Chapter : IX Role and Status of Women in Dairying

9.1 Introduction

The women's question has of late attracted the attention of social scientists. Sociologists in particular have undertaken the task of studying their problems through systematic research. "In both the industrially advanced and less developed societies, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of socio-cultural and economic discriminatory practices which, until recently, have been taken for granted as though they were part of the immutable scheme of things established by nature". Further, in India the problem of women is more acute because of the sex segregated character of society, the conditions of poverty and the traditional value system.

It has been argued that the nation's well being as well as that of its women depends upon development policies, programmes and research that fully utilize women's potential. While a women's role has been well recognised for her responsibilities of motherhood, her economic roles and contributions seem to have generally been bypassed. However, an impartial analysis of available data on the participation of women in agriculture reveals the invaluable nature and extent of her involvement in the same. For example, as elsewhere in India and

2. Ibid
particularly in A.P. women play a major role in both production and processing of food. Compared to other states, their participation in the labor force is very high, of course with the exception of the North-Eastern states. According to the 1981 census, of the total workers in A.P. nearly 30 per cent are women, nearly 24 percent of the total cultivators are women and over 50 per cent of the agricultural labour force is accounted for by them.

The economic role of women in the rural society largely depends on two major factors viz., (i) the need for augmenting the family income and (ii) opportunities available for participation in such economic activities.

Given the nature of complimentarity between agriculture and animal husbandry, dairying in rural India has been a major source of supplementary income in India. And traditionally women have been the major participants in it. The livestock statistics of A.P. 1977, indicate their potential role and the contributions already made to the impressive status of dairying in the state. A.P. is regarded second in buffalo population, fifth in milk production levels and seventh in cattle population at the All India level.

It has been widely documented that a major part of different kinds of work involved in dairying is undertaken very efficiently by women. This has lead people to believe, rightly so, that there has been a 'Feminization of household dairying, in rural India, and that their economic contribution to
the family has been phenomenal. Moreover, the NDDB too, envisages concrete participation of women in dairying as also encourages women to form cooperatives and manage them as well. This, obviously has been done recognising the role of women in all the activities related to dairying. Also several studies have shown that women anticipate and prepare for occupations that are consistent with the traditional sexual division of labour. Thus the involvement of women is more likely in programmes which are not in conflict with their traditional roles. And dairying has been seen as one such activity which could attract and gainfully involve women. This does not however mean that dairying has come in as a new avenue of participation for rural women. Far from it, traditionally, the rural women have always been closely engaged in dairying because of its strong linkages with agriculture (manure, draught power) and basic domestic needs such as dung fuel, milk, ghee, curds, etc. However of major and renewed interest on the part of both researchers and planners is that how best could one increase the quality of women's participation in dairying through scientific and extension education training.

In the light of the above we endeavour to understand and analyse specifically, the role of women in our village study.

In what follows, we present an analysis of the role of women in terms of their (i) direct participation in the dairy cooperative and its impact on the role and status and the
indirect benefits which the cooperative had enable them to realise (ii) indirect (household) participation in dairying and, (iii) the implications for and the need for motivating women to vigorously participate in cooperative dairying.

9.2 Direct Participation of Women in the Cooperative and its Indirect Impact

In our Village Dairy Cooperative, the direct participation of women in its management committee has been unheard of in its 7 year brief history of existence. Not even appreciable enrollment of women as members of the cooperative had taken place. To date, only two members are females out of a total of 120 members. Thus, the question of women aspiring for a 'formal status' through the cooperative does not arise at all in our village. However, the coming of the cooperative seems to have conferred on them 'indirectly' a new kind of 'status' at the household level. We shall come to this aspect later.

Our interview with some women belonging to different sections of the producer households revealed that the dairy cooperative society had helped them to realise increased and sustained income from the sale of milk. When asked by this author as to how exactly did the cooperative help them to reap increased returns and the extent of such incomes, a large majority of women interviewed particularly those from the small and marginal and the landless communities had mentioned that "in the past (1970-77) we hardly used to earn, on an average, Rs. 1.75 to Rs. 2.00 a litre when sold to the middlemen. Often, we felt that they had cheated
us in measurement of milk and prices offered. Some of us, infact, got the weights of the middlemen (the middlemen in this region usually buy milk by weight. They use traditional balances for the same which consists of a wooden horizontal rod to which two weighing pans are suspended by thin jute ropes. Whereas for accurate measurement, stable balances are recommended with stable pans by the weights and Measurements Department of the State) checked once and we found that their 1 kg. weight had either larger holes than their usual size in the bottom of their weights or actually weighed less than the specified weight. For e.g. a 1000 gm. metal weight used by them when weighed against another 1000 gm. weight borrowed from a grocer, weighed 120 gms less. Whereas we now earn on an average at least Rs. 2.25 to Rs. 3.50 a litre, depending on the quality of milk supplied by us, from the cooperative. Moreover, we believe that the measurement of milk and the testing for fat content done at the cooperative is by and large fair. However, we sometimes do feel that we are cheated by the cooperative also. Some of us had faced problems of inconsistent fat percentage recorded by the tester. Also because of irregular gat testing at the cooperative we sometimes get paid on the basis of last week/yesterday's fat percentage, which may or may not be favourable to us. Also we observed that, depending on the private of family relations with the staff of the cooperative, some of us get higher/lower rates of price due to over/under recording of fat percentage. However, all said and done, we feel that the extent of cheating by the cooperative is far less than that resorted
to by the middlemen. Well, we must also confess that some of us too, attempted and continue to attempt to cheat both the middlemen and the cooperative. For e.g. we sell adulterated milk to the middlemen; we mix buffalo milk in cow milk and sell it as cow milk to the cooperative and so on.

Another distinct advantage we feel that the cooperative offers us is 'regular cash payment' every fortnight. Whereas the middlemen pay/paid as and when they had money to pay and not when we wanted it. Moreover, the accounting problems we face/faced with the middlemen are not confronted in the cooperative as its recording procedures are generally fair".

On the whole, although the cooperative had helped them to obtain higher returns, the women felt that such increases did not substantially help them feel that they are much better off economically in general. Though the women do not have control over the entire income earned, from milk and in any case expend largely for the benefit of the entire family on its various needs (some variations in the expenditure pattern of some women and the way they meet such expenses from the money given by the middlemen, shall be elaborated later), they had mentioned to us that they have atleast a voice now in spending of the income. For e.g. traditionally, most middle and lower class women were not allowed to maintain any household accounts of expenditure, but now they keep accounts of dairy income and have a say in investing the resources in dairying. Of late, this flexibility, seems to
have extended into other activities of family expenditure, in the case of a significant number of households.

Another aspect of the indirect impact of the cooperative was that, according to some "the cooperative had helped them in 'some ways' to unite women of different castes and varying economic status. For e.g. the association and friendship that had developed amongst the women while dealing with the cooperative (in terms of delivering milk, seeking advise on animal health care, feed purchase, attending educational films etc.) together, had in a sense paved way for women of different groups and streets within the village (hitherto, like any other typical villages of India, women living in a certain locality of the village met and discussed areas of interest only among themselves and did not usually meet women of other localities. However, the need to deliver milk at the cooperative at one place and at a specific time seems to have necessitated mixing of people belonging to different localities in the village. Usually women and children carry milk to the cooperative. Thus, the cooperative became a new platform for regular face to face contact amongst women) to get together. It was during one such occasion that these women considered a proposal, offered jointly by the District Women's Welfare Organisation and the State Civil Supplies office whether they could undertake to run a Fair Price Shop in the village, wholly to be managed by them. On discussing the pros and cons involved in such a proposal, the women had decided to take it up. At present, they are
running the fair price shop reasonably efficiently. This also has lead to the formation of a Mahila Mandal in the village. The dairy cooperative society has offered its premises for their periodical meetings.

Effective indirect participation of women in dairy cooperatives i.e. in terms of tending animals, adopting better feeding and breeding practices for enhanced production, timely supply of, and quality milk to the cooperatives, making effective demands for the supply of inputs and services on the cooperative, seems to have established the importance of bringing women into the mainstream of economic activity to improve their status. As already mentioned, the incomes earned through dairying appears to have given them self-confidence as also boosted their self image. This may also mean the beginning of a change in the male perception of women's economic capabilities.

One of the other major indirect benefits that the cooperative had offered to them is that it has enabled them to acquire greater credit worthiness among both the neighbouring lending households as also the grocery shops. Particularly the poorest among the women interviewed said that "the grocers now give us credit easily for purchases made for a fortnight as they all now know that we are going to have an assured payment every fortnight from the cooperative".

As regards impact on women's literacy, attitudes towards family planning, consumption levels, and nutrition and health it is difficult to make an assessment without indepth research of the same. However, impressionistically, it seems to have had some impact, though only marginal. For example, the
Mahila Mandal in the village (which was a product of the association amongst women at the cooperative) had organised a Free Family Planning Camp at the village. The attendance in that camp was considerably higher than was the case in the past. This in a sense may be attributed to the strength of association and support that the organising women have built up with some prospective women, who expressed a desire to undergo Family Planning operation as they had developed confidence in the ability of these organisers to offer them any kind of required help. Similarly positive changes in attitudes towards girls' education are beginning to appear as are changes in the male perception of women's social capabilities via economic activities like dairying.

9.3 Direct Participation of Women in Household Dairying

It has been observed that, on an average, the time spent on activities such as cleaning the animal milkshed, collecting dung, milking, preparing feeds, watering and bathing the animals, delivering milk etc. usually ranges between 3 to 4 hours a day. In terms of labour input across various stages of dairying, the differentials in labour input appear to vary on the basis of the status of the women in the family (whether mother, mother-in-law, widow, house daughter) or on the basis of the resource base of the household than caste per se. However, among the brahmins, women by and large continue to keep away from the daily chores of dairying except for supervising the same now and then.
Based on our sample interviews, the following division and nature of work emerged amongst the dairy households.

(i) children usually and sometimes seasonally unemployed men in the family take animals out for grazing. Generally female children aged between 8-12 and male children aged 8 and above are assigned this job. The economic status of the household is important in understanding the labour input pattern of children. Generally children of low economic status families tend to do more of this work as they either don't attend school at all or are irregular or drop-outs from school. The well-to-do families hire child or adult labour for grazing and washing of animals. Once again this is usually done by the permanent labourers or by children of these labourers;

(ii) cleaning the animal shed, collecting wasted straw and dung and dumping them in a corner locally called 'pentapogu' meaning 'refuge dump corner' (which incidentally is the major source of organic manure for agriculture) is another critical part of women's work. Part of the dung is kept aside for making fuel balls made of dung. Wood and coal chips or fuel cakes made of dung and rice husk and or rice straw. All of this work is done generally by women if they belong to poorer or middle class households and by the hired labour if the family is well-off. Collecting fodder or feeding the stored fodder is also generally done by the women. The animals are fed a little green godder and are given drinking water before they are milked, usually by women of poor and middle
class households. In the case of upper class households either the men do it generally or the permanent labourer called 'Jeetagadu' does it. Now and then their women also do milking. Other feeds prepared by women include 'Kudithi' (rice bran mixed with water); 'Jonna Annam' (cooked Jawar food, normally fed to lactating and expectant animals); 'Ajeerthi-Vatam Annam' (food prepared to cure indigestion and fever made of asafoetida, brinjals etc.) (iii) marketing of milk is also by and large done by women, particularly if the household has to deal with a middle man (cycle vendor). Normally, women milk the animals in the presence of the vendor. If the household is dealing with the cooperative, then too, usually women and children carry milk to the cooperative. However, when it comes to collecting the fortnightly payments for milk due from the cooperative, generally men do this. Whereas the money due from the cycle vendor is usually collected by women. This is because it is believed and rightly so, that women alone can tactfully handle the middlemen when it comes to bargaining for a price, monitoring his weighing and pricing procedures, collecting payments etc. In the past women used to also spend long hours in converting milk into ghee for sale. But with the coming of the cooperative this activity has become very insignificant and consequently the drudgery part of it appears reduced; (iv) animal health care and breeding activities are undertaken generally by men as women are not encouraged to participate in the same.
animal health care by way of traditional medicines like ayurveda is taken up by women at home. But, however, when it comes to taking a sick animal to the vet. hospital or to the cooperative, generally men do it. Similarly, for breeding purposes either through the traditional natural breeding by the bull or through the modern artificial insemination, generally men take care of these activities.

From the above the view point that women play a very crucial role in production, processing and marketing of milk and in taking care of animals at home gets established beyond doubt. Hence, policy makers and planners apart from recognising their significant contributions to dairying as a major supplementary source of family income, should also aim at strengthening their role both to give a higher 'status' and improve the dairy economy in general by way of making them an integral part of all the modern dairy development programmes. But unfortunately, not many programmes have given sufficient thought to this aspect of the need to and how best to involve women in various schemes in this region. However, evidence on how women can be usefully involved in modernising dairying is not lacking in other parts of the country. For e.g. even within A.P., the Bhagawatula Charitable Trust and the All Women's Cooperative in Tirupathi have shown how best could women be made targets of development in dairying. Similar experiences are available in programmes of organisations like
Amul and SEWA in Gujarat, and the Jabalpur Cooperative Milk Union in M.P.

As a first step towards involving women in dairy development of this region what needs to be done is to introduce some women in the extension service group of the district union. Conventionally, men have been the extensionists. This may have lead to the exclusion of women in extension education and training programmes conducted by them owing to several socio-cultural factors. If some women are included as extensionists, perhaps, the lay village women would find some motivation to seek new areas of information from them and effectively implement them. In the absence of other focal points of interaction amongst village women, the existing cooperatives should strengthen their activities to be able to attract as many women as possible as members of their cooperatives. This would both enhance the confidence of the women as also provide for a platform for discussion on relevant issues of dairying. Another major step that would be highly desirable and necessary is that of direct participation of women in cooperatives which may provide for widening of their horizons. This would mean creation of and management of cooperatives by women themselves. In the absence of other strong institutional forums in the village Dairy Cooperatives managed by women themselves may be viewed as more meaningful ways of involving them in other economic activities too, which one way or the other affect the well-being of women in particular and the economy in general.
To sum up, the major findings that emerged from the foregoing analysis are: (i) women have begun to sell milk outside the house to the cooperative (a practice not prevalent hitherto owing to some social norms and restrictions on women's physical movements). This physical movement of women in the village seems to have moderately helped them to gain some 'freedom'. Sex barriers, as a result, on physical/economic transactions undertaken by women outside their homes thus seem to be breaking gradually as a result of dairy cooperative interaction. This kind of change was confined in the past only among the women of Kaira in Gujarat. It now seems to have extended to women in particular in our village and in district Guntur, in general; (ii) as a spill-over effect, while transacting business with the dairy cooperative (sales, cash returns, investment in dairy inputs), the women seem to have got well exposed to calculating economics of household activities in a moderate way; (iii) as a result of their interaction with the cooperative and the extension staff, the women seem to have gained some scientific exposure to animal husbandry practices; (iv) most of the middle and lower class women seem to have gained 'some say' in the investment decisions regarding dairying; (v) a sense of cooperation and the need to organise certain activities (such as mahila mandal, health care camps) seems to have occurred among the women as a result of their interaction with the cooperative; (vi) with the increased knowledge of scientific dairying most women have been able to maintain their animals better as also realise reasonably higher returns from dairying.