

WOMEN IN RURAL COOPERATIVES: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY (WITH REFERENCE TO RAEBARELI DISTRICT)

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ABSTRACT:

Co - operation has been the lifeblood of Indian culture from the very beginning. By “co - operation” we mean people working together in an organized manner; it is not a new Concept but has a centuries - old history. As a result of the social and economic imbalance caused by the Industrial Revolution, a committee was formed in 1901 under the chairmanship of Edward Law to discuss the establishment of cooperative societies in India. The 97th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2011 added Part XI - B to the Constitution, dealing with cooperative societies, and inserted the word “co - operation” after “associations and organisations” in Article 19(1)(c) of Part III.

INTRODUCTION

Co-operation has been the lifeblood of Indian culture from the very beginning. By “co-operation” we mean people working together in an organized manner; it is not a new Concept but has a centuries-old history. As a result of the social and economic imbalance caused by the Industrial Revolution, a committee was formed in 1901 under the chairmanship of Edward Law to discuss the establishment of cooperative societies in India. The 97th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2011 added Part XI-B to the Constitution, dealing with cooperative societies, and inserted the word “co-operation” after “associations and organisations” in Article 19(1)(c) of Part III.

The contribution of women can be seen in numerous cooperatives, from Amul products to Lijjat papad. Cooperatives provide a platform not only for urban women but also for rural women, giving them leadership skills and accelerating rural development. Therefore, there is a need to identify skill gaps, promote women’s empowerment, and create a framework for cooperatives that can deliver a sustainable, successful, and developed economic model for rural areas.

India’s cooperative model will strengthen the rural economy and offer a special platform for developing women’s skills. Women’s participation is especially visible in sectors such as bangles, bracelets, handbags, handmade paper products, eco-friendly goods, and gifts. Various types of cooperatives are being set up to inform women entrepreneurs about other areas of cooperation.

The cooperative movement has a long history of empowering women. In a cooperative conference, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that cooperative institutions should focus on various dimensions and enter fields with vast potential. In a male-dominated country, women have to fight many battles to get the chance to display their skills. Although efforts are being made to give women equal rights, success is visible in many areas. Thus, cooperatives have proved to be a positive and successful means of solving rural problems. India is a country of villages, and most of its population lives in rural areas, so the success of cooperatives can be directly observed there.

HYPOTHESES

1. Promotion of rural cooperatives will improve the status of rural women and increase their participation.
2. Providing business experience through rural cooperatives can enhance women’s status.
3. Rural cooperatives will have positive effects on women’s lives and their role in rural society.
4. Participation in the cooperative movement can improve the lives of women from marginalised communities.
5. Cooperatives have enabled many women to take part in governance and administration, with visible results.

OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the status of women in the field of rural cooperatives.
2. Study the impact of cooperative societies on women.
3. Analyse the success of cooperatives in rural areas.
4. Assess societal awareness of cooperatives.
5. Analyse the role of cooperatives in rural life and their effects.
6. Study the role of women-run cooperative societies in rural areas.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Co-operation is strong not only in India but also in many other countries. Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah stated that the principle of cooperation should provide a successful and sustainable model not just for India but for the whole world. The 100th International Day of Cooperatives was celebrated on 2 July 2022, with the theme “Co-operation builds a better world.” Various cooperative organisations exist worldwide in health, agriculture, education, employment, and social sectors, where women’s roles and contributions are evident.

Stephen C. Smith and J. Rothabam (2013) note in *Cooperatives in the Global Economy* that cooperatives can play a key role in addressing challenges facing both Indian and world economies, reducing economic inequality, and providing members with skills and experience through democratic decision-making.

Mr. Jannatul Islam, in a case study on Bangladesh, highlights that although cooperatives in Bangladesh have existed for a century, women’s membership remains comparatively low, which is essential for securing social and economic benefits.

A survey by the International Labour Organization and the International Cooperative Alliance shows that 75 % of respondents believe women’s participation in cooperatives has increased over the past 20 years. IFC (International Finance Corporation) ranks as the world’s top cooperative. Cooperatives provide employment to about 10 % of the global population. Many believe that women’s participation in the cooperative movement has declined and that government efforts have failed, but this is a misconception. After Germany, the global cooperative economy is the fifth-largest economic entity, a major achievement. No model can succeed without women’s involvement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will use empirical research methods and a descriptive research design. Data will be collected through participant observation and interviews. Both primary and secondary sources will be employed.

***Study Area:** The research focuses on Raebareli district, where about 90 % of the population lives in rural areas (Census 2011). Within the district, Lalguanjan tehsil has been selected. It comprises three blocks—Lalguanjan, Sareni, and Kheeru. Approximately 65 active cooperative societies operate in Lalguanjan tehsil, covering various sectors and demonstrating women’s involvement, awareness, and empowerment.

Potential Results

Cooperatives have improved people’s lives. By connecting cooperative members with rural women, gender inequality can be reduced, women can become more aware, and they can give new direction to their activities. The motto “Urban development should not leave villages behind” will be realised. Strengthening social, economic, and political conditions will lead to progress in women’s empowerment.

Many rural areas still need special attention from cooperative societies. Recognising this, the government has created a new “Ministry of Cooperation” to revitalise the cooperative movement, with visible positive outcomes. Integrating cooperative ideology with technology is essential, and the responsibility lies not only with men but also with women, who must be made aware. This will only be possible when inequality in rural society decreases and cooperatives work together.

Significance of the Proposed Research

The government is currently focused on the cooperative model. By establishing a separate Ministry of Cooperation, it has signalled that the future belongs to cooperatives. Both capitalist and socialist models appear to be failing, while India has become the country with the largest number of cooperatives. Cooperatives are playing an active role in involving rural women.

Recently, the Uttar Pradesh government introduced the “Mahila Samarthy Scheme” to provide employment to poor women from backward classes. The “Ayushman Cooperative Scheme” includes cooperative societies in building healthcare infrastructure, ensuring equal rights for women as well as men.

CONCLUSION

India is a nation of villages, and most of its population belongs to rural areas. Cooperative societies are considered the lifeblood of India, and the sector is rapidly progressing. Cooperatives do not focus on a single area but emphasise holistic development and solving unemployment. Their motto is “prosperity through cooperation.”

Cooperatives have improved lives and brought prosperity. Today, through cooperatives, activities range from stitching to manufacturing airplanes. Many countries are adopting the cooperative model for development. Cooperatives have nurtured hundreds of lives and have been instrumental in creating awareness and employment opportunities for rural women. Small units are now competing with multinational companies. In rural areas, cooperative banks have extended agricultural credit to the lowest strata of society. Dependence on cooperatives is increasing not only for milk and sugar but also for education, health, and manufacturing.

The cooperative movement and women’s involvement in rural areas have become highly relevant, but there is still a long way to go. By linking every village to cooperatives and introducing women to the mantra “Cooperation leads to prosperity,” the country can be given a new direction.

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