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Muga Silk Of Assam: A Fabric Of Hope

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ABSTRACT

Muga Silk, known as the golden thread of Assam is the rare, ecofriendly, exquisite and expensive, durable fabric which has been emerged as the source of income and sustainable livelihood for rural communities, specially for women. This product tagged with geographical indication (GI) promotes export and cultural heritage of Assam. Muga Silk farming is not free from challenges. To strengthen this industry, government of Assam has taken various initiatives through financial support, setting up infrastructure, introducing modern techniques in production etc. This paper aims to study the production trend of muga silk in Assam along with income and employment generation. It is also tries to highlight some issues and remedial measures taken by the government.

Keywords : Muga Silk, production, employment, income

1. Introduction

Muga is a unique and luxurious variety of silk that originates from Assam, a state of North East India Muga Silk is a rare, exceptionally durable wild silk, known for its natural golden sheen and native to Assam. The silk fibre is a very strong organic natural fibre and is derived from semi cultivated silk worm named 'Antheraea assamensis'. One of the most significant properties of the fabric is its longevity, as it has been seen time and again to outlive the wearer thus making it an heirloom piece for every owner.

The origin of Muga Silk date back over a thousand years, with reference in ancient Assamese texts and chronicles. It is believed that Muga Silk was exclusively worn by Ahom royalty and aristocrats, symbolizing wealth and status. The production of Muga Silk flourished under the Ahom dynasty (1228-1826), with weaves enjoying royal patronage. The silk was considered so precious that it was often gifted to foreign dignitaries.

Studying about the Muga Silk cultivation is significant from the economic, social and cultural perspectives. Muga is produced only in Assam due to its specific climate and host plants like som and soalu. That is why this product has got GI tag in 2007. Muga Silk production involves multiple stages - silk worm rearing, cocoon production, spinning, dyeing and weaving. It provides direct and indirect employment to thousands of families, specially in rural and semi urban areas. A large proportion of workers are women and they become self employed and empowered. Employment in this sector sustains indigenous knowledge and skills. Muga Silk industries play an important role in generating income through domestic sales and exports. Moreover, it promotes balanced rural development and preservation of cultural heritage.

The study of the Muga Silk industry in Assam is significant because it combines economic viability with social impact.

2. Objectives of the study & methodology :

2.1 The objectives of this study are –

- i. To study about the production trend of Muga Silk in Assam.
- ii. To study about the employment and income generation status of Muga industry of Assam.
- iii. To find out the challenges relating to Muga cultivation and to highlight the government policies to strengthen this indigenous industry.

2.2 Data sources :

The study is based on secondary data sources and collected from Department of Sericulture, Government of Assam, Central Silk Board of India, books, journals, news papers and internet.

3. Study findings :

3.1.1 Production of Muga Silk during 2004-05 to 2013-14

Table : 1 Production of Muga Silk during 2004-05 to 2015-16 in Assam

Year	2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	2010- 2011	2011- 2012	2012- 2013	2013- 2014
Production (in MT)	98	98	107	105	105	93	117	119	108	126

Source : Central Silk Board of India

- 3.1.2 i) Assam produces 90-95 percent of total Muga Silk in India, maintaining a global monopoly on this golden silk.
- ii) The production of Muga Silk in Assam during 2004-25 to 2013-14 shows a fluctuating trend with moderate growth shown in Table No. 1
- iii) The production of Muga cocoons has increased from 6,361 lakh in 2013-14 to 10,439.94 lakh in 2022-23.
- iv) Almost 1385.8 hectares of land are used for Muga cultivation in Assam.

3.2 Employment status of Muga Silk production in Assam

3.2.1 i) This production sector has provided employment of thousands of rural households between 2011 and 2025. From plantation of Som trees, Silk worm rearing to weaving etc., there exists various employment avenues relating to Muga cultivation.

ii) Assam has over 1.26 million hand loom weavers engaged in over 93,22,000 hand looms. Almost 2.32 million people are engaged in Muga trade as farmers, labourers and sales persons.

3.2.2 Phase wise employment trends of last 10 years :

i) According to the report of Directorate of Handloom and Textiles, Government of Assam, employment has shown a declining trend for the period of 2015 to 2018 due to fall in income and irregular work. The main cause was the climate change which badly affected silk worms and supply of raw materials (cocoons)

ii) During 2018-2025, there has been gradual recovery and skill based employment growth has been seen.

3.2.3 Nature of employment :

The nature of employment has also been changed from traditional structure with household based weaving to cluster based production (e.g Sualkuchi the Manchester of Assam). The production are carried out by women led co-operatives that result in value added designer textile.

3.3 Revenue Earning from Muga Textile Industry :

Handloom and Sericulture sector, famous for Muga Silk and Eri Silk plays a vital role in both revenue earning, rural development and cultural identity.

3.3.1 Sources of Revenue Generation :

i. Sale of Raw Silk and cocoons :

Muga Cocoons and yarn are sold in domestic and international markets at a very high price for its rareness and durability. Annual production ranges around 1.4 laks kilogram to 1.6 lakh kilogram, indicating a strong revenue base.

Table – 2 Year wise production and revenue (in crs of Rs.)

Year	Production (MT)	Revenue (Crs of Rs)
2020-21	150-200	150-200
2021-22	180	180-200
2022-23	200	200-250
2023-24	202.83	220-300
2024-25	220	250-350

Source : Central Silk Board of India

An individual Muga farmer can earn Rs. 20-25 lakhs annually through cocoon production and related activities

ii. Value added products :

Revenue from finished product increases significantly. In the current scenario, the cost of Muga yarn has risen to as much as Rs. 21000/- per k.g. as compared to Rs. 800/- during nineties various ethnic attire of female and male. Cost of a Muga Mekhela Chador ranges from Rs. 35000/- to Rs. 1,50,000/-.

iii. Revenue earning by using byproducts :

During the production process, a lot of waste materials are also produced such as pupa, cocoon or silk waste etc. which can be utilized for making handicrafts items. These items generate handsome returns. An amount of Rs. 1500/- can be earned from one kg of cut cocoon as there is a good demand of cocoon crafted items in the market (Kaul et al. 2014). Around Rs. 23 crore revenue can be generated from 10,000 kg of yarn from wastes (ghisa) indicating hidden potential within the industry.

4. Highlight of some problems of Muga Silk of Assam

- i. Climate change and environmental fluctuations like extreme temperature, increased rainfall etc. cause high mortality rates for the silk worms and have negative impact on production.
- ii. There exists gap between demand and supply of raw materials due to limited plantation of Som and Soalu trees which affect rearing of Muga Silk worms. Deforestation & changes in land use also reduce the availability of these plants that reduces employment opportunities in rearing activities.
- iii. Due to fluctuating nature of prices of silk yarn and cocoons, workers often earn low wages. The existence of middle man also reduce the profit share of primary producers.
- iv. Insufficient access to modern training reduces productivity and quality of product.
- v. The handloom industry is basically unorganized cottage industry. So lack of infrastructure leads to low productivity and it restricts the employment opportunity.
- vi. Another important issue of this sector is that poor market access, limited exposure to national and international markets restricts job expansion.

5. The government policies for strengthening Muga Silk industry

The Central Silk Board (CSB) implements various policies and schemes to support Muga Silk industry. These are –

- i) Muga Mission (2017-2026) aimed at expanding Som plantation and establishing nurseries.
- ii) Swanirbhar Naari scheme aimed to empower women weavers by enabling the direct procurement of handloom items.
- iii) ‘Silk Samagra’ – a central sponsored scheme to improve quality of cocoons, reduce relevance on imported silk.
- iv) North East Region Textile Promotion Scheme.
- v) Muga Raw Material Bank etc.
- vi) For promotion of Assam Muga Silk at national and international levels, GI tag certification is provided.

6. Conclusion

Muga, the golden thread is the pride of Assam. It stands as a powerful symbol of traditional, resilience and hope. The Muga Silk industry is not only source of livelihood, it is deeply woven into the cultural and economic fabric of the region. Despite challenges, such as change in climate, market competitions, lack of credit facilities declining host plants, the industry continues to sustain thousand of artisans and farmers, specially in rural communities.

With increasing global appreciation for sustainable and natural textiles, Muga Silk holds immense potential for growth. Government support, innovation can further strengthen this sector and make it a fabric of hope, preserving tradition while promising a sustainable future.

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