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## **WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AMONG THE MUGA REELERS AND WEAVERS IN BIJOYNAGAR AND PALASHBARI AREAS OF KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM, INDIA**

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### **Introduction:**

Sericulture is a rural and semi-urban farm based enterprise highly suited both for large and small land holdings, low capital investment, provides employment, alleviates poverty, conserves the nature, earning foreign revenue in India (Thapa and Shrestha, 1999). The silk fabric produced by rural people but largely purchased by the urban rich and middle class which are estimated around 57% final value goes to rural areas (Gangopadhyay, 2009). Women are overwhelmingly concentrated in agro-based /house-hold based activities such as dairying, fisheries, small animal husbandry, handlooms, handicraft, social forestry and sericulture. In major silk producing countries, like China, Japan, and Korea power looms are run by women (Mitra, 1990). Sericulture is one of such activity, where most of the activities are carried out by women alone *viz.*, working in raising food plants, leaf collection, silkworm rearing, reeling/spinning and weaving, contributing about 60% of work force input (Venkatesh *et. al.*, 2010). It can generate employment up to 11 persons for every kg of raw silk produced, out of which more than 6 persons are women. (Rama Lakshmi C.S. 2007).

The Ahom king patronized the muga culture and silk weaving in Assam. Muga silkworms were reared on "Mezankari" tress to produce royal dresses for their exclusive use. It is difficult to trace its origin at Assam and its adjoining states, but it was known to Assam from the ancient time as recorded in "Arthashastra" and "Ramayana" (Choudury, 1959). The first authentic information of golden muga and creamy white eri silks one can gather from the period of Mirjumla in 1652 (Subha Rao, 1978). This industry becomes developed considerably in the Ahom-period when effective measures were adopted to encourage silk trade with other nations. Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, muga silk become an important commodity of trade transacted by the East India Company (Bhorali, 1969). Golden yellow muga silk industry, the Assam state occupies a unique position in the sericulture map of the world (Chowdhury, 1982).

Muga culture especially muga reeling and weaving provides an alternative source of livelihood to increase their income to a large section of rural population. These activities can reshape the rural economy of Assam to a great extent and make this region a big earner of foreign exchange. There is lot of scope for part time employment opportunities in these sectors. The demand of muga silk is growing rapidly in the domestic as well as in the international market. But though the demand is growing, there are some factors related to it which is limiting its production. But the condition of the people related to reeling and weaving activities of muga seems to be pitiable. Thus, sericulture especially muga culture is vastly linked with the socio economic life of rural Assam. It also serves as a source of income for them. And at present muga industry is of the view to capture the export market. In spite of vast potentialities of silk industry in rural development, the required need is not fulfilled in Assam. The literature on the development of muga silk sector and socio economic condition of the reelers and weavers in Assam is also scanty. Thus, the general aim of the present study is to find out the socio-economic condition of reelers and weavers of Palashbari and Bijaynagar in particular and the problems they are facing.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To find out the socio-economic status of muga reelers and weavers.
- To find out the income generated by the reelers & weavers.
- To understand the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in reeling and weaving

### **Materials and method**

Both primary and secondary data were adopted for the study. Secondary data were collected from different publications, both governmental and non-governmental, web sites, journals etc. Primary data were collected from the selected respondents, interview schedule in Polashbari (reeling activity) and Bijohnagar (weaving activity) of Kamrup district. In the present study a total of 100 samples covering reelers and weavers (50 reelers and 50 weavers) are selected from the sampling universe.

### **Results and Discussion**

Muga culture is practiced traditionally as a source of livelihood in Assam. Muga reeling and weaving activities are closely linked with the socio economic condition of the reelers and weavers. It has great potentialities to increase the income source of the poor. Thus, an attempt was made to study the socio economic condition of the reelers and weavers. The data collected for the study were properly arranged and analyzed as following objectives of the present study.

#### **Reelers**

The result shows that 30% of the respondents are in the age group below 30 years, 56% are in the age group between 30-50 years and only 14% are above 50 years. The education profile of the respondents indicates that 46% of the total respondents are illiterate, 30% are under matric, 20% are matriculate and only 4% have passed higher secondary and none is graduate. 60% of the respondents are married and 20% are not married. 44% of the respondent's family occupation is daily wage earning, 24% of their family occupation is farming, 18% of their occupation is business and only 14% of their occupation is service. 60% that is majority of the respondent's families earn between 2000-5000 per month, 24% earn between 6000-9000 and only 16% earn between 9000 above. It was found that the socio economic condition of the reelers and weavers was not satisfactory as it is seen that majority of the respondents belong to low income groups.

56% of respondents belong to nuclear family and 44% belong to joint family. 34% of the respondent's family have marginal landholding followed by 48% of the respondents who have small land holding and only 18% of them have large land holding. 70% of the reelers status has upgraded after taking reeling and 30% of them replied negatively. 60% of the respondents have experience in muga reeling for more than 5 years and only 6% have experience for less than 1 year.

The result shows 66% of the respondents invest in between 1-1.5 lakh yearly, 18% invest between 1.51-2 lakh, 10% invest between 2.01-2.5 lakh and only 6% invest in between 2.51-3 lakh. The result shows that 66% of the respondents could purchase raw materials between 50000-75000, 18% purchase between 76000-95000, 10% purchase between 96000-1.20 lakh and 6% invest between 1.21 lakh and above. 66% of the respondent's yearly production is 10-15 kg of yarn, 18% produce 16-20 kg, 10% produce 21-25 kg and only 6% could produce 26-30 kg of yarn/ The result shows that 66% of the respondents could only generate revenue between 30000-35000, generate revenue in between 46000 and above. 18% could generate revenue in between 36000-40000, 10% could generate revenue in between 41000-45000 and 6% earn revenue between 46000 and above. The result shows that 70% of the respondents buy raw materials from traders, 10% buy from haat and only 5% have their own source of raw materials. 20% of the respondents are satisfied by selling the yarn and

80% are not satisfied by selling the yarn. Only 4% of the respondents are reelers cum weavers and 96% are exclusive reelers. 70% of the respondents have not undergone any training and only 30% of them have undergone training. 80% of the respondents have regular customers and 20% do not have regular customers. Only 20% of the could run their business by their own cash and 80% of them run their business through credit. It was found that majority of the reelers are illiterate and it is because of their illiteracy that they are not aware about the use of modern techniques of reeling and so they could not cope up with the technological change. They are still using the traditional methods of reeling because of which they could not increase the production and meet the demands in the markets. As a result, their socio-economic condition is not increased upto the expected level.

**Problems/constraints confronting the reelers while reeling:**

Following are the certain problems which are found during interviews that the reelers are facing during reeling:

- Fluctuation of cocoon price.
- Inadequate marketing facilities.
- The harvested cocoon is unpredictable due to fluctuation of weather
- Inadequate of finance for investment.
- Exploitation by the middlemen/traderers.
- Lack of technical guidance.
- Lack of technical knowledge.
- Non availability of modern devices facilities.

With due discussion with the reelers it was found that among the mentioned problems lack of adequate technical knowledge, inadequate finance for investment, shortage of cocoons and non availability of modern devices are commonly faced by 88% of the reelers.

**WEAVERS**

The result 28% of the weavers are in the age group below 30, 58% are in the age group 30-50 and 14% are in the age group above 50. 60% of females are engaged in muga weaving and only 40% of male are engaged in muga weaving. 48% of the total respondents are illiterate, 34% are under matric, 14% are matriculate and only 4% have passed higher secondary. 60% of the weavers are married and 40% are unmarried. The result shows that 58% of the respondents family occupation is wage earning, 22% of their occupation is farming, 12% of their occupation is business and only 8% of their occupation is service. 60% of the respondent's income is between 2000-5000, 24% of their income is between 6000-9000 and 16% of their family income is above 9000. 58% that is majority of the respondents belong to nuclear family and 42% belongs to joint family. 60% of the respondent's family have marginal landholding followed by 30% of the respondents who have small land holding and only 10% of them have large land holding. 70% of the respondent's status has upgraded and 30% of the respondent's status has not upgraded after taking weaving. 30% of the respondents have social participation and 70% do not have any social participation. 64% of the respondents do not have mass media exposures and only 36% have mass media exposures. 72% of the respondents do not have training exposures and only 28% of them replied positively. Majority of the respondents that is 72% do not have training exposures. The reason behind this is that the training programmes are held in places far away from their area because of which they could not attend them. The programmes are also held in limited

numbers and do not provide knowledge on designs and new technologies. They are accustomed to weaving traditionally.

It shows that 80% of the respondents have experience in weaving for more than 5 years and only 6% have experience below 1 year. 80% of the respondents invest 1-1.5 lakh, 14% invest in between 1.51-2 lakh and 6% above 2 lakh. 80% of the weavers could only purchase 10-15 kg of yarn, 14% could purchase 16-20 kg, 6% could purchase 21-25 kg and nobody could purchase above 26 kg. 80% of the respondents could generate revenue from 50000-60000, 14% could generate revenue in between 61000-70000, 6% of them could generate revenue in between 71000-80000. 84% of the respondents weave through traditional looms and only 16% have improved looms. 94% of the respondents possess 1-3 looms, 6% possess 4-6 looms and none of the respondents possess 7 looms and above. it is seen that 80% of the respondents could not keep on changing the designs and only 20% of them keep on changing the designs as the market demands. Only 8% of the respondents do self reeling for weaving and 92% of them buy the yarn from traders. 84% of the respondent's product is only loom finished and the remaining 8% sale their product after processing. It is seen 78% of the respondents have regular customers and only 22% of them do not have regular customers. 20% of the respondents has undergone training and majority that is 80% of them has not undergone any training. It was found that majority of the weavers are illiterate and it is because of their illiteracy that they are not aware about the use of modern techniques of reeling and so they could not cope up with the technological change. They are still using the traditional methods of reeling because of which they could not increase the production and meet the demands in the markets. As a result, their socio-economic condition is not increased up to the expected level.

#### **Problems/constraints confronted by the weavers during weaving**

The problems that were reported by the weavers during interview are as follows:

- High price of the yarn.
- Lack of adequate training.
- Inadequate marketing facilities.
- Inadequate of finance for investment
- Exploitation by the middlemen.
- Lack of technical guidance and knowledge.
- Non availability of modern devices facilities.
- The harvested cocoon is usually not predictable.

With due discussion with the weavers it was found that among the mentioned problems lack of adequate training, inadequate finance for investment, lack of technical knowledge and non availability of modern devices are commonly faced by 86% of the weavers.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Even though the participation of Women is high in Sericulture industry and majority of the women entrepreneurs are satisfied with subsidies provided by government still they face various problems while starting and promoting their sericulture business. Most of the women entrepreneurs involved in Sericulture have minimum educational qualification, so government and sericulture department can

Organize effective training and development activities for them, which will ultimately reduce the problems and also enable the women entrepreneurs to overcome the obstacles. Sericulture is one among the high-income generating industry, hence promoting women entrepreneurs in Sericulture will lead to economic development and empowerment of women.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Most of the women have education only up to school level hence they are unable to understand modern techniques in reeling and weaving. They face problems like heavy work load and lack of time, hence effective and efficient training programs in nearby places can be organized by government and Sericulture department.

Women are facing financial problems in reeling and, so sericulture department and regional rural banks can make arrangements so that process involved in availing loans is simple and beneficial.

Sericulture department should come out with advanced technology and make women entrepreneurs in sericulture to implement new technology in order to reduce the burden of heavy workload and labor problems.

Women must be encouraged to participate with timely and continuous support in all the activities of sericulture and also extra subsidies can be provided to promote sericulture business.

There is a need for commercialization of sericulture in order to compete in the world of new economic regime.

### **SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research can be carried out in other geographical locations and also an in - depth analysis about the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in sericulture and measures to overcome the problems in sericulture can be made. Research can be done on women employees involved in sericulture activity.

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