

Prospects of Muga Culture in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) Area of Assam

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SUMMARY

Muga silk culture is mainly confined in the north-eastern geographical location of India where tribal people are playing prominent role to conserve the culture and at the same time maintain their sustainable livelihood through this culture. In the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) area a huge number of population is involved in muga seed production, silkworm rearing, cocoon and silk production, weaving and fabric preparation irrespective of gender. Adoption of advanced technology in muga culture will help in socio-economic development of the particular area.

INTRODUCTION

Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) was constituted on 10th March, 1995 by the Government of Assam. The jurisdiction of the council extends from *Dakshin Rani Mouza* of South Kamrup to *Joyram Kuchi Gaon Panchayat* of Goalpara district. The council had its headquarter at Dudhnoi in Goalpara district. RHAC covers majority area of South Kamrup and Goalpara district. It was created for all round development in the areas of education, health, economic, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Rabha populace. Rabha tribe is one of the major schedule tribe of Assam with rich cultural heritage and tradition. Different tribes such as Rabha, Garo, Bodo, Hajong, Nepali etc. with other general castes people resides in the council area. Rabha population occupies the majority in terms of population in the council area. The autonomous council has been created to effectuate the enduring demands of the Rabha people of the area.

Agriculture and its allied activities is the primary occupation of the major population of the council area. Sericulture particularly muga culture and eri culture is one of the avenue of the people residing in the council area. The council area as it lies in the Assam-Meghalaya border is endowed with rich biodiversity, therefore, it provides a favorable environment particularly for the sericigenous insect like muga and eri. S.N Choudhury (1982) reported that the eastern part of Goalpara and south west of Kamrup district such as Luki, Bongaon, Boko constituted the most prolific muga growing areas and produced the best seed cocoons. He also further revealed that muga farmers of the area were the chief producer of muga seed cocoons in Assam. One of the major seed belt of muga silkworm lies in the RHAC area which comprises the places like Boko, Hahim, Ukiam, Baregaon, Ranikhamar, Doledonga, Gohalkona, Lapgaon, Mojebari, Somorang, Megadop, Nondrong, Talimara, Malang, Upper Tarabari, Nam Tarabari, Thangkhula, Ranguli, Adogiri, Dhanubhanga etc. Commercial rearers of upper Assam usually prefer to obtain fresh stocks mainly from these areas during the *Jethua* and *Kotia* commercial muga crops. Reeling cocoon of Chandubi area is one of the highest priced muga cocoon in the entire state. Reelers of Palashbari and Bijohnagar consume almost 90% of the reeling cocoon produced in the RHAC area. Congenial climatic condition of the RHAC area has made the natural home of different varieties of insects, moth, butterflies particularly to the sericigenous insects as well as their corresponding food plants. Muga culture is practiced from the ancient days in the council area and is handed over from one generation to another.

Prospects:

- Identification and development of muga seed pocket in the council area will enable and meet up the seed shortage of the muga silk industry of Assam. Central Silk Board, State Sericulture Department and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council must jointly take needful steps.
- Presence of wild stock of muga silkworms in the area helps in natural cross-breeding. Therefore, importance must be given in setting up of in-situ conservation site to protect the muga silkworm in natural habitat to overcome inbreeding depression.

- Plantation of muga food plants in the forest land of RHAC will help the landless people for getting engaged in muga culture. As per the guidelines for *vanya* silk cultivation under Forest Act 1980 the cultivation of *vanya* silkworms in forest areas for which specific plantation of food trees are undertaken for providing host trees is treated as forest activity.
- Muga culture involves a number of activities from land preparation for planting food plants to rear silkworms, seed production, cocoon production, reeling, weaving and marketing and thus engaging a large number of people including female. Therefore, muga culture has the great potential to provide employment to large section of people of the RHAC area particularly to the destitute.
- Setting up of adequate facilities for muga post cocoon activities and infrastructure related to forward linkages will add whopping value to the existing value. Reelers need to be equipped with modern reeling machines for production of high graded quality muga silk.
- Climate change is impacting in every sphere and muga culture is not out of that. So dissemination of weather related information to the muga farmer through bulletin, mobile app, sms etc. in the pre rearing and during rearing period will help in achieving climate resilient muga culture in the area.
- Need based training programmes should be organized to the farmers and extension workers to upgrade the knowledge and skill for sustainable muga culture.
- Undertaking programmes through 'Cluster Apporach' will help in promoting and developing participatory approach of large masses at the same time for effective adoption of technologies.
- It has been observed that muga farmers are not getting the actual price of their products only because of the absence of proper cocoon market. Farmers are always uncertain about the price of their produce. Therefore, development of the common facilitation centre (CFC) will help in creation of an organized muga silk market in the RHAC area. Exploitation of the traders and middleman can be prevented.
- Development of relevant package of practices particularly for the RHAC area will enable in constant up gradation of productivity of muga.



a) Muga Rearing



b) Muga Jali



c) Muga grainage activity



d) Muga silk reeling



e) Muga silk re-reeling

Fig (a-e): Muga culture activities in RHAC area

CONCLUSION

Sericulture particularly muga culture has a strong potential to create job among the rural and tribal of Assam. It is one of the important cash crops. Muga culture can be considered as an important tool for poverty alleviation in the RHAC area. Challenges and opportunities exist together. Muga culture will be great boon for the people of RHAC area if proper planning and policy is prepared in right direction. Co-operation among the grainers, rearers, reelers, traders, weavers will take the agro-based industry to a greater height. It will help in the improvement of socio-economic condition of the people residing in the council area. Muga culture will not only uplift the rural economy but will also contribute to the GDP and prevent rural migration.

REFERENCES

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