



A STUDY ON JUTE FARMERS' ISSUES IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Jute is an important cash crop of Assam and is mainly cultivated by marginal and small farmers under several constraints. Most farmers rely on traditional cultivation practices passed down through generations and are reluctant to adopt modern scientific methods, affecting productivity and growth. With increasing global awareness about biodegradable and renewable resources, demand for jute has risen due to its eco-friendly nature, strength, and low cost. Assam is the third largest jute-producing state in India, making it essential to study the existing cultivation practices and challenges faced by farmers. This study, based on primary data from two major jute-producing districts of Assam, analyzes cultivation practices and their economic impacts using statistical tools.

KEYWORDS : Jute Farmers, Indigenous Cultivation, Economic Return

INTRODUCTION

Jute is one of the most important cash crops supporting the livelihood of millions of poor and marginal farming households in South Asian countries (Rahman, 2008). Owing to its biodegradable, eco-friendly, and renewable nature, jute has emerged as a significant natural fiber in the context of increasing global environmental consciousness (Islam and Ahmed, 2012). The growing concern regarding environmental degradation and excessive dependence on petrochemical-based products has accelerated the demand for sustainable and renewable resources. In this regard, jute occupies a prominent position among natural fibers due to its comparative advantages such as low cost, high tensile strength, durability, and versatility. It is also recognized as the second most important natural fiber after cotton in terms of production and usage worldwide.

In India, jute cultivation is predominantly practiced by small and marginal farmers possessing limited economic and physical resources (Bagachi, 2006). The crop plays a crucial role in rural employment and livelihood generation. Approximately four million farm families are directly dependent on the cultivation of jute and mesta, while nearly two lakh workers are employed in the jute industry. In addition, several thousand people are engaged in diversified jute-related activities including processing, transportation, handicrafts, and marketing. Among the jute-producing states of India, Assam occupies the third position after West Bengal and Bihar, contributing about 7.87 per cent of the total jute cultivated area and 6.68 per cent of the total production of the country.

Jute cultivation in Assam, similar to other producing regions of India, is largely dominated by small and marginal farmers (Saikia, 2015). Fragmented and marginal landholdings constitute one of the major constraints affecting productivity and profitability among jute growers (Chapke, 2013). Besides the problem of limited land resources, farmers also face several other challenges such as low productivity, shortage of labour, inadequate irrigation facilities, lack of access to institutional credit, and fluctuating market prices. Moreover, a majority of the farmers continue to depend on traditional and age-old cultivation practices and exhibit reluctance towards adopting scientific and modern agricultural technologies. This dependence on indigenous methods adversely affects the efficiency, productivity, and profitability of jute cultivation, thereby influencing the overall socio-economic condition of the farming community.

Objectives

To identify constraints in the areas of cultivation as well as marketing at farmer's level and suggest remedial measures.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a field survey using a structured schedule, while secondary data were obtained from journals, books, and government reports. The study was conducted in two agro-climatic zones of Assam, namely the North Bank Plain and Central Brahmaputra Valley zones. One district from each zone was selected based on jute acreage and production volume. A total of 14 villages, seven from each district, were selected conveniently. Finally, 70 jute farmers were surveyed through the snowball sampling technique. Data were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS 20 with statistical tools such as chi-square and problem index ranking.

Analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents reveals that all the sampled jute cultivators were male. In terms of social category, the majority of the respondents belonged to the general category (72.9 per cent), followed by Scheduled Tribe (24.3 per cent) and OBC (2.9 per cent). Regarding age composition, most of the farmers were in the economically active age groups of 41–60 years (47.1 per cent) and 21–40 years (44.3 per cent), while only a small proportion belonged to below 20 years and above 60 years categories. Educationally, a significant proportion of respondents were illiterate (44.3 per cent), whereas only a few had attained higher education. Majority of the respondents belonged to nuclear families (60 per cent). With respect to landholding size, most farmers possessed 1–5 acres of land (54.3 per cent), indicating dominance of small and marginal farmers. Income from jute cultivation was relatively low, as 57.1 per cent of the respondents earned up to ₹30,000 annually from jute farming.

Constraints

Among the selected problem statements low return from Jute cultivation appears as the most serious constraints with the maximum score of 253 in the study areas. Low productivity appears as second severe constraints among the farmers. Productivity depends upon the optimum utilization of quality inputs. The weather has also a crucial role in productivity as Jute is a monsoon crop. Lack of price related information is the third major constraints faced by farmers in the study areas. It is observed that farmers rely on fellow farmers or traders for price related information and others marketing intelligence. Lack of availability of sufficient labor acts as another major constraints with a score of 242. Jute is a labor intensive crop and sufficient amount of labor is required at all stages of fiber production. Increasing cost of fertilizer, problems of pest and disease also affects the farmers. High dependency on middlemen and excessive charges by traders affect the marginal and small farmers of the study areas. Lack of support from government machinery and the absence of

training and capacity building is also appears as major constrains as perceived by the sample farmers. Absence of support from family and declining demand of Jute shows a low intensity in the rank order with comparatively fewer score 143 and 116 respectively.

CONCLUSION

Jute cultivation not only supports the livelihood of farmers but also provides employment opportunities to a large number of people associated with jute mills, marketing intermediaries, transporters, and producers of diversified jute products. In the present context of environmental sustainability and growing preference for eco-friendly products, ensuring the sustainability of jute cultivation has become highly significant. Sustainable production is necessary to maintain a regular and adequate supply of raw fiber for the industry. Therefore, a balanced approach is required to address the interests of all stakeholders, particularly jute growers and mill owners. Reducing the excessive dependence on inter-mediarities and strengthening government support beyond procurement activities can improve the condition of farmers. Further, provision of subsidized inputs such as quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides along with training and capacity-building programmes at the farmer level can enhance productivity, improve farmers' income, and ensure long-term sustainability of the jute sector.

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