

Sualkuchi Village of Assam: The Country of Golden Thread

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Abstract: Silk industry is an agro-based industry. In the production of Silk, India stands 2nd highest position and the sole monopoly power in the production of Muga silk among the all over the world. The North-Eastern region of India has been traditionally practicing sericulture particularly mulberry, muga and eri from time immemorial. 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 of Assam. 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 in the country. "Sualkuchi" is a centre village of producing verity of silk cloths/fabrics in Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam and it has been developed over the years as a major centre for commercial production of indigenous fabrics especially the pat and muga silk.

The paper is mainly based on to discuss the demographic, socio-economic features of the village Sualkuchi and employment opportunities in silk industries, present market situation. The paper is an empirical study made in Sualkuchi village of Assam, based on both primary and secondary data collection. Secondary data collected from various internet source, newspapers, magazines, published and unpublished articles.

Keywords: Silk industry, Silk Industry, Employment generation.

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I. Introduction

"Sualkuchi" is the main centre of Kamrup District of Assam where large amount of silk are produce. Sualkuchi has the largest number of cottage industry engaged in handloom among the whole Assam state. The pride village Sualkuchi is situated under Kamrup (Rural) district of Assam. This village is known as the "Manchester of Assam" and was established by Momoi Tamuli Barbaruah, a great administrator of the Ahom kingdom. Barbaruah set up this weaver's village by shifting a large number of master weavers from all over the region to this village. 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 (from internet source) with geographical area of 90 kms. Here weaving is a dominant occupation along the population. The weaving tradition in this area started in the 11th century when king Dharma Pal, of the Pala dynasty sponsored the craft and brought 26 weaving families from Tantikuchi to Sualkuchi. The village became a weaving village when the Shams occupied Sualkuchi defeating the Mughals in the mid 17th century. Now the Assam silk industry centralised in Sualkuchi. Presently 73.78% of the households of the village are being engaged in commercial weaving and hand-loom. The census of hand-loom in Sualkuchi conducted in 2002 reveals that Sualkuchi has 13752 active commercial hand-looms. 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 handlooms. 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.

Sualkuchi is the textile centre of Assam. Muga silk and Pat silk along with Eri silk or Endi cloth from this region is famous for its quality. Mekhela chadors and Gamosas made from this indigenous material are in high demand through whole world. These products not only use for domestic consumption but also exported many countries among the world.

Socio-Economic Background of the Study Area:

The village Sualkuchi is famous as the title of "the country of golden silk". This village is also named as the "Manchester of Assam".

Table:1Demographic description about the study area:

Village	Sualkuchi
District	Kamrup Rural
Geographical Area covered	90 km
Rainfall	1125mm
Total population	52679
Population density	2780 per km ²
Growth of population	-1.7%
Sex ratio Child	1041
Sex ratio Child	972
Literacy Rate	93%
Male literacy rate	97
Female literacy rate	89

Source: 2011 census report

Sualkuchi is the village of mixed religion and multi caste village under Kamrup Rural district of Assam. 69% of the whole population of Sualkuchi are general caste, 31% are from Schedule caste and 0% is schedule tribes.

Table:2 Change in Sex Ratio 2001 to 2011: Sualkuchi village

	Total	General	SC	Child
Change	19	58	-32	6
2001	1022	1008	1020	966
2011	1041	1066	988	972

Source: 2011 census report study

According to 2011 census, sex ratio is 1041, i.e. there are 1041 female population in against off per 1000 male population. Sex ratio in general caste people is 1066, and among the schedule caste it is 988. There are 972 girl children under 6 years of age in against off per 1000 boy child. In comparison to 2001 census, there is an increase of sex ratio by 19 female at per 1000 male in 2011 census. Child sex ratio has increased by 6 girls per 1000 boys during the same time. Population of children with age group 0-6 is 1002 which is 7.21% of total population of the village Sualkuchi.

Table: 3Change in Literacy rate in 2001 and 2011

	Total	Male	Female
Change	6.2%	3.3%	9.0%
2001	86.8%	93.4%	80.4%
2011	93%	96.7%	89.4%

Source: 2011 census report

From the above table, it is seen that literacy rate has increase by 6.2% in 2011, comparison to 2001 census. In 2001 census it was 86.8% which has recorded as 93% in the census year of 2011. In 2011 census, male literacy rate has recorded 96.7% and female literacy rate is 89.4%. This indicates people of the village become more educated. Apart from this, it is also noted that the female literacy rate has increased almost three times higher than the growth rate of male literacy rate. Male literacy rate has increased at 3.3% where female literacy rate has increased 9% on the gap of 10 years.

Table: 4Percentage of working population in Sualkuchi

	Worker	Main worker	Marginal worker
Total	52%	38.1%	13.9%
Male	62%	52%	10%
Female	42.5%	24.7%	17.7%

Source: 2011 census report

The above table represents that there is a total of 52% people are employed in various economic activities. Where male and female employment ratio are 62 /42.5. out of this 52 percent working population, 38.1% people are engaged as the main worker and 13.9% are in the form of marginal worker. Where 52% male are worked as main worker there only 24.7% female are served as the main worker. This picture is completely different in case of marginal worker. 10% male are employed as marginal worker, and more than 17% female are served as marginal worker. So from this data it is observed that till this date, the village work force is mainly handle by the male worker.

Weavers of the Village:

There are more than 73.78% of the total household of Sualkuchi are directly related with commercial silk production. The census of hand-loom in Sualkuchi conducted in 2002 reveals that Sualkuchi has 13752 active commercial hand-looms. Sualkuchi is the ancient craft village having silk rearing and weaving communities. 90% of households of Sualkuchi have looms. It is observed that, 79% families have traditional looms, 17% of them have modern looms for commercial silk weaving (CSB, Assam). They basically produce Pat or Muga Sarees, Mekhela-Chadar, Selowar-Kameej, Kurta, Scurf, Gamosa and Chunni etc. In Kamrup (rural) district there are approximately 6,000 handlooms. Out of which 4,478 handlooms are in the village Sualkuchi. Total numbers of weavers in this village are 12,056 of which 57% are female weaver. Actually, Sericulture is the occupation by women and for women because women form more than 60% of the workforce and 80% of silk are consumed by women only.

In Sualkuchi village, there are high amounts of weaver which are migrated from different places in search of work. Kokrajhar, Baska, Gosaigaon, Mangaldoi, Sipajhar etc. are the main centres from which the weavers are come. Basically they come alone in this village to earn money. Sometimes it is seen that both husband and wife are come to earn money keeping their children at home under the observation of rest of their family members. They want to earn a high amount of money at a quicker time by doing hard labour. They continue their work both in day and night time. An expert worker can complete a heavy designed Mekhela-Sador in one and half days. Some of these weavers stay in their owner's home by giving a certain monthly payment. But some of weaver takes rented house. In this village, presently 40% weavers are migrated weavers.

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 also. But the number of female entrepreneur is lesser in comparison to male entrepreneur. But in weaving sector, it is the female dominating sector.

Total entrepreneur in the village are 3621, consisting 13752 handlooms, number of total weavers are 12056, and out of these 6872 are female weavers. Among these 3621 firms, only 5% firms (181 no firms) are under the control of females. Basically the business is run under the head of the family but after his death his wife or daughter (in absence of son) handles it. The females of the family are help in other activities. That is why the number of female entrepreneur is very limited or low. There is an attempt to select 20% of total firms among the total number of firms through random sample method. If we take 20% of total 3621 firms then total numbers of firms for this study are 724. From each of these 724 firms, 30% female weavers are selected for direct personal interview. (CSB)

The firms are divided into three different categories based on the number of handlooms owned by the firms, i.e. small sizes firm, medium sizes firm and big firms. The firm's who have maximum 3 handlooms are denoted as small size firm, who have 4 to 6 numbers of handlooms are termed as medium term firm and who have more than seven handlooms are identified as big firms.

The following tables show the number of male - female weavers in various firms and the contribution of hired (migrated) weavers.

Table:5 Male and Female Weavers Engaged in Various Pat-Muga Firms:

Serial number	Firm Size	Male weaver	Female weaver	Total
1	Small size weaving firm (1 to 3 handlooms)	67	290	357
2	Medium size weaving firm (4 to 6 handlooms)	180	250	430
3	Big size weaving firm (more than 7 handlooms)	70	100	170

Source: Field Survey

From the above table it is seen that most of the wavers are engaged in 2nd category (medium size) weaving firms. The numbers of female weavers are much higher than the number of male weavers.

Table: 6 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 (1 to 3 handlooms)	22	30	30.77	13.02	17.75
2	Medium Size Weaving Firm (4 to 6 handlooms)	132	180	66.52	28.14	38.38
3	Big Size Weaving Firm (more than 7 handlooms)	72	106	91.75	37.11	54.64

Source: Field Survey

From the above table, it is clear that the number of female weaver are 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.

An empirical analysis about the decision making power among the female weavers

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 is based 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.

Table: 7 the following table shows the monthly income of the surveyed female weavers:

Sl. No.	Size of Handlooms	Total No. Of weavers		Average monthly money income (in Rs)	Average Monthly Savings (in Rs)	Duration of Involvement with the profession
		Male	Female			
1	1 to 3 Small Size weaving firm	0	48	8,000	2000	1 -5 years
2	4 to 6 Medium size weaving	0	79	9,000	1000	1-3 years
3	7 and more Large size weaving firm	0	23	9,500	1000	1-2 years

Source: Field Survey

From the above table it is observed that highest amount of weaver are engaged in medium size weaving sectors where the number of handlooms are between 4 to 6. Till this sample collection, it is also noticed that highest income earner are the weavers who work in large firms and the lowest income earners are the small weaving firms. It is because the small weaving sectors basically use the local weavers and their duration of work is limited. But in large firms, the weavers are mostly hired and they stay at the production unit and they work almost 15 to 18 hours. So they able to earn more income as they produce more output.

But in case of saving, the small weaving firm’s weavers are able to save more. This is because the hired labour spends their income to their home and they have to make expenditure on house rent, food etc.

Table: 8 Women weavers and their money oriented decision making power:

Monthly Income	Negligible decision making power	Medium decision making power	High decision making power	Total
Below 7000	10	47	53	110
Above 7000		6	34	40
Total	10	53	87	150

Source: field survey

From the above table it is seen that when the average monthly income is below 7000, 10 weaver said that their decision making power regarding money oriented things is negligible, 47 weaver said their decision making power is medium and 53 weaver said that their family did everything after asking her. The second group i.e. above 7000 income replied yes on high decision making category.

Table: 9 Women weavers and their children oriented decision making power

Monthly Income	Negligible decision making power	Medium decision making power	High decision making power	Total
Below 7000	3	20	87	110
Above 7000		3	37	40
Total	3	23	124	150

Source: Field Survey

Out of total sample collected weaver 110 are below 7000 income earner and 40 are above 7000. Among these weavers 3 weavers mention their decision making power regarding to children are very negligible, 23 are medium and 124 has high decision making power on their family.

Table: 10 Women weavers and fertility oriented decision making power:

Monthly Income	Negligible decision making power	Medium decision making power	High decision making power	Total
Below 7000		29	81	110
Above 7000		25	15	40
Total		54	96	150

Source: Field Survey

In case of fertility oriented decision, no weaver replied as negligible. 54 replied on medium category and 96 replied on high decision making power category out of a total of 150 weavers.

Table: 12 Weaver's bank related decision making power:

Monthly Income	Having Personal bank account	Operating by herself	Using ATM facility
Below 7000	50	10	2
Above 7000	20	8	3
Total	70	18	05

Source: Field survey

From the above table it is seen that very few weavers having Bank account. Instead of having personal bank account, they save their money either home or they give their husband or parents to save the amount of money. though some of them have personal account, but most of them don't know how to operate it. Only five weavers out of 70 know how to use ATM card.

Table: 13 Weaver's voting related decision making power:

Monthly Income	Negligible decision making power	Medium decision making power	High decision making power	Total
Below 7000	70	30	10	110
Above 7000	25	10	5	40
Total	95	40	15	150

Source: Field Survey

From the above table we noticed that most of the weavers are accepted the voting related decision whatever her husband or her parents took. 95 weavers accepted that. 40 replied they take medium decision making power and 15 give high decision making power in this regard.

Apart from employment the other various socio-economic factors such as education, family income, religion, caste etc also influence the decision making power of the female.

II. Conclusion

The Silk industry is an agro based and labour intensive industry. Demand for this product is continuously increasing in the global market. So there is an immense scope for labour absorption in this silk industry. The study reveals that the scope of Silk industry as an attractive livelihood in Assam as well as the village of Sualkuchi which makes the female weavers empowered and gives the strength to take decision.

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