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Practising Sericulture Through Women Self Help Group :A Tool for Economic Development of Tribal Woman in Assam

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Abstract

Assam is the meeting ground of different tribal groups. These Tribal groups in Assam are considered educationally, socially and economically the most backward. Women Empowerment is a vital issue of all round development of a society. Development of Tribal people will not be possible without closing the gap between women and men in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities. Since the 1970's the idea and practice of self-help group has developed worldwide as a major social phenomenon for poverty elevation and women empowerment. Self Help Groups are involved in different economic activities to develop their financial condition. The establishment of rural industries like sericulture can be very effective in providing a satisfactory income source for the women self-help group. Sericulture industry is an age old predominant cultural practised by almost all the tribal people of Assam. It has immense scope for empowering the tribal women in Assam. Nature has endowed Assam with favourable climate and environmental conditions for practising Sericulture. This region of the country is a substantial producer of different kind of silk i.e. Mulberry and Non-Mulberry silk worms produce about 10% of the total natural silk produced in India. It is expected that practising sericulture by Tribal Women' Self Help Group will improve the Social and economic condition of Tribal women in Assam.

Keywords : Sericulture, Tribal Women, Self Help Group

Introduction

Assam is a tribal majority State (According to 2011 census the S.T. population of Assam stands around 3.9 million) who are recognised as the primal inhabitants of the land and belong to various tribal groups. Among them major groups are Bodo, Missing, Kachari, Deuri, Karbi, Rabha, Garo, Hajong, Khamti, Kuki, Dimas etc. These people are considered educationally, economically and socially the most backward in society. Empowerment of women is one of the vital issues of All round development and harmonious growth of a nation. It is possible only when women are considered as equal partners in the development process. From 1970's self-help group (SHG) movement has got a successful path not only as financial supporting group but also as a platform for the poor and women to empower themselves psychologically, socially and economically. The ability to make their own income helps women to make decisions and give them opportunities to take part in other socio-economic activities. Self-help group is a small village based financial intermediary committee of poor people, usually composed of 10-15 local women, preferably from the same socio-economic background.

They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems through self-help group and mutual help. These self-help groups are engaged in various economic activities to develop their financial conditions. The establishment of rural industries like sericulture can be very effective in creating new job opportunities and producing a satisfactory income source for women self-help groups.

Sericulture

Sericulture industry is an age old predominant culture practised by almost all the tribal people of Assam. Its contribution to income, employment, domestic and international trade of Assam has been significant. (Ramesh Kumar Kakoti-2012). Sericulture is divided into two sectors namely Farm and Industry. The farm sector involves in growing silkworm's food plants, rearing silkworm to produce cocoon and producing eggs. Reeling, twisting, dyeing, painting, finishing, knitting and felting from the Industry sector. Though Assam contributes about one-tenth of India's overall silk production, it contributes in about 62% of the Eri silk and 94% of Muga silk production in the country. Assam alone produced 2012.70 MT of silk and 118.04 MT of Muga silk and 23.40 MT Mulberry silk during the year 2013-14. It may be due to the fact that Eri and Muga can be best produced in temperature between 24°C and 28°C and within 85% to 90% humidity which matches the climate of

Assam. Moreover plenty of wild-grown host plants are available in Assam which are also suitable for the growth of sericulture.

Objectives

- i. To study the impact of sericulture in improving Socio-economic status of Tribal women.
- ii. To study the advantages of sericulture practice through women self-help group.
- iii. To study the problems in sericulture.
- iv. To study the future aspects of sericulture.

Methodology

Information were collected from various research papers.

Findings

- i. Sericulture has emerged as the most important cash crop . It requires low investment and offers high profit. It is well suited to the agrarian economy of the tribal. It ensures optimum utilization of resources human and other inputs locally without harming the nature.
- ii. Sericulture requires several numbers of labours in its various activities such sowing of seeds , plantation of host plants, maintenance of plants, plucking of leaves from the planted and widely grown trees, feeding and rearing of silk worm up to cocoon stage, save the larvae from insects, birds and monkeys, spinning of yarn, weaving, fabrics and marketing of cocoon and cloths etc. As a women S.H.G. consists of several women, it is easy for them to practice sericulture.
- iii. Sericulture is a business profitable within a short period of time. Usually 20 days to gestation period are there for the harvesting of one brood of cocoon during the summer and 28 days during the winter season for both Eri and mulberry. In case of Muga the gestation period is 23 days during summer and 42 days in winter.
- iv. Sericulture provides regular income to farmers throughout the year. Generally sericulture practice twice in a year in Assam i.e., once in summer and once in winter. Moreover marketing of cocoon and cloth activities are running throughout the year. Therefore there is no possibility to stop the income among the self-help group.
- v. Sericulture plays a vital role in the flow of income from the urban rich section of the society to the rural poors as the demand for silk is largely from the higher class. Now it is seen that Muga , Silk and Tasar's Mekhelas, Sadars, Coats, Jackets, Sawls have become very popular among new generation in the society.
- vi. Tribal women are familiar with sericulture. Sericulture has always been a subsidiary occupation of the rural women folk of Indo-Mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman races of the Brahmaputra Velly. Largely the Kachari, Bodo, Karbi, Garo, Missing, Deuri tribes practice this culture during their leisure time. If they will take this activities in large scale through self-help group , it will help to improve their economic condition a lot especially of women .
- vii. Assam has got suitable climate and environment for practising sericulture , Therefore plenty of wildly grown host plants are available in Assam that are also suitable for the growth of sericulture.
- viii. Now a days it is seen that even the government also encourages women S.H.G. by providing subsidies , seeds, houses and training for sericulture activities in self-help groups.

Problems and prospect of sericulture in Assam

- i. Lack of education among the rearers. They have no idea about scientific and commercial process of rearing-silkworms. Moreover the rears can not avail the opportunities given by the Government to them from time to time.
- ii. Discouraging approach of the society.
- iii. Lack of healthy seeds: scarcity of quality and healthy seeds of standard breed are the major problem of sericulture.
- iv. Marketing problem: There is no organized market for the transaction of cocoon. Therefore, the rearers have to sell their cocoon to the trader just at the price offered by them.

Conclusion

- i. For encouraging the rearers and to provide necessary information Seri demonstrators should be offered by the government.
- ii. Sufficient Seri concentration centres should be opened.

- iii. The activities of the middleman traders of cocoon should be controlled by government.
- iv. Traditional weaver should be motivated and trained to embrace the new technology on silk fabric production.
- v. Attempts should be taken to capture foreign market on the basis of information provided by Indian silk Export promotion council, Mumbai. Moreover fairs and exhibitions of quality products should be held at national and international levels. This process will definitely raise the income of the weavers and exporters of silk.

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