



## Pat-Muga Industry as a Source of Women Empowerment in Rural Areas of Kamrup District of Assam

### KEYWORDS

Women Empowerment, Employment, weaver

**Preeti Chakravarty**

Research Scholar Department of Economics Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

### ABSTRACT

*Women Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social, educational, gender or spiritual strength of women. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Here, an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of women empowerment through Pat-Muga industry. Pat-Muga industry is one of the oldest weaving industries in Assam. Females known as born weaver in North-East India.*

*The paper is mainly based on to discuss the employment opportunities of women in Pat-Muga silk sector, present market situation and will discuss the various problems faced by the women this industry. The paper is an empirical study made in Sualkuchi village of Assam, based on both Primary and Secondary data collection.*

### Introduction:

The word women empowerment essentially means that the women should have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms – a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. Women Empowerment refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. It is a mean to enhance the position of women in the power structure of the society. UNDP focuses on gender equality and mentioned women empowerment not only human right, but also a pathway for achieving the millennium development goals and sustainable development.

Empowered women are very necessary for the development of the society. Basically it is seen that the woman of a family are not taking any active role in case of decision making. She is dependent on her father before marriage, after marriage on her husband and at the old age on her son. There is a famous Assamese line to indicate women's situation "Lau dangor pator tol". If women are making empowered she has the power of making decision for herself, She has the ability of showing assertiveness while making decision collectively.

Sericulture results high labour force participation rate in comparison to any other rural avocation due to which sericulture has emerged as the ideal tool for employment generation and rural development. Here the rate of participation of women is 60% and family member's leads to high income flow to the family. This sector (weaving) requires low investment and high return, short gestation period and steady income through the year.

Here, an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of women empowerment through Silk industry is one of the oldest weaving industry in Assam. Weaving plays an important role in employment generation as well as a source of income to a family; various socio-economic spheres relating to women empowerment would contribute to have scope in their day to day life business. Since this Weaving sector requires less investment, therefore, anybody can easily establish such firm in their house and apart from income earning they can give employment to others too.

There are four different varieties of silk- Muga, Eri, Mulberry and Tasar silk. India is the second largest producer of silk followed by China. India contributes 18% of total raw silk of the world.

Assam has the unique distinction in producing four major varieties of silk- Muga silk, Eri silk, Mulberry silk and Tasar silk. Rearing of Eri, Muga and Mulberry silk worm are playing an important role and economic support to a large section of rural population in the state. It is practiced in more than 10532 villages and provides employment to 2.6 lakh family. Assam accounts for the highest production on Muga and eri among the country.

### Study area:

"Sualkuchi" is the main centre of Kamrup District of Assam where large amount of silk are produce. It is situated under Kamrup (Rural) district of Assam. This village is known as the "Manchester of Assam". It is situated on the bank of Brahmaputra, about 35 kms west from Guwahati city; it is the block of Kamrup district with a population around 52,679 with geographical area of 90 kms. Here weaving is the dominant occupation among the population. Today the Assam silk industry centralised in Sualkuchi. 73.78% of the households of the village are being engaged in commercial weaving and hand-loom. It is an ancient craft village having silk rearing and weaving communities. 90% of household of Sualkuchi have looms. It is found that 79% families have traditional looms at their home, 17% of them have modern looms for commercial silk weaving (CSB, Assam). Pat and Muga are the two main silk varieties that they use to produce Sarees, Mekhela-Chadar, Selowar-Kameej, Kurta, Scurf, Gamosa and Chunni etc. In Kamrup(rural) district there are approximately 6,000 hand-loom. Out of which 4,478 handlooms are situated in Sualkuchi. Total numbers of weavers in this village are 12,056 out of which 57% are female weaver.

### Objective and Methodology:

The basic objective of this paper is to analyse the rural women employment opportunities in Sericulture, basically through Pat-Muga Industry.

The present paper is carried out taking both primary and secondary information. The sources of secondary information are newspaper, journal, magazines and internet source-

es. For the primary information, data are collected through direct personal interview.

### Result and Discussion:

Pat-Muga industry is a high income generating industry which is regarded as an important tool for economic development of the country. All over the world India has sole monopoly in the production of "Muga Silk", the golden yellow silk obtained from semi-domesticated multivoltile silkworm. Out of total Muga production, 90% are produced in Sualkuchi village of Assam. Sericulture is one of the most labour intensive sectors, combining activities of both agriculture and industry. The production process involves a long chain of interdependent, specialized operations which provide a means of livelihood to a large section of population, i.e., silkworm seed producers, farmers cum rearers, reelers, twistors, weavers, spinners of silk waste, traders, etc. In India, almost 6 million people engaged in these occupations in 53,814 villages. Most of these workers are small and marginal farmers, or tiny and household industry mainly in rural area. Sericulture suits both marginal and small scale land holders because of its low investment, high returns, short gestation period, high opportunities for enhancing income and creation of family employment round the year. In reality, it is an occupation by women and for women because women form more than 60% of the workforce and 80% of silk are consumed by women only. The nature of work involved in the sericulture industry such as harvesting of leaves, rearing of silkworm, spinning or reeling of silk yarn and weaving are carried out by women.

Women are known as born weaver in Assam. Almost each and every woman in Assam knows how to weave

cloth, rearing of silkworm and spinning of silk. A weaver is able to earn from Rs 6,000 to Rs 15,000 per month. Their wage depends upon their performance. By weaving a plain Pat mekhela, they earn minimum Rs 200. This amount increases according to the design of the cloth. In a Pat mekhela-sador set they able to earn average Rs 1,200. In case of Muga mekhela-sador or saree the weavers are able to earn Rs 1,700 to Rs 2,500 in per set. In Sualkuchi village, there are some weavers which are hired from different places. Kokrajhar, Baska, Gosaigaon, Mangaldoi, Sipajhar etc. are the main centres from which the weavers are hired. Mostly they come alone in this village to earn money. Sometimes it is also noticed that both husband and wife are come in search of work keeping their children at home under the observation of rest of family members. An expert worker can complete a heavy designed Mekhela-Sador in one and half days. Some of these weavers stay in owner's home by giving a certain monthly payment. But some of weaver takes rented house. In Sualkuchi, almost 30% weavers are hired in these days.

It is seen that the female are not only engaged in weaving or reeling sector, rather they engaged in entrepreneurial sector and able to earn profit. But the amount of female entrepreneur is lesser in comparison to male entrepreneur. But in weaving sector, it is the female dominating sector. Basically, a family heaving 1 to 3 units of handlooms is said as small firm, 4 to 6 units as medium firm and 7 and more handlooms are said as big firm. The following tables show the number of male - female weavers in various firms and the contribution of hired (migrated) weavers.

**Table 1: Male and Female Weavers Engaged in Various Pat-Muga Firms:**

Serial number	Firm Size	Male weaver	Female weaver	Total
1	Small size weaving firm	67	90	157
2	Medium size weaving firm	180	250	430
3	Big size weaving firm	70	100	170

Source: Field Survey

**Table 2: Contribution of Hired Male & Female Weavers in different size of Pat-Muga Firms:**

Serial Number	Firm Size	Male Weaver	Female Weaver	% of Hired Weaver	% of Hired Male Weaver	%of Hired Female Weaver
1	Small Size Weaving Firm	22	30	30.77	13.02	17.75
2	Medium Size Weaving Firm	132	180	66.52	28.14	38.38
3	Big Size Weaving Firm	72	106	91.75	37.11	54.64

Source: Field Survey

From the above two tables, it is clear that the number of female weaver is much more higher in comparison to male weaver in all three sizes of firms, i.e. small sizes firm, medium sizes firm and big firms. Also in table2, the number of hired female weaver is higher than the male hired weaver.

The basic problem faced by the entrepreneur in Pat-Muga industry is the non-existence of price control. That means the price of the products is not regulated. Again, raw materials cost increasing in a rapid rate. It creates problems to production cloths. Most of the small entrepreneurs are not interested to take loan from the banks; rather they

take loan from the local mahajans or money lender at a very high interest rate. It creates a big problem to them because they have to pay a huge amount of their income in the time of repayment of loan.

Almost all of the producers use the old traditional technique to produce Pat or Muga cloth. It is more time consuming and expensive. If they use the developed machineries and modern techniques then their cost of production will reduce as well as they able to give better quality.

Lack of management and training is another problem faced by the entrepreneurs in this industry. If government and NGO's are provide training to the weaver and entre-

preneur, then their profit margin will be much higher.

**Conclusion:**

Our main motive is to make women empowered through financial support. The engagement of the women in silk industry and such other type of gainful employment will raise their economic and social status in terms of a great say in the decision making process within their household and induce them to break free of servile traditional customs. The standards of living of the women are improved through the income generation. If the women educated and self-dependent then they get respect from their husband, their child as well as the society. An educated woman makes the society more developed. They may reduce gender inequality and will finally help in Human Resource Development in near future.

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