

Insightful Exploration of Tasar Sericulture in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Practicing Tasar sericulture in the state of Odisha dates to time immemorial. It represents not only an age-old tradition but also has a pivotal socio-economic significance as it is the crucial avenue for sustainable livelihoods and financial empowerment particularly for the forest residing tribal communities. This article throw light on the Tasar silk production in the region with respect to its history, current trends, challenges, possible innovations, and future expectations. It also provides an information regarding the practices of silkworm rearing, silk production process and influence of governmental and other socio-economic factors on this sector.

INTRODUCTION

Tasar silk is one of the most important non-mulberry silks produced in India and it is derived from the *Antheraea*

mylitta silkworm. Odisha enjoys the privilege as one of the prominent centers for Tasar silk production due to its most favourable climatic

conditions and rich biodiversity. It contributes the most of the income earned by the rural and tribal people both directly and indirectly also helps in promoting the economic development while maintaining the environmental sustainability (Vishaka *et al.*, 2020).

Historical Context: Although the production of Tasar silk dates to centuries with indigenous tribal communities traditionally engaged in rearing the silkworms, overtime the state has seen greater advancements in terms of techniques and infrastructure with the continued and significant support by the government schemes and research institutions (Akhtar, 2022).

Current Status: Currently, Odisha ranks third among the leading states for Tasar silk production in India. At present production of tasar silk and marketing the silk products has been a pivotal livelihood option for the tribal communities residing in the Sundargarh, Nabarangpur, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Sambalpur, Nuapada, Deogarh, Jajpur, Boudh districts and weavers of Sambalpur, Cuttack, Sonapur, Jajpur, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Bolangir and Koraput districts of Orissa and they also contribute to the growth of state's sericulture industry.

Sericulture Process: At old times, tribal people used to collect the cocoons directly from the forest where they live, which has a wide range of flora among which there are trees like Arjun, Asan and Sal, which are the primary food crops for the tasar silkworm. As the years goes by, they adapted rearing by themselves which involves several stages such as silkworm egg incubation, rearing on host plants, reeling and weaving. Farmers carefully rear the silkworms ensuring the suitable conditions for cocoon formation then the cocoons are harvested and processed to obtain the raw silk which further spun into yarns (Barsagade, 2017).

Economic Impact: The tribal people, particularly women, are highly involved in the entire silk production process, from rearing to weaving, and it provides great employment opportunities to them, thereby increasing their income and their standard of living. The BSM&TCs and research centers associated with Central Silk Board also provide them the work both as seasonal workers and as skilled workers (Choudhary *et al.*, 2023).

Challenges and Constraints: Although the tasar sericulture is very profitable to the state of Odisha there are certain constraints such as erratic emergence during unfavourable weather, disease, and pest outbreaks. In addition to these natural challenges there is a lack in technical knowledge, modern infrastructure, insufficient credit, and the fluctuations in the cocoon market. Limited research and development in this sector also hinder its expansion and growth.

Governmental Initiatives: Acknowledging the importance of tasar silk production for the state income the government of Odisha has put forward many schemes and policies that help in further development of the silk sector. Approaches such as technical training, infrastructure development, subsidized inputs etc., has been useful in enhancing the productivity and profitability.

Prospects: Advertising tasar silk in domestic and international textile markets as a premium eco-friendly textile will lead to increased production, thereby increasing the income of the local farmers. Adapting newer technologies, sustainable package practices, and strengthening research can play a crucial role in taking this sector's growth to a new level (Kar *et al.*, 2019).

CONCLUSION

For many centuries tasar silk production has been the main source of income for forest dwelling tribal communities and it is also part

of their cultural heritage. However, it is very important to address the constraints regarding the technological advancements and credit availability. In short, tasar silk production in Odisha has the potential to flourish as a viable industry with the continued support of both research centers of central silk board and local state government.

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