

Impact of COVID 19 pandemic on Sericulture industry in India

Bhupen Kumar Sahu¹, Ipsita Samal²

¹Scientific Officer, OLM-ICRISAT Project, ICRISAT, Hyderabad

²Assistant Professor, Faculty of Agriculture, Sri Sri University, Cuttack, Odisha

ARTICLE ID: 064

Abstract

The silk industry in India is multivoltine oriented and about 92% of mulberry silk production is of multivoltine origin. The silk industry in India is both a handloom and power loom operated sector that acts as the bread and butter for millions of people directly or indirectly. Sericulture in India is farm-based, labour-oriented commercial activity and suited to rural-based farmers with a good cost-benefit ratio. The average selling price per kg of cocoon during the pre-COVID-19 period was Rs. 400.00 while that of the COVID-19 period was Rs.200.00. Social distancing, strict and indefinite lockdown during this pandemic expose the loopholes in the silk trading system and bring huge unexploited opportunities for many others to fill them.

Introduction

Sericulture is the art and science-based skills of silk production by the culture of silk-producing insects, primarily silkworms. It includes various activities starting from insect-host plant cultivation to silkworm rearing and post cocoon production of silk. The silk industry in India is multivoltine oriented and about 92% of mulberry silk production is of multivoltine origin. Silk industry in India is basically both handloom and power loom operated sector that acts as the bread and butter for millions of people directly or indirectly. Sericulture in India is farm based, labour oriented commercial activity and suited to rural based farmers with good cost benefit ratio.

COVID-19 is a viral disease caused by SARS-COV-2 that causes infection to respiratory tracts. For the first time, it was reported in Wuhan city of China in December, 2019 (WHO, 2020). The Government of India announced nationwide lockdown to gain

control over the spread of COVID-19 further by looking into the pace of rise in number of incidences. Lockdown is considered as one of the rational solutions to bring the spread of this pandemic under control. The nationwide lockdown was imposed on 24th March 2020 for 21 days later it was extended for the 2nd and 3rd spell up to 17th May 2020. Till date, many states are imposing lockdown from time to time to curb the sudden rise of COVID-19 cases.

Impact on the Sericulture industry:

It's been estimated that about 8.5 million people are engaged in various sericulture activities in India; a majority of them are small and marginal farmers. These poor farmers do not possess any land, in fact work as labourers in the fields of agricultural landlords to earn their daily expenses. After the COVID-19 hit India's considerable and potential silk-producing areas, particularly, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and North-Eastern regions, silk-producing farmers suffered a lot due to the indefinite lockdown and enormous restrictions imposed by the GoI. During the lockdown period, farmers were frightened to transport their harvested cocoon produce not only because of restrictions on inter-district and inter-state movement of vehicles but due to fear of possibility of getting infected with COVID-19.

It was studied by Niyati and Vijayamba (2020) that the expenditure pattern in sericultural activities has remained the same during pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19 induced lockdown periods however, the only change was observed in terms of price realized per kg of a cocoon. The average selling price per kg of cocoon during the pre-COVID-19 period was Rs. 400.00 while that of COVID-19 period was Rs.200.00. It's been also observed that some of the farmers have stopped silkworm rearing due to non-availability of 2nd instar early instar larvae at chawki rearing centres (CRCs) or quality DFLs as they were closed/unavailable during lockdown period along with the restriction in movements. Essential inputs and critical rearing appliances were not available as the majority of shops were closed during the lockdown. Farmers encountered personal inconveniences viz., lack of transportation, lack of boarding & lodging during the marketing of harvested cocoons and the possibility of getting infected with COVID-19. Thus, the silkworm rearers suffered a lot during the active pandemic periods and were forced to be exploited by the reelers by selling the harvested cocoons at very nominal prices.



Yet, it is not the ending for the silk industry trapped with all these problems as “every crisis comes with some better alternatives”- holds true in the case of the silk industry as well.

Initiatives taken by the Government for the revival of the silk industry:

To withstand in COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India (GoI) has announced a special economic package *viz.*, Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan for boosting the economy of the country and making India self-reliant. Relief and credit support measures have been announced for various sectors including MSMEs. Ministry of Textiles emphasized that the weavers & artisans can avail the benefits of these relief and credit support measures to revive their businesses which have suffered due to lockdown necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic. Taking a step towards realizing “Aatma Nirbhar Bharat”, Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC) has endeavored to virtually connect the handloom weavers and exporters from different corners of the country with the International Market. A social media campaign “#Vocal 4 handmade” was launched on the 6th National Handloom Day by the GoI, in partnership with all stakeholders, to promote the handloom legacy of India and to ensure people’s support for the weaving community. Ministry of Textiles also requested all the Chief Ministers of all States and UTs to instruct their State Handloom Corporations/Co-operatives/Agencies to make purchases of the finished inventory available with the handloom weavers so as to put some ready cash in the hands of the weavers to enable them to meet their household needs (PIB, 2020).

In the era of online marketing and business solutions, the silk industry too does not lag. Many online trading solutions have been created in order to facilitate smooth transactions among silk rearers and reelers. Such a well-known online platform is “RESHAMANDI” which claimed itself to be India’s first agritech start-up digitizing silk supply chain. RESHAMANDI acts as artificial intelligence and IoT-led digital ecosystem for silk-related businesses starting from farms to consumers (Anonymous, 2021).

Conclusion:

COVID-19 pandemic made us realize that mankind can be saved from such disaster by the sustainable use of resources along with the help and support for each other. It also taught us that we need to respect nature and don’t have to manipulate it in a drastic way for ourselves. The silk industry comes with the vast potential of improving the economy of our country by following sustainability and resilience in agritech systems. However, COVID-19



realized the existing loopholes in the silk industry and made us proactive, even more than before, to streamline the conventional silk markets with artificial intelligence, thereby providing a real time-based online trading with adequate social distancing.

References:

1. Anon. (2021). How technology weaves a stronger silk supply chain, The Hindu, posted on 22 June 2021 (<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/agriculture/silk-agritech-startup-reshamandi-streamlines-production-from-farm-to-store/article34908586.ece>)
2. Niyati, S and Vijayamba, R (2020) COVID-19 in Rural India-II: I Had to Sell Cocoon @Rs 150/kg, Instead of Rs 500/kg, NEWS CLICKS updated on 7 April 2020 (<https://www.newsclick.in/COVID-19-Rural-India-Sell-Cocoon-Rs-150-kg-Instead-%20Rs%20500-kg>)
3. PIB, (2020). Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Textile Sector, Ministry of Textiles, New Delhi, published on 18 September 2020. (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1656233>)
4. WHO (2020). Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard of WHO, browsed on 17 Aug 2020 (<https://covid19.who.int>)