SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF FEMALE WEavers- A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SUALKUCHI SILk INDUSTRY

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Abstract- India is the only country in the world which produces all the five varieties of silk i.e. Mulberry, Muga, Eri, Tropical Tassar and Temperate Tassar. India enjoys monopoly over the world's Muga silk production. Major share of Muga production contributes by the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, a state in the Northeast India. Assam ranked third in the top 10 largest silk producing state of the country. Assam has been famous for its cottage industry specially for spinning and weaving. Weaving and reeling activities were popularized and became an indispensable part of every Assamese household. This probably could be the reason why Assam has largest concentration of handloom weavers in India. About 55 per cent of total weavers in India are women. This research will focus on the socio-economic difference between the migrated and local female weavers of Silk Industry of Assam.

Key-words—Migrated, empowerment, comparative, Chi-square, Sualkuchi

INTRODUCTION
Purity of materials, polyphony of colours and unique design are the identity of Indian silk. India is a labour intensive country and sericulture sector requires more labour, both together create perfect combination for the economic development of the country. Sericulture could be a factor for uplifting the socio-economic standard of the weavers section of society. Sericulture could play an important role in solving unemployment problem. Weavers are the backbone of the Sericulture sector and women play notable involvement in sericulture activity. Sensational manual skill and lots of attention of weavers is needed for reeling, weaving etc. Careless and less skilled weavers produce less quantity of silk. Women handle cocoons and silk yarns more suitable than men. May be because of that reason, about 60 per cent of total manpower engaged in sericulture is women. Handloom Industry of India is facing various crises. The declining living standard of weavers is the result of the crises faced by the Industry. Weaving community plays very important role in the development of the sector. Majority of weavers engaged in sericulture are marginal and medium. The socio-economic conditions of the weavers are so depressed that they even cannot fulfil their basic human needs. Wage arrangement is very diverse in the handloom Industry. Men and women work participation in various sericulture operations is not similar. Women are more laborious than men, so declassed to less skillful activities in Sericulture. Education and skill training is very necessary to improve the situation of women weavers. In Sualkuchi about 49 per cent of total women weaver is migrated from other states or other districts. The socio-economic conditions of these migrated female weavers have great impact on the sector. Here in this paper an attempt has been made to study the socio-economic condition of those migrated female weavers in comparison with the local female weavers.

SELECTION OF THE STUDY:
India's silk known for its striking colours and creative design. India is the World's second largest producer of raw silk and is the only producer of Muga silk. Assam is the top Muga silk producing state of the country. Assam enjoys monopoly in the Muga silk production. But due to various reasons the state failed to in cash that monopoly power. Total area under Muga production is highest (86.12 hectar) in Kamrup district. Sualkuchi is the silk centre of Assam, situated in the Kamrup district. It was observed during the field visit that about 60 per cent of the weavers of Sualkuchi silk centre are women. Which means women plays very important role in the Sualkuchi Silk Industry. And almost 40 per cent of total female weavers are migrated from others places. The important factor affecting Handloom Industry is the socio-economic conditions of weavers. As the majority of weavers are female in Sualkuchi silk centre, therefore how their socio-economic conditions affect the industry. The study also gives importance on the difference between immigrant and local female weaver socio-economic conditions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:
Weaving is in the culture of Assamese people. Sualkuchi is one of the World's largest weaving villages. Sualkuchi silk industry plays significant role in the socio-economic life of the people of Assam. According to the 2002 census of Handlooms, in Sualkuchi there were total 13752 active commercial handlooms of which 54.75 per cent were engaged by women weavers, who were basically hired from the outside of Sualkuchi. According to the Third National Handloom Census 77.90 per cent workers in handloom sector were women which simply specify the significant role of women in the sericulture sector. Socio-economic conditions of women weavers is a matter of concern of the development of Handloom sector. But women weavers suffer from very depressed living standard and specially immigrant weavers. They choose to work due to pressure of poverty and therefore always ready to work for a very low wage. Awareness for education among weavers, common weaving shed for weavers and technical training is needed to fight against the adverse situation faced by the women weavers. Work shed and housing are the serious problems faced by the immigrant weavers. So here in this study socio-economic conditions and status of women weavers in general and immigrant women weavers in particular of the Sualkuchi silk industry will be examined.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
Important objectives of this study are
➢ Socio-economic conditions of women weavers of Sualkuchi silk industry will be studied.
➢ To compare the status of the local and immigrant female weavers in the silk industry of Sualkuchi.
Suggest some solutions from the findings of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW:
Singh (1993) studied the problems and prospects of Sericulture in Himachal Pradesh. He revealed that sericulture could be a factor for uplifting the socio-economic standard of the weaker sections of society. He considered sericulture as a part time job which could heighten the income of the agricultural farmers. Education played an important role for the development of the industry of sericulture. Only literate rearers could make sericulture activity economically usable.

Mahan (2013) explained the important of silk industry in socio-economic life of Tai Ahoms. She classified silkworm rearing and cocoons production as agricultural activity and reeling, weaving activities under industrial motion. Both these activities were labour intensive. Due to facing problems in the operation of silk, people didn’t want to continue weaving.

Kamala (2008) disclosed that majority (63.3 per cent) women weavers were unaware of occupation health problems and of the preventive measures. There were pathetic working conditions like lack of proper lighting, lack of proper working sheds, lack of modern skills etc.

To favour women engagement Dewangan (2017) suggested women friendly technologies and market structure should be developed. Direct linkages between rearers, reelers, twisters and weavers should be established. Sericulture was helpful in preserving environment, in generating income.

Roy et al. (2017) focused on the situational analysis of women workers in Sericulture in their paper. Land and labour rich country like India is perfectly suited for Sericulture. Their paper revealed direct and positive relationship between male-female wage differences. They suggested education and skill training to improve the situation of women weavers and banned on gender discrimination.

HYPOTHESIS
Hypothesis for the study is socio-economic conditions of local female weavers is better than immigrant weavers. Three important parameters of socio-economic studies i.e. education, income and occupation are taken into account to prove the hypothesis. Chi-square test is used in order to prove the hypothesis statistically. Specifically Chi-square test is appropriate here because the required sample for the study were collected with the help of simple random sampling technique; variables for the study are categorical.

Formula to calculate Chi-square value is:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Here $X^2$ denotes Chi-square test, $E$ represents expected frequency (obtained by using the formula $E = \frac{RT \times CF}{N}$), $O$ denotes observed frequency.

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$): Socio-economic condition of local female weavers is not better than immigrant female weavers.

Alternative Hypothesis ($H_1$): Socio-economic condition of local female weavers is better than immigrant female weavers.

DATA COLLECTION:
There were four active co-operatives in Sualkuchi, namely Assam Samabay Resham Pratisthan (total female weavers 297), Kalpataru the Assam Co-operative Silk House Ltd (total female weavers 151), Sualkuchi Resham Samabay Samiti (total 99 female weavers) and Bayan Sahayika Sababay Samitee (89 female weavers). There are total 636 female weavers in Sualkuchi of which 30 per cent (191) were taken as sample for the study. Samples were collected by using simple random sampling.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:
An effort has been made in the study to analyze the socio-economic status of migrated female weavers of Sualkuchi Silk Industry. But the study faces some limitations. The major limitations of the study are as follows:

- Required information for the study has been collected from 191 female weavers of Sualkuchi. Therefore the outcome of the study is limited to that specific area it may not be same for the weavers of other parts of the state or country but will be helpful as guidance for future studies.
- Respondents were unlikely or unable to answer all the related questions of the questionnaire.
- Secondary data were collected from government officials where data were not maintain properly and lack of continuity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:
Distribution of total female respondent weavers on the basis of permanent resident is represented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-operatives</th>
<th>Local weavers</th>
<th>Migrated weavers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASRP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalpataru</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRSS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSSS</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey ASRP (Assam Samabay Resham Pratisthan), Kalpataru (Kalpataru the Assam Co-operatives Silk House Ltd.), SRSS (Sualkuchi Resham Samabay Samiti), BSSS (Bayan Sahayika Sababay Samitee).

Chi-Square Test Result: Chi-Square Test Result of the Study based on the information related to income, education and occupation of the weavers is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
<th>Critical Value</th>
<th>$X^2$ Value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5% Level</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>20.79</td>
<td>Reject $H_0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5% Level</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>Reject $H_0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5% Level</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>11.16</td>
<td>Reject $H_0$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So we have enough statistical reason to reject null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis that is socio-economic status of local female weavers of Sualkuchi silk industry is better than the migrated female weavers.
SUGGESTIONS:
Sualkuchi Silk Industry has the capacity to contribute a good share to the country’s GDP and reduce unemployment problem. Important recommendations or suggestions of the study are as follows:

i) Work shed and housing facilities and travel allowances should be given to the migrated female weavers.

ii) Discrimination on the distribution of wages should be removed.

iii) Securities and health care facilities should be given to the weavers.

iv) Special training facilities should be organised for the female weavers.

v) Education facilities should be given to the children of the weavers.

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