**Role of Government in the Development of Silk Industry of Murshidabad**

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**ABSTRACT**

The strongest, lightest weight, and most luxurious natural fabric is silk, which is also remarkably light-absorbing. Sericulture, another name for silk culture, has long been connected to royalty and is thought to be a vital part of Indian cultural heritage. It also has a big impact on how far rural Indian communities have come. It is the reason why many Indians who reside in rural and semi-urban areas have plenty of work. Because sericulture offers a rapid, high-return labor-centric economy and requires minimal capital input, it is a vital industry for developing countries like India. The textile business in India is heavily reliant on the silk industry, which is one of the nation's oldest industries.

**INTRODUCTION**

The most distinguished and opulent natural fabric is silk, which is remarkable for its strength, light weight, and ability to absorb light. Silk culture, also known as sericulture, has long been associated with royalty and is regarded as an essential component of Indian cultural legacy. It also plays a significant role in the advancement of rural Indian communities. The people of India who live in rural and semi-urban areas have plenty of jobs thanks to it. Sericulture is an essential industry for emerging nations like India since it requires little capital input and has a quick, high return, labor-centric economy. Known as one of India's oldest industries, the silk industry plays a major role in the country's textile sector. There are several distinctive silk weaving clusters in the nation, each distinguished by its own designs, weaves, colors, and patterns. The climate in India is ideal for sericulture, and the country produces various types of silk, including Mulberry, Muga, Eri, and Tasar. In the commercial sense, only Mulberry silk is regarded as genuine silk; other types are referred to as wild or Vanya silk. The best silk that can be purchased is mulberry silk. This cultivar produces the majority of the world's commercial silk, which is frequently referred to as mulberry silk. The method used to create mulberry silk is what makes it special. It originates from the Bombyx Mori L. silkworm, which only consumes leaves from mulberries. One of the special qualities of Mulberry silk is that, unlike other varieties, it is completely allergic and has a pure white color. The states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jammu Kashmir, and West Bengal are the primary producers of mulberry silk, whereas Jharkhand, Orissa, Chattishgarh, and the northeastern states are the primary producers of non-mulberry silk.

**WOMEN AND SERICULTURE**

Over 50% of the global population is made up of women, who work primarily in agriculture and related fields (Sarkar, Majumdar, & Ghosh, 2017). In the Indian economic framework, women's contribution to income production is quite important, particularly for women residing in rural areas. Although women in India are primarily viewed as "home makers," there are occasions when it is vital for them to work in the economy in order to better their family's circumstances and provide their children with a suitable upbringing. In this industry, women are essential since they make up 60% of the workforce and consume 80% of the silk produced (Bukhari, Kour, & Aziz, 2019). There are certain aspects of sericulture that make it perfect for female participation. First of all, because it is an indoor activity that requires less manual labor and can be done close to the dwelling, it is suitable for the traditional rural Indian lifestyle. Second, due of its flexible work hours, it may be combined with other domestic chores. This is important because it is common for men to go to cities in search of better economic possibilities, leaving women to handle all household maintenance. Thirdly, whereas reeling and spinning require dexterous fingers, raising silkworms requires maternal instinct and care. Women are naturally skilled and patient in this procedure. Because of this, the silk industry and sericulture provide a huge number of jobs and empower women to make decisions for their families as well as the community at large by fostering their social, economic, and political independence.

**STUDY AREA**

Situated between 23°43′ and 24°52′ North latitudes and 87°49′ and 88°44′ East longitudes, Murshidabad district is south of the Ganga River, making the town a prospective center for the silk trade. It covers an area of 5324 square kilometers. The district in question is among the most populated in West Bengal, home to about 7,000 people (Census of India, 2011). According to Guha (2005), Robert Clive said, "The city of Murshidabad is as extensive, populous, and rich as the city of London." There are 26 blocks and 5 subdivisions within the district.

**GOVERNMENT SCHEMES**

In order to maintain the famous status of Murshidabad silk and preserve its unique legacy, the West Bengal government established a special directorate in 1975. The government focused more attention on this industry in order to bolster the district's economy. Because mulberry plantations are the fundamental factor in silkworm rearing, the Department of Sericulture (West Bengal) has developed an action plan to boost raw silk production and meet the higher target. In order to address this, the Central Sericultural Research and Training Institute (CSRTI), one of the oldest training facilities of the Directorate of Sericulture, introduced two new species of mulberry plants: TR 23 and TR 24, which are suited for growing in the climatic conditions of Eastern India. Additionally, the institute introduced a new type of Japanese silk worm, which gave sericulturists hope for a better future by producing 55–65 kg of cocoon from 100 disease-free layings. A high-quality crop of 24 tonnes of mulberry leaves per hectare of soil is produced annually by the mulberry plant TR 23, making it perfect for feeding silkworms. Silkworms are exceedingly fragile and highly susceptible to changes in their surroundings. 22°C to 27°C is the ideal temperature range for silkworm development. The production of silk faces significant challenges due to temperature fluctuations, which are a major consequence of climate change. The State Government is providing room heaters and air conditioners to farmers in order to boost productivity in this situation and maintain the ideal temperature for silkworm growth. The state government provides a subsidy of 25,000 Rupees per year to those sericulturists who grow six crops annually. In 2018, the State government provided 3000 looms to the district of Berhampore with the assistance of the Handloom Development office.

The Central Government has initiated the concept of a block level cluster, which will assist weavers in working on various projects and provide them with year-round employment opportunities. Additionally, they will learn about the government's recently introduced schemes through this approach.For each cluster, a Common Facility Center (CFC) with an emphasis on training programs will be constructed. The concept of gender budgeting was introduced by the Government of India during the 10th five-year plan, following the declaration of 1994 as a "Year of Women in Sericulture." Subsequently, the 11th five-year plan introduced the "Women Development Component," which primarily focused on highlighting the concern regarding the social security of women involved in the silk industry. This initiative by the Central Silk Board about women empowerment through the promotion of sericulture is a great initiative. The Directorate of Textiles encourages and takes the required steps to enable weavers to participate in various fairs and exhibitions across India in order to expand the marketing of silk products.

**MAJOR PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

As of 2021-22, there are 2450 Self Help Groups (SHG) under the co-operative society, all of which were founded on the foundation of the sericulture sector. Approximately 25,000 women work in these groups, but it appears that they face numerous challenges, including the fact that the majority of their one-story, mud houses make it difficult for them to raise silkworms during the summer, and that many of them lack the reeling equipment they need. Therefore, each SHG needs to be given a shared work shed with all the amenities they need to carry on with their rearing process without any obstacles. Due to the middleman's interruption, the farmers and reelers who are creating cocoon and silk yarn must sell their goods on the open market, which forces them to lower their prices. As a result, they suffer significant losses. The only way to address this marketing problem and enable the government to set a market price for those goods is to organize a government-approved market. Since China has no such domestic need for silk, a significant amount of China silk has been brought to Murshidabad and is being used for warping.

Even though the state government has taken the initiative to provide looms to the weavers, it appears that the looms are only suitable for weaving cotton and are not of a quality suitable for weaving silk. Thus, it is crucial to construct the looms under the appropriate technical supervision of the silk weavers. Since the weavers operate looms out of their living rooms, the government provides funding for the construction of individual work sheds for them, with only a quarter of the total cost to be covered by the weavers. However, these weavers must possess a weaver's identity card and be members of the cooperative society. Many weavers, however, are not registered with the cooperative society because they work for master weavers or for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide employment and training opportunities for female weavers. Therefore, in order for all weavers to be registered under them and receive their identity card as weavers, it is imperative that they take an initiation from the government. Since female weavers are not affiliated with the Weaver's Co-operative Society, this advancement will be extremely beneficial to them.

**CONCLUSION**

The only remunerative cash crop that has a substantial impact on rural people's lives is silk, which offers high returns with little initial investment and a short gestation period. Because the silk industry and sericulture provide jobs to people regardless of their gender, caste, or religion, and because any member of a family, regardless of age, can work in the industry, it is seen as a home-based enterprise. This industry includes both skilled craftspeople and unskilled farm laborers. In the field of sericulture, women play a critical role and generate chances by bolstering the economy.

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