

✍ . . . **Development and Upliftment of 'Untouchable' Castes
in Sericulture Industry**

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Abstract : *Sericulture or silk farming is an agro based cottage industry where cultivation of silkworm to produce silk takes place. Several species of silkworm like Bombyx mori, Antheraea mylitta are used to produce silk like mulberry and tassar. It provides employment for the Indian women and men equally. India is the second largest producer of silk in the world. China, Brazil, India, Korea and Japan are foremost countries contributing for the raw silk production. In 1980 the untouchable castes which were officially classified as Scheduled castes became the entrepreneurs in silk reeling. They were very poor and hence this silk reeling helped the untouchable caste where they got involved in the business. This research paper helps us to find out that the sericulture industry has helped in the growth, development and upliftment of untouchable caste.*

Key words: *Sericulture, untouchable Caste*

Introduction

India is an ancient country to establish sericulture industry and to manufacture and even export the tassar cloth (Kosa) to various countries even since several centuries prior to the B.C. during the second century B.C., the silk was exported from India to European countries. Jolly et al., (1979) mentioned that the production of tassar silk is much more than that of mulberry silk during the Moughal period. Present day status shows that India produces all four varieties of natural silk, namely, tassar, eri, muga and mulberry. In the early part of the century the 'untouchable castes' ventured in reeling of the silk. After the approach of agricultural castes which acted as business reelers and hence 'untouchable castes' became laborers. Because of the retreat by the business reelers, untouchable caste

became entrepreneur, however enterprising.

Establishment of sericulture in early nineteenth century

Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, until he was defeated by British and their allies in 1799 and Dr. James Anderson, an Edinburgh man who was Physician General of Madras under the East India Company (Charsley 1992, 1995, 1997) both were interested in getting the cocoons produced and reeled in southern India. Their involvement helped in establishing sericulture early in nineteenth century.

Major operations involved in sericulture industry are:

- 1) Cultivation of food plants for silkworm
- 2) Rearing of silkworms
- 3) Reeling the cocoons
- 4) Post cocoon process such as twisting, dyeing, weaving, printing and finishing.

Employment generation

Sericulture is a village based industry which provides employment to both skilled and unskilled labor (Lakshman and Jayram, 1998) and practiced in about 53,814 villages and provides employment to nearly 6 million people. This can be adopted by the people with large scale as well as small scale land holders because it requires low investment, high assured returns, short gestation period, good opportunities for enhancement of income and creating employment for family members.

The climatic conditions are changing day by day where there may be insufficient rain fall for the food crop production. So it has been appealed to the government, NGO's, the poor, women and landless labourers, Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to opt for sericulture farming (Shekhar and Kumar, 1991).

Scheduled and other castes of low traditional status were mainly facing problems in reeling of the silk thread (Hunumappa, 1993) which includes the drawing of continuous filament out of cocoon and amalgamating it to form a raw silk yarn for weaving and further processing. The landless people including caste of particular kind can achieve off-farm employment.

Prosperity of Scheduled caste farmers in twentieth century

In twentieth century sericulture has spread in south of state where Muslims were few but then the Hindu farmers who were taking up, growing and planting in their small unirrigated land and has started rearing batches of silkworms inside their

own houses. Thereafter those who would come to be known as 'Untouchables' and later Scheduled caste also joined (Charsley and Karanth, 1998). Thus they were able to make a good living from sericulture farming but still were dependent on members of higher caste for employment.

Establishment of sericulture industry in four different stages

At the very beginning of the century it was difficult to establish the sericulture industry. Four different phases were distinguished. In the first phase the middling of the economic standing from variety of castes took the business of reeling. They included Holeyas which were the main untouchables later on were called as 'Harijans'. The second phase which included businessmen of agricultural castes moved in the industry. Involvement of original reelers was largely reduced to manual labour for the few masters. The third phase involved the upgradation of technologies and thus there was a control over business. But the fourth phase brought a social and political change which led to re-emergence of Dalit reelers (Simon R. Charsley, 1998).

Conclusion

The above study showed that silk reeling was associated with upper castes, labour with lower, and even the few members of Scheduled Castes were involved in establishing the work at household level with simple and inexpensive machinery by involving their family members which also included their children. The scheduled caste people were never excluded from the silk reeling process and in the mid-20th century they got dominated over the agriculture

business class people. Thus by 1990 the industry of southern India seemed increasingly dominated by members of the Scheduled Castes replacing the earlier dominance of agricultural castes



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