	3.967	.000	.661	1.514
Man-days	-3.412E-04	.000	-.162	-3.149	.002	.837	1.194
Family Empowerment	5.059E-02	.022	.111	2.261	.025	.914	1.094
Household Size	-3.642E-02	.005	-.776	-7.600	.000	.212	4.711

a Dependent Variable: Share of Female Workers

Interpretation of Coefficients

A rise in school education years by 10 years of the Principal Earner (usually, Head of the Family) in the household will reduce the female domination in domestic work sphere by 4 percent. An educated head of a household will naturally try to involve his/her young female members of the household to get more involved with sphere of education. Naturally that would have a significant effect on reducing female share in household workforce.

One unit rise in the size of household will reduce the female-labour share in total labour force of a sericulture farm by 3.6%. This unequivocally reinforces the traditional myth and feminist claim that in large household women carry the domestic burden, while responsibility of economic work is being shouldered by male member of the household, which corners the chance of emancipation of women members of the household as such. Therefore the result is not surprising in rural sericulture too.

On the other hand, if there is increase in number of females in household by 1 unit, then the chance of female dominance in workforce is raised by 6.6%. This result is also fairly logical, as female dominated households are always expected to exert their dominance in work-sphere too.

A rise in child member of the sericulture household also raises the female share in total work force of sericulture by 4.7%. Between male and female child, male child is usually engaged outside either for education or for joining in child labour force in several economic activities. Girl children are usually confined in the house by most of these community people for sharing in several domestic business activities. This raises the female share of the total work force in the sericulture as sericulture work is principally hinged on women workers.

A rise in wage of male labour reduces the female share in workforce by 0.1%, which is bit difficult to justify from common perspective. We need to use more cautious foresight and our field experience to explain this anomalous behaviour. When wage rate of hired male labour rises in sericulture sector, it indirectly declines female hired workers' relative wage rate. Female hired workers feel deprived in this sector and try to shift their labor to some alternative works (e.g., beedi binding, jute work, polythene bag manufacturing etc.) where their relative wage is comparatively higher. Therefore female dominance is reduced due to supply side shortages

On the other hand, a unit rise in wage of female labour naturally increases the female labour supply in the workforce and female dominance in the workforce of sericulture by 0.1%. Though impact of this male and female wage rate change is not very high on female dominance (i.e., only 0.1% in each case) but what is discernible is that sericulture labour force is rather supply driven than demand driven. It is the supply of work force which ultimately determines what would be the composition of labor force. This is not expected to be the case in a labour surplus economy and needs further investigation, which is beyond the scope of this research study.

A rise in 100 days of work in a year (which means actually sericulture work for two seasons) ultimately reduces the work-share of female labour by 3 percent. It is also seen that income and female dominance in labour force has an inverse relation, which indicates that wealthy farms prefer male hired-labour more than female labour force. The general perception is that it may be due to their greater productivity which is difficult to justify. But it has been found from the field survey that women of affluent classes do not participate in income generation process. Higher man-days are indicative that the firm is rich (Roy, RoyMukherjee and Ghosh, 2012). Therefore increase in man-days naturally leads to reduction in female domination in work force.

The most interesting result of this model is the link between female dominance in workforce of sericulture and Family Empowerment of Sericulture Women. The result reveals a significant and direct relation between them. A rise in Family Empowerment Index (C_f) by 0.1 unit would increase the female share in work force by 0.52 percent. Though the impact is not very high, but still it indicates an important relationship.

Besides the significant explanatory factors, the “sign” of the insignificant variables are also important indicators to explain the model. Female dominance is inversely affected by several explanatory variables, e.g., mulberry cultivation area possessed by household, income, loan, social empowerment. Although the regression coefficients of these variables are not significant, it is important to explain the inverse relation and the rationale behind them.

A higher area of mulberry cultivation by farm actually raises the male labour work share in total work hours and that indirectly declines the female dominance in work force. Higher loans taken by the households are having higher level of income status who can keep male hired work force. This justifies inverse relation between higher amount of loan advance and female dominance in sericulture labour force. Increase in social empowerment of household women has an inverse relation with female dominance in workforce of sericulture farms. Higher the participation of women in diversified social organizations and political organizations, more they become aware and conscious of their own rights. This seemingly lowers their inclination towards day to day household chores. This reduces the female dominance in workforce of sericulture activities.

8.6.1 Construction of Women Empowerment Index in Sericulture

Women’s Empowerment Index or WEAI (IFPRI, 2012) has been introduced recently by the US Government’s Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative to overcome the obstacles and economic constraints faced by the agricultural women in Less Developing Countries. As empowerment is inherently context specific and shaped by the socio-economic, cultural and political condition, two indicators of women empowerment will be constructed relevant to sericulture, following the computation method of WEAI.

Two broad domains have been chosen for computing the empowerment indices specially, where sericulture women are expected to exhibit their power after being financially supportive in this household industry, viz, (i) Within Family Sphere, (ii) Within Social Sphere.

Family Empowerment Index (FEI)

Within Family sphere the empowerment of the women depends upon her participation in decision making role in following three household activities:

- (a) Various decisions with respect to silk production
- (b) Control on the use of income earned from sericulture
- (c) Decisions about health & education about her children (including her own reproductive health)

These three sub-indicators are given equal 1/3 weights to construct 'Family Empowerment Index' in Sericulture (C_f)

$$C_f = w_1I_1 + w_2I_2 + w_3I_3$$

Where, $I_1 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making of running daily family expenditure;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_2 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making about the health and education of her children in the family (including her own reproductive health);

= 0, otherwise;

$I_3 = 1$, if the household women participate in decision making about her household business, i.e., sericulture.

$\sum w_i = 1, i = 1, 2, 3$ (w_i being the weight)

All three decisions in a sericultural family are expected to be equally important. Thus the assumption of equal weights to all three decisions is made, i.e.,

$$w_1 = w_2 = w_3 = 1/3$$

FEI ranges between 0 and 1.

$$0 \leq C_f \leq 1$$

$C_f = 1$ would imply family empowerment at highest attainable level, which also signifies gender parity at perfect level within family

$C_f = 0$ would imply absolute disempowerment of women within family structure

Empowerment has not been defined in binary consequence as either empowered or disempowered. Field experience has helped to find women with different level of empowerment. According to the model construction the family empowerment in sericulture women in Malda district is 0.25, which is even below the moderate level of empowerment. The socio-economic background in the minority concentrated regions is the major reason for this low level of empowerment even in sericulture farms where domestic labour force is seen to be women labour dominated. An attempt has been made to compute the association between Family Empowerment Index of Sericulture Women and several other socio-economic factors using primary survey data collected from sericulture rich villages of Malda District of West Bengal and some notable results have been found (see table 8.5).

Social Empowerment Index

As sericulture is an indoor activity, Family Empowerment is more crucial for the women for taking decisive role. However in order to include the leadership domain it is necessary to build a Social Empowerment Index of Sericulture Women. Being more socially empowered the sericulture women are expected to take leading role even in marketing and other outdoor activities associated with sericulture livelihood. The three indicators which capture the essence of social empowerment in sericulture villages of West Bengal are as following:

- (a) Member of NGO (social interaction)
- (b) Member of Self Help Group (social grouping for economic interest)
- (c) Representative of Political Parties (power of talking in public)

The three sub parameters are given equal weights 1/3 to construct 'Social Empowerment Index' (C_s) in the artisanal silk sector:

$$C_s = w_4I_4 + w_5I_5 + w_6I_6$$

Where, $I_4 = 1$, if the household women actively participate in NGO (Non-Government Organisation) being a member of the NGO;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_5 = 1$, if the household women participate in any Self Help Group as a member of that group;

= 0, otherwise;

$I_6 = 1$, if the household women represents any political party either in local or zonal or in higher constitutional body .

$\sum w_i = 1, i= 4, 5, 6$ (w_i being the weightage)

We feel all three social fields are equally important for any household women involved with sericulture for expressing and controlling her social views. So we place equal weights to all three social participation, i.e.,

$w_4 = w_5 = w_6 = 1/3$

SEI also ranges between 0 and 1. $0 \leq C_f \leq 1$

$C_s = 1$ would imply social empowerment at highest attainable level, which also signifies gender parity at perfect level in society

$C_s = 0$ would imply perfect disempowerment of women in the society

Empowerment has not been defined in binary outcome e.g., either the woman is empowered or disempowered. Field experience helped to find sericulture women with different level of empowerment. According to the model construction of social empowerment it is found that the value of SEI for sericulture women in Malda district is 0.04, which is much below than the moderate level of empowerment. The socio-economic background especially in the minority dominated regions is the major reason for this low level of empowerment. An attempt is made to compute the association between Social Empowerment Index of Sericulture Women and several other socio-economic factors as mentioned earlier (see table 8.5).

Table 8.5 Correlation between Empowerment Index in Sericulture & Socio-Economic Factors

Associated Factors	Family Empowerment Index (FEI)	Social Empowerment Index (SEI)
Ratio of working women in family	Spearman R= -0.184** Kendall's R = 0.149**	Spearman R= -0.031 Kendall's R =-0.026
Number of Child Workers in the family	Spearman R= -0.162* Kendall's R = - 0.140*	Spearman R= 0.013 Kendall's R = 0.011
Income of Sericulture Farm	Spearman R= 0.126 Kendall's R =0 .095	Spearman R= 0.021 Kendall's R = 0.018
Average years of education of Head of household (usually a Male)	Spearman R= -0.116 Kendall's R = -0.098	Spearman R= 0.176* Kendall's R = 0.153*

* significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level;

Interpretation of the Results

A significant association has been found between ratio of working women in the family and the family empowerment which is very natural. More and more involvement in income generating activities makes the women more empowered while the social empowerment has an inverse relation with ratio of working women in the family (though not in significant proportions). One can defend this inverse association by explaining an higher the community involvement by woman lowers thier chance of involvement in family enterprises. Moreover, sericulture activities of women require time and care which is around 10hours per day during the rearing season. Therefore it is quite understandable why a socially empowered woman is less associated with sericulture workforce within domestic arena.

An empowered woman would always prioritize health and education of her children. So if her empowerment rises, she would not let her children work inside the house. She would rather send them to school instead of supplementing family income against their toil. Social Empowerment has however no significant relation with children workforce in the family.

Though women empowerment is often called a tool for poverty alleviation, no significant relation could be observed between income earned by a sericulture farm and empowerment of the household women within and outside her house.

The final result is most interesting and it opens few new issues in the arena of Women's Studies. It has been found that the 'educated head of the family' is more associated with 'the farm women having less empowerment within domestic sphere'. Education of the head of household (who is usually male, except the women headed household) may increase his confidence in taking entire decision of the home. However, the relation is not statistically significant like positive association between social empowerment and education of the head of the family. This reinforces an old idea that education always broadens the views of a common man living in a conservative society and makes him more radical and rational. Thus social empowerment is seen to be significantly associated with those sericulture household whose head of the household is more educated.

8.7 Conclusion

Sericulture is thus ideally suited for land and labour abundant economy like India as well as in West Bengal, not only because it is low capital intensive but also because it is women labour intensive. Gender promotion and thereby social transformation along with poverty eradication is one of the major features of this particular sector. In case of West Bengal, the survey analysis shows that higher percentage of female members in the household can raise the gender dominance of the sericulture farms and gender dominance is associated with higher level of female members in the household, wage of female labour, family empowerment of domestic women. But, if the size of household rises and greater number of male workers are being attracted to join the sericulture farms, possibly due to higher returns, they push out the female workers to domestic unpaid work.

However, the welfare impact of a female dominated farm is always redistributed to different sections of the society and a gross level of up-gradation in nutrition and education level of the household is possible only through the spillover effect of this female employment generation. Therefore, holistic level of development is possible via gender promotion only. Situational analysis of women workers in this sector provides a scope to review the actual condition of the working women in sericulture and recommend few measures thereof.

Family Empowerment in household can be raised through rise in health, education level of female members of the households, which again reinforces their dominance in income generating household activities. Ensuring female education in remote areas and female health care in rural household (including their reproductive health) the government can make this breakthrough. Sen (1999) stated that women should not be a passive recipient of institutional help but a dynamic promoter of social transformation. This requires a change in outlook of the society as a whole.

Gender discrimination against women workers in wage payment has to be legally banned and rightfully implemented, which requires good governance. The Women's Rights Commission may adopt positive roles in this direction. More incentive schemes (like concession in taxation, etc.) if provided to the employers is expected to raise the involvement and recognition of women workers in sericulture farms. Solely women workers dependent sericulture farms require some primary institutional support and initiatives so that sole-women household members can survive and sustain this livelihood. Women workers in West Bengal as a whole should be given proper recognition. Then only their rights can be ensured. Low levels of education and low skill have obstructed their inner potentials to come out. Sericulture opens up a vast scope for them to extend their work abilities and expand their participation domain. Institutional support requires to be extended to these poverty stricken rural women so that they can be initiated to adopt sericulture as a source of earning their own, besides their domestic chores of activities. However, all these will be mere rhetoric unless the gap between policy suggestion and actual implementation is eliminated. Therefore, restructuring the process of implementation is also urgently required at this time. Then only the status and existence of the invisible, unrecognized and unremunerated women workers can be promoted. Drastic change in the mind-set is also required while implementing equal remunerations and ensuring female dominance in farms. The Equal remuneration Act of 1976 should be seriously adhered to and ensured by local governance. Presently, monitoring and reviewing of the employment scenario in case of sericulture has become imperative.

Socio-economic regional policies have to be remobilized in such a manner that various government policies and schemes to promote women's social and economic welfare may be dovetailed to maximize such gains in welfare of women workers in this sector. This only can address the poverty situation of the workers and empower them to have a voice of their own.

The next chapter will conclude this research study through suggesting few policies and restructuring some existing ones so that artisanal silk industry in West Bengal can reach its desired level of success, given its potential and past glorious heritage.