



# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SILK INDUSTRY OF ASSAM

Dr. Bashanta Mangal Dutta<sup>i</sup>

Dr. Atul Hazarika<sup>ii</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant professor Machkhowa degree College

<sup>1</sup> Associate professor Murkong Selek College

## Abstract

Women make remarkable contribution to the society. But in a developing country like India; most of the female work force is in the unorganized sector. Coming mainly from lower socioeconomic strata, these women take up employment primarily to support their family income and play a major role in areas like sericulture, agro forestry and farming. Yet it is goes unaccounted as their contribution and is considered as an extended part of their domestic duty.(Gautam and Sarma-2003). In this paper an effort was made to observe the strength of silk industry in Women empowerment especially in Economic empowerment. It is seen these industry has enough strength in women empowerment.

Key word: Sericulture, Women Empowerment, Socio economic Strata.

## Introduction

Women make remarkable contribution to the society. But in a developing country like India; most of the female work force is in the unorganized sector. Coming mainly from lower socioeconomic strata, these women take up employment primarily to support their family income and play a major role in areas like sericulture, agro forestry and farming. Yet it is goes unaccounted as their contribution and is considered as an extended part of their domestic duty.(Gautam and Sarma-2003). It is said that the dream is realized more effectively if the income of the women is high .Children receive more benefit if the mothers income is high. Sarma (2005) found a positive relationship between women income and family welfare. In order to overall improvement of the

society condition and status of the women in the society need to be changed. Thus it is drawing attention to academic community as well policy maker to find out those sector through which women empowerment is possible. In case of Assam the situation is different in terms status of women. It is seen that income received from certain sericultural activities in the state entirely goes to women. Thus sector like sericulture where women participation is very high may play a vital role in women empowerment.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

The objectives of the study are

- (1) To determine the women participation rate in silk producing activities and income received by them from these activities.
- (2) To study the comparative efficiency of silk industry in women empowerment.
- (3) To observe the problems associated with women of silk industry.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

This study is an empirical one based on primary and secondary data collected through field survey of 200 hundred households of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur district of Assam. Data is collected through a purposive random sampling. Data so collected was tabulated and analyzed in light of the objective of the study indicating the participation of men and women in each stage of production and income received by them in different silk activities. The potentiality of the silk industry in women empowerment is judged by amount of income received by women in silk activities.

### **Silk and the people:**

Assam has global Monopoly in Muga production and pre dominance in Eri production. These two are the major silk products in the study area. Muga is a polyphagous semi domesticated silk worm and rearing is completed both in indoor and out door. Eri on the other hand domesticated silk worm rearing is done indoor. The finding of the study reveals that all cast are involved in silk activities in the study area though *Ahoom* caste is dominated (Table-1) performing all kind of silk activities. Missing community prefer Eri rearing and all Eri activities is completed within the household though the few rearers are involved in Muga rearing and very few are involved in all Muga activities. And the *Brahmin* and *Kalita* castes are also involved in Muga rearing but

very few of them completed all the silk activities of Muga and Eri. *Kachari* is the cast equally prefer both Muga and Eri activities. These clearly indicate that concentration of silk activities is more in back ward and tribal castes. The total population of the study villages are 1125 with the sex ratio of 825 (Table 1.2) which much below the state overall sex ratio of 932. On the other hand the literacy rate in the study area is very high i.e 72 percent which is high to the overall state literacy rate of 64.24 percent of the state as well as national average of 65.38 percent. The female literacy rate in the study area was 53.24 which was also high to the state female literacy rate of 50.04 percent. This picture rejects the view that educated people are not involved in silk producing activities.

### **The women participation rate and the amount of income received:**

In the study area it is observed that both men and women are participated in silk activities. In the Muga production the women participation is satisfactory both in case of indoor rearing and out door rearing activities. In case of indoor rearing activities the women participation rate is 41.41 percent while it was 30.14 percent in case of out door rearing activities. In case of reeling and weaving their participation is dominant i.e 94 per cent and 100 per cent respectively. Of course in case of seed cocoon procurement and Muga host plant maintenance women involvement is almost zero (Table 1.3 and 1.4). Table – 1.3 & 1.4 shows that 34.6 per cent income of Muga cocoon production goes to women while 42.98 per cent of total labour in muga production is women. This is a balance income distribution in the sense that rearer received highest share of total value in Muga production activities and as the women participation in Muga rearing activities is low i.e. 30.14 per cent compared to men (Table 1.4). On the other hand it is seen that in all stages of Eri production women participation is 100 percent and the entire income from Eri production activities is goes to the women (Table - 1.4).

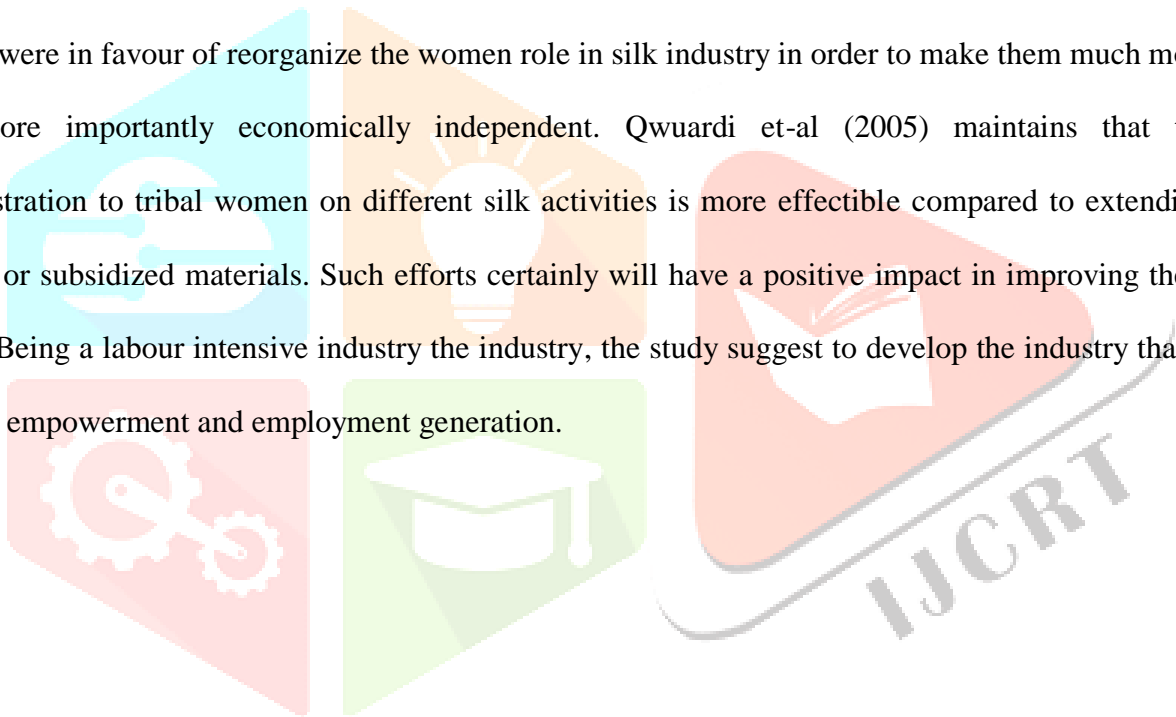
The percentage of income received from silk activities by women is high compared to all farm activities. It was highest in Eri producing activities than all farm activities. The percentage was lowest in commercial crop producing activities like betel nut, jut, mustard oil seed and cereals production. It was comparatively high in birds and animals production (Table-1.5)

It is also observed that all silk producing activities are running in traditional mode of production. Thus the industry in the study area is not a well commercially organized unit. It is seen that 72 percent women rearers are

interested in getting training in different silk activities. But due to lack of training facility, information and knowledge about modern tools equipments they are using time and labour consuming traditional appliance in all silk producing activities which make the sericulture in the study are uneconomic.

### CONCLUSION:

On the basis of the findings of the study it is observed that the development of Muga and Eri industry will definitely help in women empowerment. Comparative efficiency towards women empowerment is highest for Eri activities. It is noticed that women empowerment is positively correlated to development of sericulture industry provided that silk activities should remunerative. Though at present stage the activities is less remunerative it can be made more remunerative by slight injecting of new technology. Gautam and Sarma (2003) were in favour of reorganize the women role in silk industry in order to make them much more confident and more importantly economically independent. Qwardi et-al (2005) maintains that training and demonstration to tribal women on different silk activities is more effectible compared to extending monetary benefit or subsidized materials. Such efforts certainly will have a positive impact in improving their economic status. Being a labour intensive industry the industry, the study suggest to develop the industry that will both in women empowerment and employment generation.



## Appendix-1

Table -1.1

**CASTE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS**

Caste	Numbers of households			Remark
	Dhemaji	Lakhimpur	Total	
Ahom	65	61	126(63)	OBC
Konch	11	14	25(12.5)	OBC
Chutia	8	10	18(9)	MOBC
Missing	0	4	4(2)	Tribal
Kachari	10	0	10(5)	Triabal
Brahmin	0	4	4(2)	General
Kalita	6	7	13(6.5)	General
Total	100	100	200(100)	Total

Note:Figure in the bracket indicate percentage in total population.

Source: Field survey, 2005.



Table-1.2

**DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY  
AGE AND SEX**

Age group	Male	Famle	Total	Sex ratio
Dhemaji				
1-14 years	85	66	157(27)	776
15-60years	66	185	379(65.8)	953
60+	41	13	489(7.2)	317
Total	320	264	584(100)	825
Lakhimpur				
1-14 years	53	60	113(19.8)	1132
15-60years	205	185	390(68.5)	902
60+	36	30	66(11.7)	833
Total	294	275	569(100)	935
Total				
1-14 years	138	126	264(23)	913
15-60years	399	374	773(67)	937
60+	77	43	120(10)	558
Total	614	543	1155(100)	884

Note:Figure in the bracket indicate percentage in total population.

Source: Field survey, 2005.

Table- 1.3  
MEN AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SILK INDUSTRY IN THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

Muga									
Activities	Dhemaji			Lakhimpur			Total		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Seed procurement	113 (100)	0 (0)	113 (100)	102 (100)	0 (0)	102 (100)	215 (100)	0 (100)	215 (100)
Host plantation	159 (100)	0 (0)	159 (100)	146 (100)	0 (0)	146 (100)	305 (100)	0 (0)	315 (100)
Indoor Rearing	148 (59.67)	100 (50.33)	248 (100)	166 (57.64)	122 (42.36)	288 (100)	314 (58.58)	222 (41.42)	536 (100)
Outdoor rearing	164 (70.68)	68 (29.32)	232 (100)	179 (69.11)	80 (30.89)	259 (100)	343 (69.86)	148 (30.14)	491 (100)
Reeling	6 (3.23)	136 (95.77)	142 (100)	12 (6.78)	164 (93.32)	176 (100)	18 (5.66)	300 (94.44)	318 (100)
Weaving	0 (0)	139 (100)	139 (100)	0 (0)	159 (100)	159 (100)	0 (0)	298 (100)	298 (100)
Eri									
Seed procurement	0(0)	88 (100)	88 (100)	0 (0)	95 (100)	95 (100)	0 (0)	183 (100)	0(0)
Host plantation	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)	0(0)	0(0)
Indoor Rearing	0(0)	146 (100)	146 (100)	0 (0)	180 (100)	180 (100)	0 (0)	329 (100)	0(0)
Out door rearing	0(0)	0	0	0 (0)	0	0	0 (0)	0(0)	0(0)
Spinning	0(0)	142 (100)	142 (100)	0 (0)	153 (100)	153 (100)	0 (0)	295 (100)	295 (100)
Weaving	0(0)	148 (100)	148 (100)	0(0)	163 (100)	163 (100)	0(0)	311 (100)	311 (100)

Note: Figure in the bracket indicates percentage.

Source; Field Survey.2005

**Table- 1.4****DISTRIBUTION OF SILK INCOME OF RUPEES HUNDRED  
BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE SAMPLE HOUSE HOLDS.**

Muga		
Men	Women	Total
65.4(65.4)	34.6(34.6)	100 (100)
Eri		
0(o)	100(100)	(100)100

Note: Figure in the bracket indicate percentage

Source: Field Survey, 2005.

**TABLE: 1.5****COMPARATIVE INCOME RECEIVING PERCENTAGE BY WOMEN FROM  
DIFFERENT FARM ACTIVITIES**

Products	Percentage	Products	Percentage
Rice	18	Jut	14
Mustard oil seed	16	Goatery	41
Cereals	24	Pigery	33
Muga	56	Betel nut	12
Eri	98	Poultry	63

Source: Field Survey, 2005.



An Assamese women is winding thread by using a traditional Appliance (*Jatar*)



An Assamese reeler reel Muga on bhawari



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