



Role of women in Dairying

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As part of the family labour, dairying in Kerala is a small holder enterprise.

Majority of the farmers keep one or two milch animals primarily to meet their household milk needs, making it an additional income source. This invariably means that women are responsible to a considerable extent for the labour input in dairying as a part of their normal household tasks. However, the workload associated with dairying was not very high in the former system of dairying with local cattle, which was a 'low input-low output system'. The popularisation of cross-bred cattle has changed dairying to a 'high input-high output' system where the workload is relatively higher. Even in the new system of intensive dairying, the main responsibility of domestic dairying has continued to rest with the females in the household.

However, the question is whether women's work is adequately recognised and rewarded. The lack of recognition of women's work in dairying has serious consequences. It is quite likely that if a person does not get recognition and reward for the work he/she does, the activi-

ty may not be performed properly and it will be reflected in the output from that activity. From an extensionist's point of view, it is important to know to what extent women's work in dairying is recognised and rewarded by their families and the state. If women's work is not recognised and rewarded, the production enhancing inputs provided by the extension agencies may not be utilised appropriately.

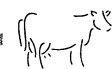
An understanding of the concept of 'Relative Economic Power' (REP) within the household needs to be introduced at this stage to explain the importance of recognising women's work. REP is conceptualised in terms of the degree of control of key economic resources such as income. REP is the most important power variable affecting gender stratification in the micro-level of family (Blumberg, 1991). When the REP of woman increases, her decision-making power, self-esteem and overall authority within the household increase. However, women's work needs to be recognised by her family members because it is a pre-requisite to improve women's ability to control the income. Of course, women's ability to control the income within the household depends on other social, personal and cultural factors of the members in the household as well, including the woman herself. It is well known that the recognition and attribution of a certain value to the women's contribution happens at three levels; the recognition of the value of the contribution by the contributor i.e. the woman herself, the recognition of the value of the contribution by the immediate social group i.e. the family unit, the recognition of the value of the contribution by the wider society.

Now the crucial question is that why does women's work in productive activities like dairying remains invisible? In addition to the issues mentioned above, there are other issues in this context to be examined, which are applicable to all cases of home-based productive activities in which women involve. First of all, it is important to know the real extent to which women are able to take part in any productive work. Women are often forced to opt for only those types of jobs that are compatible with their reproductive

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roles as wives and mothers. Because of their domestic responsibilities women often have to opt for only those productive works, which can be performed within the premises of the household. Thus, the work of women in household enterprises like dairying, which is an extension of domestic work, is not perceived as work unlike in the case of men whose work is almost always paid for. Further, the work done by women within the household like dairying is often not recognised by a wage income. This results in under-valuation of women's work by both themselves and the society at large. The self perception of women, who though economically active, continue to declare themselves as only housewives is a crucial factor in the underestimation of the female work force (Dulansey and Austin, 1985). Further, there is a tendency by the male dominated policy planning and administrative body to highlight women's 'supportive role' rather than 'productive role' (Samanta, 1994).

Even when women do work it may not be accounted due to faulty measurement techniques. Conventional labour statistics excludes a good proportion of the activities in which women are involved (Beneria, 1982). Often official definitions of what constitutes work fail to capture a large share of women's labour (Jacobson, 1992). The invisible nature of women's contributions reinforces the social perception that they are dependants rather than producers. Further, the form of production providing the main source of income in a given community is usually valued more highly by community members than the subsidiary sources of income. Therefore, women often get the opportunity to perform the not so highly valued tasks involving the subsidiary source of income such as dairying. The undue emphasis on biological determinism has further favoured the underestimation mentioned above.

Even with the payment of milk money on a weekly basis, as in dairy co-operatives, it often gets spent then and there. Milk money is used by almost everyone to meet the cost of cattle feed and domestic expenses, which is the most important single expenditure in the household. It is also used to repay the cattle loan. The cost of cattle feed and the loan (if availed) are deducted from source. Further, in many cases, the milk money from a single cow is used to meet the feed cost of other non-milk animals as well. In the case of other milk

outlets, the payment may not be regular and lump sum always. As a result, there is not much 'take home' milk money. People give importance to dairying only if there is a reasonable amount of money remaining after meeting all these expenses. Then only they will be ready to recognise the contribution of the person involving in it.

At the micro-level the man's felt economic dependence on the women's economic contribution is an important factor affecting the visibility of women's contributions (Blumberg, 1991). Accordingly, in the lower and middle socio-economic classes women should receive more recognition for their work in dairying since dairy income is important for the survival of these households. Nevertheless, this does not happen in all the lower and middle socio-economic class households.

In fact, women's work in dairying is not appreciated by the government also. The recognition of the work done by women in any productive activity, such as in dairying, by her household members reflects the recognition she gets from the wider society. The recognition given by the society is reflected in government policies, which in turn is represented by the extent to which governmental extension efforts are addressed to the needs of such women. Regardless of the admission that dairying is an appropriate avenue for employment for women (Government of Kerala, 1995), most of the dairy development schemes have not taken care to have a female oriented strategy of operation. These schemes are seen not to have considered the gender based division of responsibilities in dairying households, but rather, they view dairying households as a single unit. The important role of women in dairying is not seen to be recognised in the formulation of training and extension programmes. Although extension activities form a part of the responsibilities of many of the government agencies, the gender dimension of home-based dairying does not seem to be reflected in their extension efforts. It is essential to recognise and reward women's role in our home-based dairying. Otherwise it may lead to under utilization of the extension inputs. Recognition and provision of appropriate rewards to women's efforts will enhance the performance of the dairy sector in the state.

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