

Kashmir sericulture - Its economic potential

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Sericulture has been identified as one of the important component for economic development in India. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the sericulture activities not only engage the rural house holds in the cultivation of mulberry and silkworm rearing but also encompass in their fold a whole range of reelers and weavers. Recognizing this important role of sericulture in Kashmir present communication discusses four main issues in this economic sector such as agrarian economy, employment generation, competition from other crops, its innate rituality in addition to approaches for its improvement.

Reasonable or high productivity is the essential pre-requisite of any enterprise, industrial or agricultural. This is true of sericulture also. Productivity is a relative term which varies from person to person, region to region; season to season and time to time but Kashmir sericulture is characterized by low productivity and higher cost of production. In India's raw silk production contribution of Jammu & Kashmir state is very small as 98 % of its mulberry raw silk production is contributed by the five traditional states of sericulture namely Karnataka (55 %), Andhra Pradesh (30 %), West Bengal (9 %) and Tamil Nadu (4 %) (Sericulture and Silk industry Statistics - 2003). Although Kashmir was at one time the premier producer of silk in the country. Today, both sericulture and silk in the state have not only kept pace with progress in other states but have undergone a steady decline. The comparison indicates a wide gap between raw silk out put and reeling cocoon production which obviously reflects upon the poor yield & quality (Table 1 and 2). Sericulture has an important place in the economy of J&K, inspite of all odds it faced and is facing from time to time particularly related to modernization of silkworm rearing methods. But direct as well as indirect involvement of more than 23,000 rearing families generating annual income of Rs 7.26 crores justifies its expansion and support on scientific lines (Annual plan 2008-2009, Planning and Development Department, Jammu).

There are about 173 mulberry nurseries spread over an area of 953 acres and about 667 acres of this area is cultivated for plantation of cuttings, seedlings, grafts which

remain in the nursery for a period of one or two years and the annual plant producing capacity of these nurseries is about 19 lac mulberry plants which are distributed among the farmers for propagation of mulberry wealth. In addition to above there are 290 mulberry blocks spread over an area 917 acres which serve as mulberry leaf reserves for rearing silk worms by landless farmers. Sericulture depends primarily upon a temperate climate, density of population, soil, agrarian economy, cash returns from other agricultural and industrial pursuits and finally the social and religious susceptibilities of the people. Jammu and Kashmir state is eminently suited for growth of sericulture as well as these factors is effectively present here (Annual plan 2006-2007, Planning and Development Department, Srinagar).

Agrarian economy:

Agriculture is the main stay of the economy of J&K State. About 70-75% of the population in the state derives its livelihood from the agriculture directly or indirectly. The net area sown is 752 thousand hectares with a net irrigated area of 310.17 thousand hectares. Principal crops of the state are rice, maize and wheat. Under agriculture sector production level of 19-24 lac metric ton production of food grains was achieved in 2005-06. The fruit production (dry and fresh) reached 16.36 lac MT in 2007-08. Area under horticulture increased to 2.95 lac hectares around 6 lakh from families comprising 25-26 lakh souls are involved in this sector generating annual income of about Rs 2000 corers. Twenty three thousand hectares of land is covered under vegetable crops with an estimated production of 3.10 lac tones (Annual plan 2005-2006, Planning and Development Department, Srinagar).

For Sericulture Development in the state, 19.02 lac field and 114.55 lakh nursery plantation were done, 7.62 lac kgs of cocoons were produced generating an income of about Rs. 6.50 corers. 22907 OZS of silkworm seed were distributed, 930 OZS of P₁, 18218 OZS of F₁ seed was prepared, and 346 kgs of mulberry seed was also sown in 2005-06 while income generation to the farmers by way of sale of cocoons has increased to Rs. 726 lacs