

Chapter 17

Sericulture Industry: A Bonanza to Strengthen Rural Population in India

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ABSTRACT

India has a huge potential for sericulture development unlike other agro industries since sericulture is a unique agro-based industry comprising of several components such as mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, silk reeling and other connected activities. Each of these components appear to be independent but closely linked with one another having intricacies of their own. The major activities of these components comprises of mulberry food-plant cultivation to feed the silkworms which spin silk cocoons and reeling the cocoons for unwinding the silk filament for manufacturing silk goods, subjecting them to the process of degumming, bleaching, dyeing, weaving and printing. Thus sericulture industry provides employment to approximately 7.85 million in rural and semi urban areas in India. Of these, a sizeable number belongs to the economically weaker sections of the society, including women. In addition to this, India has the unique credibility of producing all the five known commercial silk viz., mulberry, tropical tasar, oak tasar, eri and muga of which muga with its golden yellow glitter is unique and prerogative of India. Though silk is a luxury item, it is produced by the rural populace and purchased by urban rich, causing money to flow from urban to rural. It also prevents rural people to migrate to urban areas. The United Nation's recent endeavor "Millennium Development Goals" has an eight point programme to make our earth more healthy wealthy and free from inequalities by 2015. Sericulture being a rural and women friendly business aligns well with many of these ideas which are explained in detail in the chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi said that the “Real progress / development in India can be achieved only through village development programs”. Rural development can be assured only by creating sustainable entrepreneurship with employment and income generation to the rural needy poor people. But most of the people are illiterate and the available resources are scarce and are not reaching the actual needy. Good number of schemes were planned and executed by different agencies in rural areas especially for the development of agriculture dependents. Eradication of poverty and unemployment are often attributed to the lack of “sustainable livelihood”. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and accesses) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recovers from stress and shocks, maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the coming generation and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. The rural development has been a major factor of sustainable livelihood by using available resources, manpower and technology. The women and unemployed youths are to be taken as the driving force of any sustainable development in rural India. Strong rural urban linkages will not only help farmers stay back in villages pursuing profitable enterprises, it will also improve access to quality produce by urban consumers. It is noteworthy to mention the views of late Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who has advocated his concept of PURA (Providing Urban facilities in Rural Areas).

Agriculture is the single largest livelihood source in Asian countries contributing to about 30 percent of the GDP and sericulture plays a vital role in it. There are certain evidences from various studies that more than 70% of the poor people live in rural area and the reduction of rural poverty continues to be a primary goal of the developing countries like in India. So far, various policies have been pursued to address this concern and among the major ones is rural employment creation. Sericulture is an agro-based labour intensive industry which provides gainful employment to the rural and unemployed youth and helps to uplift the socio-economic status of small and marginal farmers. It is therefore necessary to focus on a broader spectrum of the rural economy. The establishment of rural based agriculture enterprise like sericulture, in particular, could be very effective in creating new job opportunities and providing income for their livelihood. Being a rural agro-based labour intensive industry the Sericulture sector plays a vital role for checking the migration from rural to urban areas. Because of its multifarious advantages such as high employment potential, rural base, relatively low capital requirement, checking migration to urban areas, meeting raw material needs of the silk weaving industry and as such introduction of sericulture has been attempted in several countries but it could be sustained only in a few countries. Considering the merits of the sericulture industry for inclusive growth and the activities aligning with the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of India and the State Governments have taken up various developmental programmes for the development of sericulture and silk industry in India.

Silk is the most elegant textile in the world and known as the “Queen of Textiles”. On the other hand, it stands for livelihood opportunity for millions owing to high employment oriented, low capital intensive and remunerative in nature. The very nature of this industry with its rural based on-farm and off-farm activities and enormous employment generation potential has attracted the attention of policy makers to recognize the industry as one of the most appropriate avenues for socio-economic development of a largely agrarian economy like India.

Mulberry sericulture is a land based activity, which is labour intensive and provides good returns to the farmers. It has special significance for women as the silkworm rearing is done indoor is not physi-

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