



Original Article

Scenario of Raw Silk Production in West Bengal: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

West Bengal is a traditional state among the silk producing states in India. Among the silk producing states, West Bengal is the only state where all four types of silk are produced. Mulberry silk accounts for the highest production of about 98%. This study has studied the trend of total silk production in West Bengal from 2008-09 to 2022-23. It has been shown that during this period, the production of mulberry silk has increased slightly but the production of other silks has been decreasing continuously over the years. The main objective of this study is to highlight the trend of silk production in West Bengal.

Keywords: Silk, West Bengal, Production, Sericulture,

Introduction

Ancient human civilizations were of diverse cultural nature, the traces of which are still present. Each human civilization has its own culture that carries their identity. Along with the changes in human civilization over the ages, their culture has also changed. From that distant ancient era to today's modern era, human civilization has undergone fundamental changes and with it their culture has also changed. In the present human civilization, some cultures are still present that have been going on for ages since ancient times and one of them is sericulture. The process of making silk thread from silkworms and making silk cloth from it has been going on since very ancient times.

It is not possible to say for sure when sericulture originated in human civilization, but several historical books give an idea about its origin, although there are differences of opinion among various researchers. Although there is disagreement about the history of the origin of silk, the most accepted idea is that during the reign of the Chinese king "Haungti" in 2640 BC, his wife Si-Ling-shi discovered silk and later this silk industry gradually spread to other countries of the world and since then this silk industry has existed until now [1]. Nowadays, the main livelihood of many people is the silk industry, especially in the rural areas of Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Karnataka. Although silk is currently produced worldwide, China and India are the main producers of raw silk. Currently, China ranks first in silk production and India ranks second.

There are four types of silk produced in India, namely mulberry, tasar, eri and muga. Among these four types of silk, mulberry silk is produced in the largest quantity, accounting for an average annual of about 72% and followed by Erie silk (20%), tasar silk (7%) and muga silk (1%). More than 18 states in India are associated with the silk industry and this industry has provided employment opportunities to more than 8 million people. The major silk producing states in India are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Meghalaya. Among the silk producing states, West Bengal is the only state where all four types of silk are produced. In terms of silk production, mulberry silk dominates the state. About 98% of the annual silk production in the state is mulberry silk and 1% is tasar silk and the production of the remaining two silks is very negligible. In this study, we will mainly discuss the trends in silk production in West Bengal over the past few years and along with this we will try to focus on other economic aspects of the sericulture activities.

Objectives

Every study has a specific purpose and this study also has a specific purpose. West Bengal has an abundance of various rural cottage industries and silk industry is one of them. It is said that

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Silk industry is the pride of Bengal and it is because of this industry that Bengal has been a known name to the world since ancient times. The main objective of this study is to present the Outline of the current state of the sericulture in West Bengal.

Methodology

This study is based on secondary data and secondary data has been collected from various silk related books, research papers and articles, annual reports of various organizations, etc.

History of Bengal Silk

We know from history that, the history of the silk in Bengal was very glorious. Silk was invented in China about 4500 years ago but many researchers claim that, the Indian weavers invented the technique of silk production long before silk arrived from China to India. Evidence of this can be found in the Indian ancient Sanskrit texts, where silk cloth is mentioned. In the Kautilya 'Economic Scripture' of the fourth century A.D, mentions a type of fine cloth called 'Patranna' which is a type of woven silk cloth [4].

Scenario of Sericulture in West Bengal

West Bengal is treated as a traditional state in sericulture. People from rural Bengal were associated with sericulture industry from ancient time. Sericulture is an agro-based rural cottage industry and this industry provides self-employment opportunities and important income source in rural areas. In West Bengal sericulture is being practiced in 2523 villages and 120449 families are involved with this livelihood. West Bengal is the third largest traditional silk producing state in India and accounting for more than 8 percent of country's silk production. Among the silk producing state in India, West Bengal is only state that who produces all four types of silk. Mulberry sericulture practices in almost all the district, though Malda, Murshidabad and Birbhum are the three significant silk producing districts. Tasar silk practices in the district of Birbhum, Bankura, Burdwan, Purulia and Midnapur. Eri silk production is done in the traditional district of Jalpaiguri and Muga silk has made inroads in Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri [3].

Table 1: Raw silk production in West Bengal

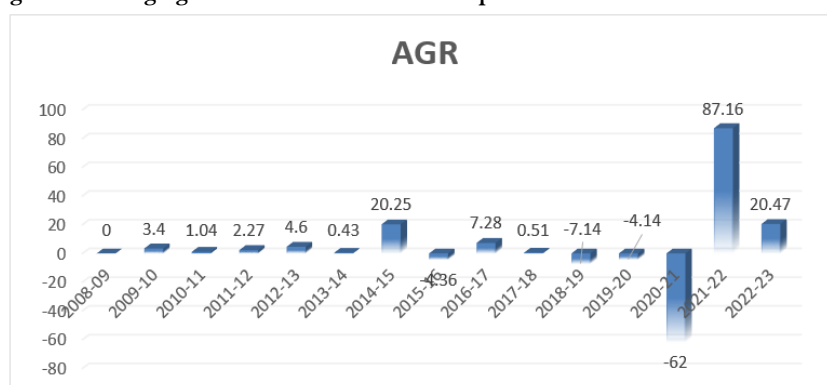
Unit: MT

Year	Mulberry	Tasar	Eri	Muga	Total	AGR
2008-09	1809	31.23	11.23	0.2	1852	0
2009-10	1865	37	13	0.2	1915	3.40
2010-11	1885	41	9	0.25	1935	1.04
2011-12	1923.78	43	11.6	0.23	1979	2.27
2012-13	2018	43.76	7.2	0.26	2070	4.60
2013-14	2030	42	7	0.18	2079	0.43
2014-15	2450	43	6	0.27	2500	20.25
2015-16	2351	34	6	0.21	2391	-4.36
2016-17	2524	37	4	0.2	2565	7.28
2017-18	2540	35	3	0.19	2578	0.51
2018-19	2365	25	4	0.016	2394	-7.14
2019-20	2262	30	3	0.08	2295	-4.14
2020-21	850	19	2	0.05	872	-62.00
2021-22	1617	12	3	0.01	1632	87.16
2022-23	1947	16	3	0.03	1966	20.47
Mean	2029.12	32.60	6.20	0.16	2068.20	
S.D	418.57	9.99	3.45	0.09	422.89	
C.V	20.63	30.65	55.63	57	20.45	
CAGR	1%	-5%	-9%	-13%	0.43%	

Source: Annual report CSB 2009-10 to 2022-23

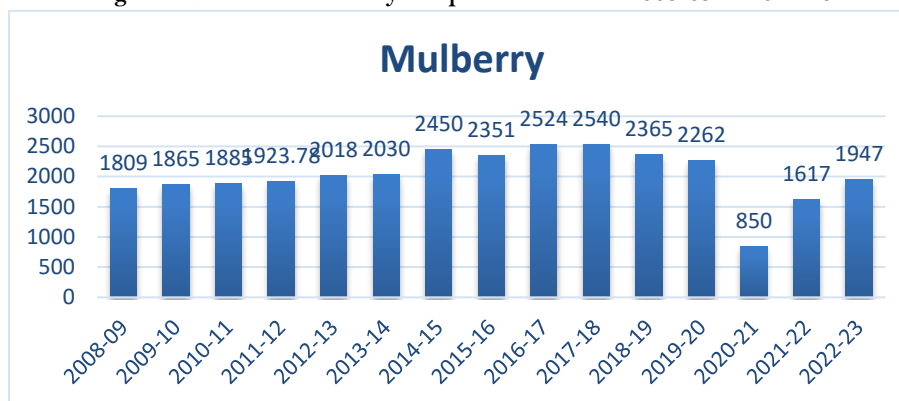
Let us look at the trend of total silk production in West Bengal during this mentioned period. During this mentioned period we can see that total silk production has indeed increased but the trend of this production growth is of an isolated nature. We have tried to express the form of this silk production trend through Figure-1.

Figure1: Average growth rate of total raw silk production from 2008-09 to 2022-23

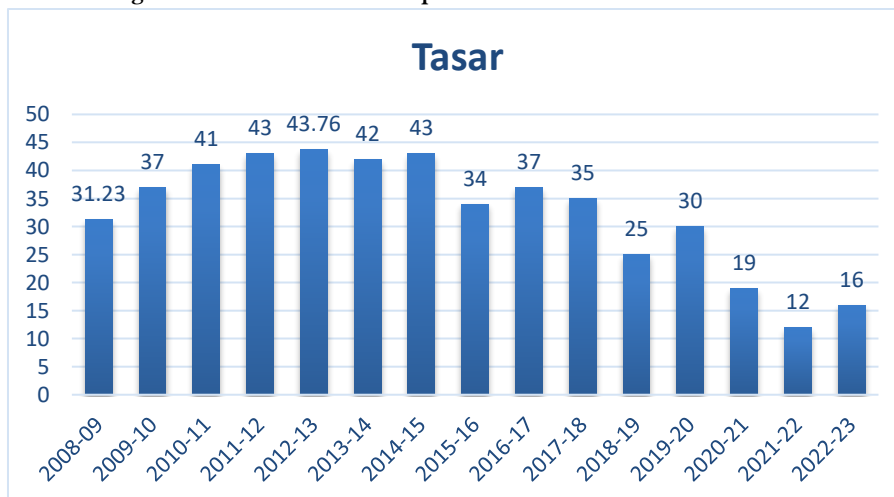


Source: Table 1

In 2009-10, the total silk production increased by 3.40% compared to the previous year, and in the following year, 2010-11, the growth rate of silk production decreased and this year, silk production increased by only 1.04%. In the following years, silk production also increased, in 2014-15, silk production increased by about 20.25% compared to the previous year. The trend of silk production has been continuously declining since 2015-16. In this year, the total silk production decreased by 4.36% compared to the previous year. Although silk production increased by about 7.28% in 2016-17, but the production of silk continued to decrease in the following years. In 2020-21, the production of silk fell drastically, in this year production decreased by about 62%. This drastic decrease in silk production this year is probably due to Covid-19. In the following years, silk production started increasing again. In 2021-22, silk production increased by about 87.16% and in 2022-23, silk production increased again by 20.47%. Now let's look at the production trends of four types of silk. We have tried to express the production trends of mulberry silk through Figure-2.

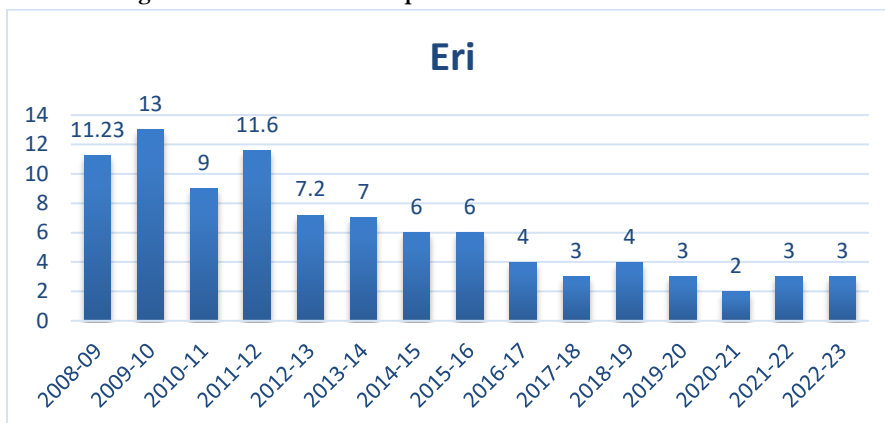
Figure 2: Trends of mulberry silk production from 2008-09 to 2022-23**Source: Table 1**

Although there are four types of silk produced in West Bengal, mulberry silk is one of the main types of silk produced. Mulberry silk accounts for about 98 percent of the total silk production in West Bengal. Although the production of mulberry silk increased during this period, but it did not increase significantly. From the year 2008-09 to 2014-15, the growth rate of mulberry silk production was faster and silk production was continuously increasing. In 2015-16, the production of mulberry silk decreased by about 4.04% compared to the production of the previous year. In 2016-17, the production of mulberry silk increased by 7.36% and in 2017-18, the production of mulberry silk increased again by 0.63%. Then, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, the production of mulberry silk continued to decrease. In 2020-21, the production of mulberry silk decreased and reached the lowest level. In last two year 2021-22 and 2022-23, the production of mulberry silk started to increase again.

Figure 3: Trends of tasar silk production from 2008-09 to 2022-23**Source: Table 1**

Although the quantity of tasar silk is very small in terms of production volume, but, it is the second largest silk produced in West Bengal. The pattern of production of tasar silk during this period is rather erratic. Initially, the production of this silk increased year after year, but in the later years, it continued to decline. In 2008-09, the production of tasar silk was 31.23 metric tons and this production continued to increase and in 2012-13, its production increased to about 43.76 metric tons. Which was the highest production during this period. The next year, in 2013-14, the production decreased to 42 metric tons and in the following year, in 2014-15, the production increased slightly but in the following years, the production decreased. In 2022-23, the production decreased to about 16 metric tons. Looking at the context of this mentioned period, it is seen that the total production of tasar silk during this period has decreased.

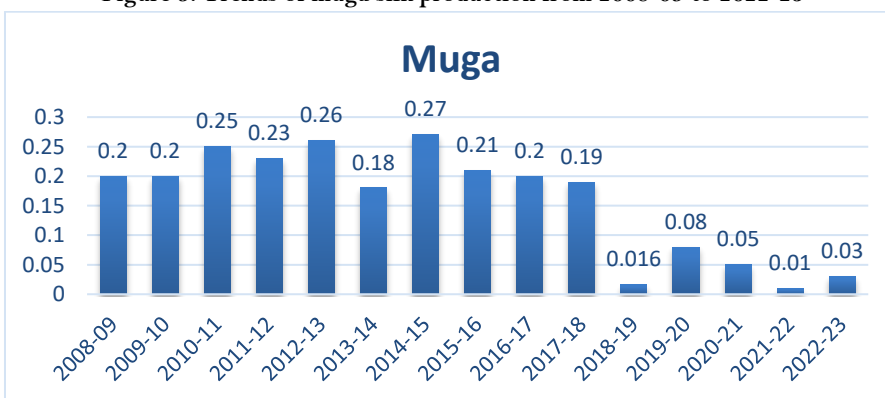
Figure 4: Trends of eri silk production from 2008-09 to 2022-23



Source: Table 1

Eri silk production ranks second after mulberry silk in terms of total silk production in India. West Bengal produces a very negligible amount of eri silk compared to the total eri silk production in India. In 2008-09, the production of Eri silk was about 11.23 metric tons and in 2009-10, the production of this silk increased to 13 metric tons and since then, the production of this silk has been continuously decreasing and in 2022-23, its production has decreased to about 3 metric tons. Needless to say, if the production trend continues like this, then eri silk will disappear from West Bengal in the future.

Figure 5: Trends of muga silk production from 2008-09 to 2022-23



Source: Table 1

Compared to other silk West Bengal produces very insignificant amount of muga silk. The current level of muga silk production suggests that muga silk will disappear from West Bengal in the near future. muga silk production has also been declining steadily, although production initially increased but could not sustain this trend of increasing production. Muga is a very important and demand silk, so it is imperative for the government to take appropriate measures to increase the production of muga silk in West Bengal.

Finding of the Study

Rural cottage industries are considered the as a backbone of the rural economy. The rural economy is mainly dependent on agricultural activities and cottage industry activities provide additional income opportunities in rural areas. The importance of silk industry in the rural economy is immense. In West Bengal, about lakhs of families earn their livelihood from this industry. We can see in our study that the total silk production including three types of silk except mulberry silk has been continuously declining during the period 2008-09 to 2022-23. During this period, the total production of mulberry silk increased by 7.63% and the compound average growth rate is 1%, meaning that during this period, the production of mulberry silk increased by 1% every year. On the other hand, the production of tasar silk has decreased by 5% per year, the production of eri silk by 9% per year, and the production of muga silk by 13% per year.

Conclusion

Silk is a traditional cottage industry of West Bengal. Once upon a time, Bengali silk was famous all over the world. But now this reputation is no longer there, maybe it will not be there in the future. The reason is that the production of silk is almost decreasing every year, or even if it increases, it is not sustainable. If the production trend continues like this, then one day silk will disappear from West Bengal. The production of eri and muga silk has reached its lowest point, maybe in the coming years these silks will not be seen in West Bengal. The production trend of tasar silk is going on in the same way. There is enough potential for the production of tasar silk to increase and expand. Appropriate measures should be taken for the development of tasar silk while there is time, otherwise the condition of tasar silk will be like eri and muga silk. Mulberry silk is the main silk produced in West Bengal. Although the production of mulberry silk has not decreased, but the trend of production growth is not satisfactory. Ultimately, it can be said that to protect the heritage of silk in West Bengal, appropriate steps must be taken and a silk development plan must be adopted and implemented as soon as possible.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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