

STATE AND MUGA SILK INDUSTRY IN INDEPENDENT ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The development of Muga silk industry, with a maximal state during the early part of independence was not significant. The development of cottage and small-scale industries received importance only with the announcement of Industrial Policy statement of 1977. In India, after 1990, though the nature of state transferred to a minimal state, the forces of democracy have compelled the state to be an integrative state which gave importance on both public welfare and market needs. The various populist measures of the State in the Muga sector and increasing awareness and competitiveness of Muga growers' due to globalisation, gave a new lifeline to the Muga silk industry. But still the industry is not free from challenges. Hence, the responsibility of the State goes on increasing for better productivity and posterity of the Muga silk industry in Assam.

Keywords: Muga silk, Industry, Minimal State, Maximal State, Democracy, Integrative State

1. INTRODUCTION

State is the most universal and powerful of all social institutions. It is deeply connected with the political structures of society i.e. groups, classes and institutions (formal and informal) and the political structure of society is shaped by the state. Further the state is considered as a cluster of agencies, departments, tiers and levels, each with their own rules and resources and with various purposes and objectives. The state or apparatus of "government" appears to be everywhere, regulating the conditions over lives from birth registration to death certification.

The nature of states has undergone transformation with time. During the period of eighteenth and nineteenth century, the classical economic and political thinkers, Adam Smith, James Mill, Bentham etc. supported limited state activities or non-intervention of the state in economic life of individuals. Economic development is a process of capitalistic development. The duties of the state are only the maintenance of law and order at home and protection against aggression from abroad.

Towards the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century, the theory of welfare state emerged due to the accommodation of liberalism with some ideas of socialist and idealist thought. Negative liberalism transformed to positive liberalism, which promoted the idea of “welfare” or “maximal” state, as it pleaded for positive role of the state. T.H. Green (1836-82), L.T. Hobhouse (1864-1929) and H.J. Laski (1893-1950), supported positive role of the state in regulating the economic system for the welfare of common people.

Moreover, the Great depression of 1929-33 and the influence of Keynesian economic ideas played an important role in setting up an era of positive role of the state in economic and social life of individuals.

Accordingly, soon after independence it was widely believed that without increasing the role of the state, development of the country was not possible. The introduction of the industrial policy resolution of 1948 is considered as a fundamental departure from the earlier policy of laissez-faire. In order to achieve a socialistic pattern of society, the 1956 industrial policy resolution gave primacy to the role of state for industrial development. The development of small-scale and cottage industry received importance after the announcement of industrial policy statement of 1977.

During the second half of the twentieth century, some thinkers like F.A. Hayek (1899-1992), Robert Nozick (1938-2002) etc. considered the concept of welfare or maximal state as inimical to individual liberty and advocated “libertarianism”, by supporting full autonomy and freedom of the individual and minimum activities of the government. The state plays a very limited role like the power of protection, justice and defence. Hence, there is no welfare state, but a minimalist state. More and more areas are being made open for the private sector and delicensing of industries were introduced in India.

However, forces of liberalization coupled with the forces of democracy have compelled the state to assume a more integrative role. In a large populous democratic state India, where poverty, unemployment, poor socio-economic infrastructures etc. are major problem, the state has to play a more positive role. Integral state, therefore, seeks to play multiple roles in consonance with the necessity of public welfare as well as answering the market needs. Though, historically, liberalism favoured free market and minimal role of the state, yet at present, liberalism acknowledges a role for welfare state and accepts the need for measures to reduce both social and economic inequalities. There should be a balance between the role of the state and market in the economy. In the post liberalisation period, the state may play a diminishing role, but still it plays a critical role in all sectors of the economy.

Thus, the role of the state has undergone changes over time and simultaneously the economic policies have also changed. The state is a “superstructure” which develops on the “foundations” of economic and social relations.

2. MUGA SILK INDUSTRY

Silk is a fine, continuous, protein fibre from cocoons produced by different insects or larvae. It is defined as a yarn reeled from the cocoon spun by the caterpillars of silk producing insects. There are four varieties of commonly used silk. Mulberry is the most widely used silk and it constitute about 95% of world silk production. Eri, Muga and Tassar are other commercially used silk and they are categorised as the non-mulberry silk.

Silk is the most elegant textile and popularly known as the “Queen of Textiles.” It is the livelihood opportunity for millions due to high employment opportunities, low capital intensive and remunerative nature of its production. Presently, the major silk producing countries in the world are China, India, Brazil, Japan, Thailand, Iran, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Nepal, Bangladesh etc. There are over fifty countries in the world producing raw silk, some of them with a century old tradition like Thailand and some are new entrants like Zimbabwe. While geographically, Asia is the main producer of silk in the world and produces over 95% of total global output. China is the leading supplier of raw silk and contains about 60% of the total world production. India became the second largest producer of silk in the world in 1987.

The major consumers of silk of the world are USA, Italy, Japan, India, France, China, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, Korea, Vietnam etc. The demand for raw silk and silk products are increasing day by day in developed countries. The growing trend of world silk industry opens the way of transferring funds from developed to developing or underdeveloped countries.

As a traditional silk producing country, India attempts to increase the production of silk and occupies the second place in the world for the production of raw silk. Generally, in the global textile parlance, the term silk refers to the mulberry silk, since bulk of the world silk production constitutes mulberry silk. But in India, it is Mother Nature’s boon that silk in India constitutes all the four varieties of silk, namely, Mulberry, Eri, Muga and Tassar. India is the only country that produces all the four varieties of silk in the world of which, Muga with its golden glitter is unique and prerogative of India.

Muga silk worm is a polyphagous insect which feed on several feeding plants. These native plant species grow abundantly through North-East and especially in the Brahmaputra valley and foothills of Naga, Khasi and Garo Hills. Muga, the golden yellow silk, is exclusively the monopoly of India, is being cultivated mostly in Assam and in small scale in some other states of North-East India.

There is no recorded history about the origin and growth of Muga culture in Assam. Since Muga worm are not known to be cultivated outside the North- Eastern Region, therefore the culture is considered to be of local origin. It is endemic to the North-Eastern region. The ecological condition, food plant distribution, atmosphere makes the region a natural home for Muga silk. The Muga worm (*Antherea assama*) is still exists in wild state and is cultivated in forests.

The first official record of Muga worm and Muga silk of Assam was reported by famous traveller Jean Joseph Tavernier in 1662. The ancient Ahom kings patronized the development of sericulture and for its development, they exempted Muga worm rearers from the payment of land revenues.

Muga silk worm (*Antherea assama*) is a polyphagus insect which feed on several endemic host plants that grow abundantly throughout North East India and especially in the Brahmaputra Valley and foothills of Naga, Khasi and Garo hills. The Muga silkworm is multivoltine and therefore, rearing can be conducted round the year. It completed five life cycles in a year. Traditionally, Muga rearing is done outdoor and hence the climate and environment has a direct influence on its growth. As such harvesting of silkworms becomes an uncertain proposition and largely depends on the vagaries of nature.

Muga rearing for the people of Assam is a part of their culture, tradition and customs, rather than a profitable profession. Muga occupies an important place in the society. The Muga mekhela chadar is a traditional dress of Assamese women. In Assam Muga culture is mainly distributed in the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur & Dhemaji.

The Muga silk is an integral part of the state's heritage. For the people of Assam, it is a part of their culture, tradition and customs. It is an identity of Assamese culture. The Muga industry is appropriately described as an "industry of the poor" and this silk is considered as "the queen of fabrics". It is an important labour-intensive, eco-friendly, agro-based cottage industry generating employment opportunities for the rural people with low investment cost. A sizable section of the rural population earns their livelihood from it either directly or indirectly. All members of the family irrespective to age and sex can engage themselves in Muga culture. It is a viable economic activity if improved technology is employed. At present, there are about 37,434 families directly associated with the Muga culture in Assam. However, presently the industry is facing several challenges like lack of healthy seeds, environmental degradation, financial crisis etc. Hence, by realising the importance of this age-old industry in Assam, the state's intervention is considered important. This paper emphasizes on the role of the State (on the basis of it's changing nature), for the development of Muga silk industry in independent Assam.

3. STATE AND MUGA SILK INDUSTRY IN INDEPENDENT ASSAM

In Assam, both the ancient period (350-1206) and Ahom period (1228-1826) was the most flourishing and glorious period for the Muga silk industry. The Ahom state patronized the Muga industry. Imperial British Government did not give adequate importance to this industry as imperial exploitation attached more importance to tea plantations and other lucrative ventures for which the Muga industry was in a downward trend. Muga culture declined during this period and there was no appreciable development for decades. Since there was a change in the nature of the state in the first half of the twentieth century or during the time of independence, India followed a broad societal consensus on the nature and path of development. The Gandhians, the socialists, the capitalists as well as the communists, were all more or less agreed on self-reliance, rapid industrialisation, prevention of imperialist or foreign capitalist domination and for an active role of the state etc. as agenda for the development of society.

3.1. State Initiatives after Independence:

After independence (1947), with the changing nature of the state to a socialistic one, the state's activities had begun to increase for the development of the Indian economy. Accordingly, the Government of India established the Central Silk Board, for the overall development of sericulture in the country in the year 1948, and sericulture departments were established in the silk producing states. In 1956-57, Directorate of Sericulture and Weaving was established in Assam. For the development of Muga culture in the state, Research Stations, Muga Seed Farms, Plantations, Village Grazing Reserves, Muga reeling units, reeling machines were introduced during this period.

However, since the development of small-scale and cottage industry in the state received importance only after the announcement of industrial policy statement of 1977, therefore, after this period, the Government of independent India came up with various schemes for the development of Muga silk industry in Assam. The Government of India launched an ambitious Multipurpose National Sericulture Project (MNSP) in 1989-90. Its main objectives were to upgrade the quality of Indian Silk and to increase the quantity of raw silk production through research and development activities.

The Ninth Plan period (1997-2002) is highly phenomenal for the sericulture industry in the state. The Department of Sericulture, with the help of Central Silk Board, Government of India, has implemented a number of schemes, which transforms the traditional sericulture into a viable commercial activity. The Directorate of Sericulture Assam is directly responsible for the production of silk in the state of Assam. It also introduced, improved technology in Silk Reeling and Spinning which has provided the opportunity to improve the productivity of the reelers and

spinners and quality of yarn. In order to augment host plants of new technologies for silkworm rearing, reeling and spinning, the most important Catalytic Development Programme (CDP) has been implemented by the Central Silk Board (CSB) during this period. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sub programme for non-mulberry silks has also been implemented in association with some frontline Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) of the state. Integrated Muga Development Project (IMDP) has also been implemented during the ninth plan period with financial assistance from the North- Eastern Council (NEC).

The Project Golden Thread has been implemented by District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of eight districts of the state to establish a working relationship with other states and central sector agencies and non-governmental organisations.

Based on the achievements of ninth plan period the Sericulture department has implemented some more employment generating projects during tenth plan period (2002-2007) and started the second phase of the Catalytic Development Programme (CDP). But during the twelfth plan in the year 2013, the Catalytic Development Programme (CDP) was postponed and it was merged with North Eastern Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS).

After independence, it is seen that, the state/government plays a significant role for the development of Muga silk industry in Assam. Various programmes, schemes and policies are undertaken by the State Government as well as Central Government agencies for the development of the industry. But immediately after independence, although there was a maximal or welfare state and the expansion of village and cottage industries was considered as an important aspect of both Indian National Movement and Gandhian Development Model, yet the development of Muga silk industry was tardy. This is evident from the trends of Muga silk production in independent Assam in Table 1, Fig.1 (a) and Fig. 1(b).

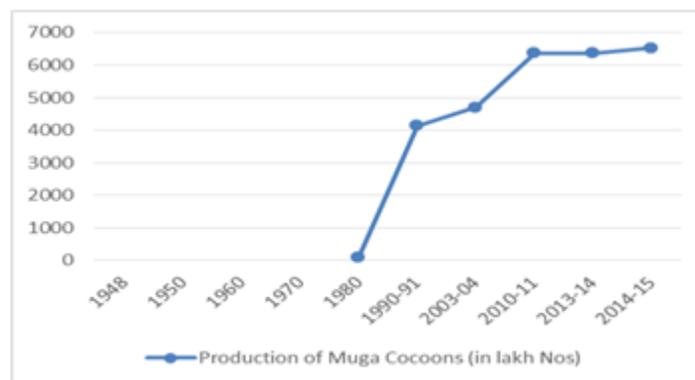


Fig 1(a): Production of Muga Cocoons (in lakh Nos)

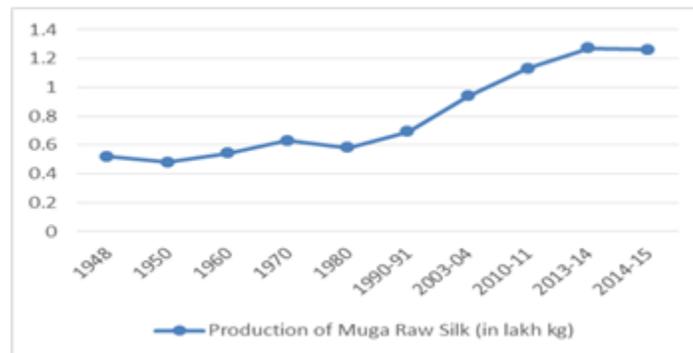


Fig 1(b): Production of Muga Raw Silk (in lakh kg)

Data available in Table 1, shows that the production of Muga raw silk (data on production of Muga cocoon is not available from period 1948 to 1970) in Assam from the time of independence to 1990 was not significant. It was very negligible in amount which implies that the measures taken by the state for developing the Muga silk industry was not adequate and effective. The production of Muga raw silk was very fluctuating during this period as shown by the curve in Fig.1 (b). The state gave more importance on large industry to build the economy. But since 1990-91, in Table 1 and Fig. 1(a) and 1(b), an increasing trend (though at a lower rate) is seen in the production of both Muga cocoons and Muga raw silk. But the most important point is that, in 1990-91, the nature of the state transferred from maximal to minimal and there were changes in policies at global, national and sectoral level. So after liberalisation and globalisation firms are allowed to sell their products to consumers outside the country and thereby contribute to the building of their competitiveness, encouragements and efficiencies. Unnecessary bureaucratic controls are reduced as liberalisation measures integrate both public and private sector for the development of industries. Since the Muga Silk industry is mainly dominated by the private individual growers therefore they got opportunities to expand their industries with the assistance of the Government.

Table 1: Production of Muga Silk in Independent Assam

Year	Production of Muga Cocoons (in Lakh nos.)	Production of Muga Raw Silk (in lakh kg)
1948	-	0.52
1950	-	0.48
1960	-	0.54
1970	-	0.63
1980	107	0.58
1990-91	4145	0.69
2003-04	4705	0.94
2010-11	6368	1.13
2013-14	6361	1.27
2014-15	6528	1.26

Source: 1. Bulletin No. SG/25/48/62 Dept. of Sericulture and Weaving, Govt. of Assam, 1949
2. Directorate of Sericulture, Assam, Guwahati in 1994
3. Directorate of Sericulture, Assam, 2014-15

4. CONCLUSION

The role played by the state for the development of Muga silk industry during the early phase of independence was not significant. The industry exists only because of the Muga rearers' own efforts and efficiencies. But after the transformation of the nature of state to a liberalised and populist one, various schemes and policies for the development of Muga silk industry were made available to Muga growers by the state. But the progress of the industry is very tardy. It is existing with a number of challenges, even though the commercial prospect of the industry is very high. Presently the demand for Muga products is very high in both domestic as well as foreign markets. Hence, for the development of the industry, the responsibility of the State is increasing day by day. Proper support, motivation and encouragement to this industry will help the State in scaling new heights in the world silk sector.

An object of pride, the golden yarn and its fabrics got the recognition it so rightly deserves by securing the Geographical Indication (GI) Registration in August 2007 by the GI Registration in Chennai and was granted a GI logo for the trademark purposes in 2014. The registration was done on the basis of its uniqueness. It has been identified as a silk of given quality, reputation

and characteristic, attributable to the geographical area of Assam since immemorial. This especial fabric needs to be promoted and popularized across the country and abroad.

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