

SERICULTURE INDUSTRY IN MALDA DISTRICT: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The word Sericulture has been derived from the Chinese word “Su (Si)” which means “Silk” and the English word “Culture” means “Rearing.” Silkworm is the caterpillar of adult silkworm. Sericulture or silk farming is the art and science of bringing up of silkworms for the production of raw silk and end product is silk. In general, the production of silk from Silkworm by rearing practices on commercial scale is called sericulture. Sericulture is the only cash crop in agriculture sector that gives quick returns income to the farmers within 30 days. Silk being an exclusive fiber and popular as “Queen of Textiles” and is well known for its natural colour, fine, strong, purity and unusual lustrous. The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. Sericulture is intensively labour based, agro-based commercially attractive economic activity. It provides self employment, quick return and additional income to the farmers especially with small landholdings, marginalized and weaker section of the society.

Keywords : Flood, cyclone, Silk Worms, Food Plants, Cocoon etc.

Introduction :

Analysis done in the previous sections has revealed that the sericulture industry have bright prospect of development, though they can be considered as one of the most problematic sectors of the economy of Malda. Of course, problems related to man power and economy is inevitable in any productive activity but in this case some of the problems are very crucial and unless they are solved with appropriate decisions, the sectors are bound to limp and in a few cases the very existence of the sector in near future is doubtful. Though some of the problems could be tackled with efforts in management and governmental supervision, several other need to be solved with case and action based on intensive and minute examination of the working of the units and an in depth study of the social and entry preneurial factors governing labour efficiency.

These problems can be broadly categorised under three groups, mainly, the problems related to production, those related to marketing and those related to labour including entrepreneurship building. The first group includes the problems associated with raw materials, capital and infrastructural inconsistencies while the second group incorporates sale of finished products price of the commodity, location of the markets, etc. The third group, however, consists of problems associated with experience, skill and efficiency of the labour forces, training facilities, entrepreneurial abilities etc. It is well understood that the primary focus of

this research has been to identify all these problems and furnish appropriate solutions for meeting the objectives of development of sericulture and silk weaving industry. The problems presented here are follows :

Problems:

The study reveals that sericulture industry in Malda District faces weighty problems. They may be discussed as :

Price fluctuation of Cocoons:

The prices of Cocoons are fluctuated from one season to another season. The government of West Bengal or Ministry of Textile(Sericulture), West Bengal should fix the remunerative price for cocoons which in turn helps the farmers to overcome the problem of violent fluctuation in cocoon prices.

Problems of Mulberry leaves cultivation:

Mulberry leaves are the main food plants of silk worms. During the rearing period, silkworms require adequate mulberry leaves. The proper and adequate feeding has a predominant influence on the growth of silkworms and quality of cocoons. Therefore, the rearers prefer their own mulberry plants or they manage these plants from the surrounding and from the *chawkie* rearing centers as free of cost. The poor farmers who do not have own land to plant mulberry leaves, they depend on big land owners mulberry trees who exploit them by charging heavy prices for leaves.

Scarcity of education among the sericulture workers:

Sericulture of Malda district is mostly carried out by the illiterate person. Not a single post graduate or other degree holders rearing this activity. Usually, educated youth do not come forward to take up this occupation. Sericulture is mostly run by the illiterate people of the society, who have no idea about scientific as well as commercial process of rearing silkworms.

Faulty rearing houses:

Mulberry silkworms are domesticated insects and they are reared indoor. It requires intensive care and hard work by the rearers to preserve these worms. A suitable ventilated room is required for the silkworms rearing. Majority of the farmers do not have proper rearing houses and proper equipment facilities.

Middlemen interference:

Due to absence of sericulture market in the district, large number of middlemen and traders engaged in this activity. The middlemen or the traders are moving door to door to purchase the cocoons from sericulturists. So, the farmers are unable to getting the remunerative price for their hard work.

Competition with different cash crops:

Sericulture of Malda district has been facing strict competition with different cash crops like paddy, jute, mango, *litchi* and other horticulture crops. These cash crops are especially market oriented.

Financial Problem:

Finance is the main pre-requisite of every productive operation. So, the success of this sector depends on adequate financial aid. In sericulture activity, fixed capitals are required for every step such as mulberry leaves plantation, construction of rearing houses, rearing and grain-age equipments. Negligible amount of the

grant is generally available to only few selected rearers. Apart from this, most of the rearers are poor and they have to take large scale rearing on commercial basis.

Lack of transport facilities:

Raw silk (cocoons) exchange markets are located at distances places. Due to which reelers face difficulties to easy and comfortable transport system to sell their finished products to the market and this leads to increase in the cost of production.

Absence of storage facilities:

There is lack of storage facilities in district. The storages facilities are located only in Englishbazar and Kaliachak-I block. For surplus production of cocoons and raw silk, well equipped storage facilities are required.

Lack of skilled Labour:

Sericulture is an agro-based, labour intensive industry. From the cultivation of mulberry plants to the finished raw materials, skilled labour are required at every stage. In the study area there is lack of skilled labour to perform the various works related to sericulture.

Poor information on market trend:

Lack of marketing information is another bottlenecks faced by this industry due to which reelers are not getting remunerative price for their finished products. There is not a single agency by the government which may provide the market trend information to the sericulturists in the study area.

Attitude of the society towards sericulturists:

In this modern age, some sections of the society who accord lower status to the people who are engaged in rearing of silkworms.

Problem related to training and technical guidance:

Silkworm rearing requires technical guidance and in the absence of training and guidance, the rearers are not able to carry out the sericulture activities properly and efficiently, which result into the poor production of cocoons. In the district there is only one Sericulture Training Institute located at Amrity in Englishbazar block. The post of Technical Officers and other Staff in this district are lying vacant and these posts are not filled by the department for long. Because of lack of qualified field staff, no proper guidance can be provided to the workers. Most of the rearers are untrained and there is shortage of training skills to take up the sericulture activities at various levels.

Erratic seasonal conditions and effect of natural hazards:

Erratic or extreme flood, seasonal conditions and cyclone (*Kal Baisakhi*) put hurdles in silk worm rearing. They destroy the mulberry plants gardens and also cause the spread of diseases among the silkworm insects.

Inadequate power supply:

The inadequate electric supply is a major problem for running the tube-wells and pump sets used for irrigation in the mulberry gardens. Therefore, supply of electricity should be adequate during irrigation to mulberry garden.

Prospects:

Historically, the sericulture activity in Malda district emerged as a cottage based household level industry under the British colonelship and also remarkable noted for its brand name not only in domestic market but also in foreign trade. Though the different phases of development of sericulture activity in Malda district had remarkable track record all across the different blocks of the region. But due to changing scenario of long historical time scale, the sericulture industry of Malda district could not manage to retain its glorious past production and number of people engaged in this sector. In the post-independence era, due to change in government policy, programme and agenda of the industry have suffered many grass root problems. Firstly, the Central government of India took major initiatives, various policy and progress to promote khadi industry, ignoring and sidelining, promotional development of silk industry. Secondly, competition between silk and khadi industry, the government takes efforts and prefers in most of the cases which are in the favour of enhancing the khadi industry.

The Mahananda river divides the study area into two divisions namely Northern Malda and Southern Malda. The study reveals that there is significant regional variability in the production of mulberry area, production of reeling cocoon and production of raw silk. The largest concentration of sericulture has been reported from the southern side of district in which three significant blocks Kaliachak-I, Kaliachak-II and Englishbazar have the highest percentage of total production of mulberry leaves, reeling cocoon and raw silk production.

The sericulture activity in the district is leading towards better development and prosperity in rural areas but the problems expressed by the farmers become hindrance in the progress of sericulture in Malda district. New farmers may hesitate to take up this activity as a leading profession, due to existing of the said problems. Hence, the department of sericulture should be paid extra adequate attention to solve these problems. Otherwise, it will affect the development of sericulture as well as production of raw silk will be severely affected in the study area and those who have already engaged in sericulture activity may withdraw and switch over to the cultivation of other crops.

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