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Importance of sericulture from economic perspective: A case study of Kokrajhar district, Assam

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Abstract

Sericulture is an amalgamation of arts and science of cultivation of silk production. It is an ancient industry with significant cultural and economic importance. It is an integral part of Bodo culture and economics for centuries. This paper examines the significance of sericulture industry in Kokrajhar district, Assam, imparting the economic and social contribution. Sericulture industry in the district provides employment opportunity and help in advance rural development. It is also a process that conserves the traditional acquaintance, culture and heritage. This paper also examines the key problems and prospects of sericulture.

Keywords: Sericulture, bodos, tradition, rural development, problems, prospects

Introduction

Sericulture is a mix of ancient art and culture of silk production practiced since thousands of year, primarily in the regions of Asian countries. Sericulture is a distinctive agro-based industry that involves the rearing of silkworm to produce silk. It is one of vital economic activity practiced in the region of China, India and Thailand particularly. Sericulture is been practicing in Assam since ancient history. It has been playing a pivotal role in generating employment and income to the people engaged in the process. It is also known for its low investment and fast payback with high profit.

The Bodos, an ancient community of the north-eastern region, habituated in the different parts of Assam and its neighboring states, has been practicing sericulture since ancient period. It is kind of a part of their life that is present in their culture and tradition. The technique of spinning and weaving of silk from the silkworm cocoons was first introduced by Bodos, India (Sharma, 1983) ^[12]. It is a general household affair among Bodo community of Kokrajhar district (Teotia and Bajpeyi 2009) ^[13]. All the family members are involved directly or indirectly in silk worm rearing. Basically it is the Bodo women who engage themselves in silkworm rearing apart from their household chores. Bodo women are excellent weavers, they utilize their skill in weaving different clothing materials such as their traditional attire such as Dokhona, Jwmggra, Aronai, Sima, Phalli etc. silk obtained from silk worm are being used to make these luxurious clothing materials and are used in important functions, ceremonies and other religious or cultural gatherings. Apart from the fabric, silkworm pupae are also consumed among Bodo communities and considered as a traditional delicacy containing several health benefits. Sericulture involves raising silk worms to produce silk. The various species of silk by growing are the Eri (samia ricini), Muga (antheraea assama), Mulberry (bombyx mori) and Tasar (antheraea mylitta). The bodos mostly are engaged in rearing eri silkworm.

Cultivation of silkworm has potential benefits in terms of Employment generation in the rural areas of Kokrajhar district. Sericulture is a labor intensive industry that provides diverse employment opportunities. It provides jobs, entrepreneurship and skilled workers in silk production industry that contribute to income generation, economic development and thus help alleviate the poverty in the region. The silk worm presents several market opportunities in the district. The use of natural silk product is observed in various industries such as textile, fashion industry, furnishing home etc.

Thus adding- value and diversifying the product through innovation can enhance the utilization of silk and its by product, thus increase the profit margin.

Silk production has a scope in Export potential and earning. There is a high demand of silk in countries like Japan, China and other European countries. The Kokrajhar district having blessed with its rich silk heritage and traditional craftsmanship, silk producing farmers of the Kokrajhar district can elevate their export market for silk products by establishing partnership with international buyers. Platforms like participating in trade fair and exhibitions provide opportunity to develop exposure in the domestic and international market.

Mostly women participate in the sericulture activity, starting from mulberry cultivation to silk weaving. Sericulture industry employs a significant number of women so, provides an excellent opportunity to empowering them economically and socially. It is a source of sustainable livelihood to women, farmers and other artisans by providing a lucrative income and financial stability.

Handloom weaving of silk fabric is a traditional and cultural practice in many regions not only in the Kokrajhar district but also several other districts of Assam and northeast. The Bodo communities are an excellent weaver and mostly admire the traditional craftsmanship, reflecting the rich heritage and artistic traditions of these communities supporting the preservation of traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage and these have been passed down through generation maintaining cultural continuity.

Sericulture is a part and parcel of the Bodo community. It is being celebrated in cultural festivals and rituals among the community. Traditional silk garments such as Dokhona, Jwmgra, Aronai, Fasra etc. are highly valued and often worn during cultural and religious ceremony. The traditional attire of the Bodos are valued much, some of the silk attire and the process of silk production are showcased in national and international exhibition, workshops and museums. This promotes the districts cultural heritage promoting tourism and related activities. It has other several impact on rural development by providing employment opportunities it reduces the out migration of local people, development of rural infrastructure.

Sericulture also has an environmental impact it promotes sustainable agricultural practices. Cultivation of mulberry crops enhances biodiversity and soil health and soil fertility. Mulberry tree also help absorb carbon di oxide from atmosphere help mitigate the climate change. Silkworm pupae are been consumed among the Bodo community knowing the medicinal benefit since ancient period. Both its pupae and its cocoons are used to cure diseases. Now that the value of silkworm having its medicinal property is known to all, it is utilized in medical and cosmetic industries applications. Silk proteins are used in medical applications such as sutures, tissues engineering and drug delivery system. This innovation highlights the biocompatibility and versatility of silk.

Disease management for silkworm which is vulnerable to infection and viruses, market price fluctuations, climate change, lack of investment and technological innovation are some of the problems faced in sericulture industry in the Kokrajhar district. To support sericulture industry and promote it to flourish government should support the farmers and artisans by providing incentives and subsidies, trainings programs for maintaining of silkworm, processing

of silk threads, utilizing modern technique and infrastructure development. Government should provide such activities that encourage the farmers and entrepreneurs to invest and capitalize on the market opportunities. Government should also invest on research and development towards sericulture.

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