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## Eri Culture And Growth Of Economy- A Case Study In Some Villages Of Kamrup District

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### **Abstract:**

*Eri culture occupies a prominent place in the cottage industries of Assam. It is a traditional agro-based sericulture activity that has been playing a significant role in generating employment and income to the families living in rural areas of Assam. It has been mostly practised by the womenfolk and that too mostly by the tribal communities. In the present paper an attempt has been made to analyse some of the important aspects of eri culture and its economic help to the families with special observation in some villages of Kamrup district where majority of the population belongs to tribal communities.*

**Key words:** Eri culture, tribal community, womenfolk, employment and economy

### **1.Introduction**

Eri culture is the most ancient of all the varieties of sericulture. Eri culture occupies a prominent place in the cottage industries of Assam. It is practised by almost all sections of people in the state. Of course majority of households involved in eri culture belongs to tribal communities. In different states of India people practise eri culture but among all the states Assam occupies the highest position in terms of Eri raw silk production. Unlike other three silkworm culture namely Mulberry, Muga and Tasar, Eri silkworm rearing is not confined to certain areas of Assam rather it is prevalent all throughout the length and breadth of the state. Generally the womenfolk living in villages conduct all the activities of eri culture such as silkworm rearing, spinning, weaving etc. According to the Economic Survey of Assam, 2011-2012, the number of families engaged in eri culture in Assam is 182979. As already stated that it has been mostly practised by the tribal communities like Bodos, Rabhas, Misings, Karbis, Kacharis etc. and in most cases their womenfolk are found to be engaged in all these activities to supplement their family income along with nutritional support through the delicious by-product, pupae.

Like the other districts of Assam, the village women of the district of Kamrup are also practising eri culture as a subsidiary occupation. The villages Ratanpur, Bamunigaon, Gumi, Mazpara, Barkhal and Bhutargari are located in the Southern part of the district of Kamrup where majority people belongs to tribal communities namely Bodos and Rabhas. Large number of families of these villages are engaged in eri culture. In this context in the present paper an attempt has been made to study the problems and prospects of eri culture and its economic help to the respective families.

### **2.Objective Of The Study**

The objectives of the present study can be highlighted as follows:

- To acquire knowledge about eri culture as a supporting occupation.
- To study different aspects like problems and prospects of eri culture.
- The income generated from the entire activities of eri culture by each individual families.
- To add some ideas towards the development and status of eri culture for enhanced economic help to the rearer families.

### **3.Methodology**

For the conduct of the present study both primary and secondary data have been collected. Secondary data are collected from books, journals and magazines etc. Also the investigator collected information and data by using internet facilities. For the collection of primary data a field survey was conducted in villages of Ratanpur, Bamunigaon, Gumi, Mazpara, Barkhal and Bhutargari where random sampling methods were adopted for the selection of households. Hence a large number of inhabitants were interacted and thus information were gathered. The gaon burah (village head) of each village was also met and information were collected covering different aspects.

### **4.About the place of survey**

The district of Kamrup is one among the 27 districts of Assam. One part of this district is located at the North bank of the river Brahmaputra and the other part is at the South bank. The Southern part of the district is generally called the South Kamrup district. The villages under survey are located in the South Kamrup district under the Chhaygaon and the Boko revenue circles. These villages are filled of natural beauties with variety of lofty green trees and surrounded by green hills.

## 5.Results And Discussion

### 5.1.Number Of Families Involved In Ericulture

Rearing of eri silk worm, spinning and weaving from eri fibre has been an integral part of the rural economic activities especially of the rural women in Assam. Ericulture is recognized as an occupation of very low investment and high output of income. Apart from that those men or women who are interested in ericulture can easily practise it without affecting their main job or occupation. In reality ericulture can be practised during the leisure period of the incumbent. At the same time it is also worth mentioning that for the rearing of eri silk worm there is no necessity of high quality and expensive infrastructural facilities. For rearing of eri silk worm a simple thatched house is enough for each rearing family in their own home campus. On the other side the inhabitants of the village under observation are economically very poor. Literacy rate in the village is increased but there is no scope for employment. Therefore people have to find out the scope of self-employment on the basis of their own skill, knowledge and experience. Above all the general environment and the climate of these villages are well suited for ericulture activities. It is therefore residence of these villages as observed during field survey are attracted towards the occupation of ericulture which requires only some simple tools and very small investment without much technical knowledge. Also the little knowledge that is required can be easily acquired with the demonstration of an elderly experienced person.

Ericulture generates employment for a large number of unemployed people especially females partially or fully in its various steps of activities. A large number of families in Assam have been engaged directly or indirectly in various ericulture activities like sowing of seeds of host plants, maintenance of plants, plucking of leaves from the planted and wildy grown trees, feeding and rearing of eri silk worm up to cocoon stage, spinning of yarn, weaving of fabrics, marketing of cocoons and the finished products i.e. cloths. In the context of the surveyed villages land holding of each family is very small. The number of Govt. job holders are also very limited. Therefore the families are practising ericulture both for the way of livelihood as well as extra source of income. Thus this occupation helps them in elevating from poverty at the family level. In the table-I the total number of families involved in ericulture are shown. From the table-I it is observed that about 60% of families of these villages practise ericulture.

Name of village	Total number of surveyed families	No. of families engaged in ericulture out of the surveyed families	Percentage of families involved in ericulture
Ratanpur	8	3	37%
Bamunigaon	10	7	70%
Gumi	10	3	30%
Mazpara	12	7	58%
Barkhal	10	8	80%
Bhutargari	10	8	80%
Total	60	36	60%

Table 1: Data Regarding Rearer Families Collected During Field Survey

People belonging to different religions and different caste and communities live in these villages. But the no. of families involved in ericulture found to be the maximum from ST communities. Those villages where majority families belong to ST communities the percentage of rearer families are high. Of course the general caste families are also practising ericulture but their no. is low. In all these cases, it is observed that the families who are economically poor are practising ericulture along with other partial occupations. They are performing these activities as an additional source of income. Thus the activities help to come out of acute poverty and render the womenfolk basically an economic stability and atleast some social empowerment.

### 5.2.Economics Of Ericulture

From the survey it is found that ericulture is not an organized commercial activity in these villages. There is no organized marketing avenues also to promote the sales of the eri products. Now with reference to the no. of families involved in ericulture (table-I), the amount of production of cocoon and hence income generated per family in a year are presented in table-II.

Number of families involved in ericulture	Number of broods done in a year by each family	Total amount of pupae free cocoon produced in a year.	Price of these cocoon at the rate of Rs600/- per Kg.	Number of pupae in pone	Income from pupae at the rate of Rs40/- per pone	Total income per annum.	Average income per family.
8	1	24 Kg	Rs14400/-	240	Rs12000/-	Rs26400/-	Rs3300/-
20	2	120 Kg	Rs73000/-	1200	Rs60000/-	Rs132000/-	Rs6600/-
8	4	96 Kg	Rs57600/-	960	Rs48000/-	Rs105600/-	Rs13200/-
Total 36	80	240 Kg	Rs144000/-	2400	Rs120000/-	Rs264000/-	_____

Table 2: Annual Production And Income From Ericulture Of The Rearer Families

From the table-II it is observed that 8 families rear only one brood in a year. So their annual income from ericulture is very small. Those 20 families who completes 2 broods each in a year, generate a bit higher income while the remaining 8 families completed maximum 4 broods each and collect still higher income per annum. From the personal contact it is found that these families are

not interested in spinning and weaving though they have their own cocoon. They directly sale their produce at different markets namely Boko, Chhaygaon and Bijoynagar. Of course they separate the pupae and hence sell these produces. Generally pupae is sold in numbers not in weight. The present market value of one pone (80 pieces is called one pone ) is nearly Rs40/-. According to the data collected during survey that in a brood on an average maximum 3 Kg pupae free cocoons are produced. In the table-II the prices of these cocoons are shown at the rate of Rs 600/- per Kg. Now on the basis of the findings it can be explained that inspite of the alarming demand of eri silk products not only in India but also in abroad the percentage of families involved in ericulture in these villages are not encouraging. Again those who practice the eri farming are also not getting suitable earnings. The causes of this trend may be for different factors. The main factors involved are-

- Castor is the principal host plant whose leaves are used for feeding the eri silkworm. But most of the rearer families in these villages do not have their regular plantation of food plants. As a result they need to collect food plant leaves from stray plants from distant places which causes extra expenditures. On the other side because of this constraint farmers cannot take up the rearing in every season regularly. Thus they are restricted to 1—4 crops only instead of 5—6 crops in a year which restrict their annual income from eri culture to a meagre amount.
- Most of the farmers are not aware of the improved rearing technologies. It is observed that they use the old traditional method and without the use of high yielding eri silkworm variety. These factors lead them to low production of cocoons and hence generate low income. It is to be noted at this stage that due to the poor income from eri culture there is a growing tendency of occupational mobility among them.

From the study again the following observations can be pointed out as to why the profit rate is not sufficiently high.

- Due to lack of organization of the rearers and also of the weavers.
- Lack of scientific knowledge about rearing procedures.
- Lack of market at suitable places for easy reach to the rearers.
- Unnecessary expenditures due to communication to sell their produces at distant markets.
- Brokers or middle men stand as a great hurdle for which they are deprived of getting proper values of eri products.

Now from the study it can be argued that household ericulture activities have been suffering over the years due to the very nature of being unorganized and dispersed. There is lack of proper education and training. Also there is lack of awareness about the global demand of eri products together with other silk products. There is a growing need to expose the rearers to the new technologies. The state Government can do a lot for the upliftment of ericultural activities at the household level by providing financial support for infrastructural development. The concerned families can be motivated department of the Government should arrange frequent training programmes at diffit villages so that more and more economically poor families can be motivated to ericulture as a part time occupation. With the use of modern methods and high yielding seeds definitely the rearers will be able to produce more and generate more income. Also the state Handloom and Textile Department should accord priority to purchase the eri products from the rearers and also from the weavers at appropriate prices so that the farmers get encouraged for further involvement with full concentration.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study reveals that in the surveyed villages large number of economically poor families are involved in ericulture. But they are using the old traditional method for the rearing of eri silk worm and therefore their earnings are not satisfactory. On the other hand due to the lack of systematic plantation of food plants there is scarcity of food leaves which debarred the rearers from increasing the possible number of broods in a year. For non existence of spinning and weaving facilities these families are refrained from those tasks. But interestingly more profit comes from that part of the entire process. So if it is to be taken as a part time business they must involve in weaving also.

Therefore with the initiative of the state Government and framing some rules this occupation can be converted into a very potential and lucrative sector and finally it will generate large number of direct and indirect employment. Thus certainly there will be handsome growth of economy.

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