Chapter IV

Role of Governmental Sericulture Department and Weaver service Centre.

Sericulture and Weaver Service centre run by the Government of Meghalaya are two most important cottages based eco-friendly Industries which provide gainful employment to the people in the rural areas mainly on part-time basis. These twin industries portray the cultural ethos and rich heritage of the people of the State. In the absence of a textile industry, these Centers can play an important role for the production of Silk fabrics and hand woven fabrics with ethnic designs. Till date around 10,000 families are involved in handloom activities and 16,000 families in Sericulture farming. Of late, efforts have been made to create full-time employment activity for the rural people in both the above industries through proper motivation, introduction of improved Dyeing (Fig.4.1) (Fig.4.1a) (Fig.4.1b) techniques with training and demonstration facilities, etc.\textsuperscript{95}

The Department of Sericulture and Weaving has taken up need-based and employment-oriented Schemes which aim at increasing the production and improving productivity. The infrastructure of the Department was inherited from the earth while in Assam Govt. and it become a full fledged Department under the Govt. of Meghalaya in the year 1979. They encourage the village weavers specially training them on aspects of dyeing and weaving. The rearing of silk moth was introduced by the Sericulture department which has made it easier for the weavers because earlier they had to go to the forest to collect them. The ones collected from the forest was the reason for less production as it was a tedious job. The quality had to be compromised earlier as these silk moths were very venerable to diseases. The weavers now have learned the art of rearing this silk-moth at home and can take proper care of the
hygiene so as to obtain healthy cocoon. In Sericulture, the stress is on systematic plantation of silkworm food - plants by the village sericulture farmers in order to ensure abundant supply of nutritious leaves to feed the silkworms and thereby harvesting superior cocoons for sale. Reeling and spinning are also being improved for quality production of silk yarn.  

Sericulture and Handloom Weaving are two important cottage industries in Meghalaya which provide gainful employment to the people in the rural areas mainly on part-time basis. Of late, efforts have been made to create full – time employment activity for the rural people in both the sericulture and weaver’s service centres through proper motivation, introduction of improved techniques with training and demonstration facilities, etc. They have also tried introducing new designs and motifs. The department has taken up need – based and employment – oriented schemes which aim at increasing the production and improving productivity. In Handloom – Weaving, emphasis is made on the production of exclusive items of handloom fabrics like dress and furnishing.

In the RI – Bhoi area it is that found many weavers underwent trainings on spinning, dyeing, weaving, etc., which were organized by the Sericulture department in Nongpoh. These weavers still follow new way of rearing silkworms but at the same time they have learned about the plants on which these worms breed as well as how to make proper shelters so that they can get good quality silk. They have a separate hut where they literally rear the worms till it becomes a cocoon. The technique taught by these centers is mentioned below:

**Training of rearing Eri by the Sericulture Department:**

Dr. S. N. Choudhury, a silk expert of high reputation holds that Eri culture is indigenous to the North – Eastern region of India as the best natural food plant, mainly
castor is found in the sub – Himalayan region. Some other authors hold that it might have originated in India and North Africa.97

The Eri worm is motivation and reared five or six times in a year. The worm is also a product of an egg hatched within about 10 days, and like other silk worms, 300 – 500 eggs are laid by the female moth after mating with the male moth. The worm is fed on castor oil plant leaves for about 30 – 35 days (larval period). A bundle of castor leaves is hung over the trays of Eri larvae which they climb and eat the leaves; after finishing one bundle, another of leaves is hung one after another till the larvae is matured. The matured larvae start searching for a proper place for spinning cocoons. The weavers pick up the ripe worms and put them on montages of castor leaves or branches of straw in a basket. The worms in the montage spin cocoons in two or three days. The cocoons spun are open mouthed; the worm remains inside the cocoon in the form of pupa. The cocoons are white in colour, 4/5 cm in length and 2/3 cm in width.

For seed the best cocoons are to be selected and kept in trays; within 4/7 days of the pupae stage, moths with feathers come out. The moths are black in colour and after emergence, the male moth while searching the female moth mates for a few hours (3 – 4 hours). While the male moth is separated, the female moth is tied by a small string for laying eggs on some small sticks or sun grasses. The eggs hatch within 10 days and the worms are born.

EriFood Plants: Several varieties of host plants for Eri are available in the natural conditions of the North–Eastern region. The Eri worm is also polyphagus and feeds on different varieties of leaves. The most commonly found plant in the North East is the castor or RicinusCommunis. There are two varieties of castors, perennial and annual. The duration of the perennial types is 3 to 4 years, both types of castor plants grow naturally out of the seeds that germinate and the plants come up and grow 1 1/2 to 2 meters tall. Sometimes the seeds are spread by birds after eating and throwing
the seeds out of which plants germinate. In Assam such plants are often found on the road sides. It may also be recalled that castor oil pressed out of the seeds is widely used as lubricant although a seed market in the North – East has not emerged, while in Mumbai and Ahmadabad thousands of tones of castor seeds are offered in future exchange markets. Development of a seed market would have encouraged farmers to systemically cultivate castor plants, which in turn would have encouraged Eri rearing too. The other Eri food plants are \textit{Barkesseru} (\textit{Ailanthus excels}) and \textit{Barpat} (\textit{ailanthagrandis}). While the former grows to 10/15 meters tall, the latter is a lofty tree. There are other secondary host plants like \textit{Kesseru/Karanga} which grow about 8 meters high; \textit{Gulancha} is a decorative tree, Tapioca – a small perennial plant, \textit{Bhotera}, a plant of 2/3 meters height is also used as food plant. Rearers, however, mainly use castor for \textit{Eri} worms.\textsuperscript{98}

**Improved Eri Spinning:** These centers are trying to help these weavers to use new technology for spinning the Eri silk so as they can get more yarns. Improved equipment called Charkha was also introduced in Meghalaya in the sixties of the last century. In this equipment the cocoons after processing for spinning and making silvers are put on a long stick. Fibers are drawn by hand and the twist is given by a spindle while rotating the Charkha by pedalling. Here, both the hands of the spinner remain free to draw and to give the finishing touch to the thread. Productivity of Charkha is more than double that of the \textit{Punshi}; while the \textit{Punshi} spins 20 – 25 gram of cocoons, the Charkha spins about 50 grams in an 8 hour day. The centers are also taking responsibility in upgrading these Weavers with all new equipments as available\textsuperscript{99}.

In the context of very low productivity of the traditional techniques it is worthwhile recalling that these tribes have been provided with silk spinning mills which are using cutting, combing and carding machines for Eri cocoons. Innovation and introduction of such small machines affordable by the poor rearers and spinners is likely to bring
about a revolution in the Eri spinning technology, and raise labour productivity as well as income. The electric power driven small machine introduced by the Central Silk Board at different centers in Meghalaya than the Charkha just described; here the kneaded small Eri bundle is to be held by one hand and the fibers are to be drawn by the other hand while the twist is given by the spindle and as such both the hands do not remain free to uniformly smoothen the filaments by removing the knots etc. as may be done in the treadle - driven Charkha where the kneaded small bundle of Eri is kept on the top of a long stick and both the hands remain free.

Main role of this sector is to boost up cocoon and silk production by development of systematic and economic plantation at sericulture farmers level so as to enhance the productivity per unit area through implementation of need-based schemes such as Integrated Eri, Mulberry and Muga Development Program Training facilities are provided to the farmers, reelers and spinners on improved methods. In-service training of technical personnel and training for the educated unemployed youth for self-employment are also provided\textsuperscript{100}.

Training centers have been set up in Ummulong, Jowai, Nongstoin, Nontadu, Sohliya, PahamSyiem, Nartiang, Mawsyntai and Nongpoh. Here the weavers come for all sort of enquiries as well as training to improve their skills and knowledge.

There are 12 seed farms, 6 for mulberry, 3 for Eri and 2 for Muga. There are 9 nurseries to rear planting materials in different Districts. There are two (2) numbers of training institutes located at Ummulong (Sericulture) and Mendipathar (Weaving) which are meant for imparting various courses of training and also issue of certificates\textsuperscript{101}.

**Looms Provided by Centers:** Handloom is a loom operated by hands, unlike powerloom which is mechanically processed. Handloom forms a precious part of the generational legacy and exemplifies the richness and diversity of our country in which
the weavers exhibit their proficiency. Tradition of weaving by hand is a part of the country’s cultural ethos. As an economic activity, handloom is a second largest employment provider next only to agriculture. Until the advent of machineries and the growth of the Industrial Revolution, many villages were involved in handloom and weaving. The clothes, blankets, curtains, baskets, various kinds of household goods and containers, etc. were locally made from the indigenous materials. The scenario in the North Eastern Region (NER), before the coming of the British, did not differ much from those of other places. In fact, every tribe and sub-tribe had its own distinct features of hand-woven clothes and shawls. But with the introduction of the comparatively cheaper power-loom products produced by the different textile industries of England, the popularity of the local products waned. After independence, however, many tribes who retained the technique of weaving cloth began to revive the profession and thereby produced many attractive and colourful handloom items. The Government of India (GOI) took active interest in the rich cultural tradition which, if left unattended, might become extinct. So in 1976, the office of the Development Commissioner for handloom was created. Various schemes are being implemented for the promotion and development of handloom sector (Fig. 4.2) as well as welfare of handloom weavers, during the 11th Five-year Plan (2007-2012).

**Five schemes are under implementations these are:**

1. Integrated Handloom Development Scheme;
2. Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme;
3. Marketing and Export Promotion Scheme;
4. Mill Gate Price Scheme; and
5. Diversified Handloom Development Scheme$^{103}$.

The Integrated Handloom Development Scheme (IHDS) aims at the interests of the weavers by stressing on formation of weavers groups to be effective and self-
sustainable. The Government of India (GOI) extends assistance to them; those who are not in the groups are supported by means of a “Group Approach”. However, they are insisted to form clusters so that the scheme can be reached out to them in a systematic manner.

With regard to Handloom weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme, there were two schemes implemented by the GOI during 2005-06 and 2006-07. These were the “Health Insurance Scheme” and the “Mahatma Gandhi BunkarBima Yogana”. The first scheme was meant for providing health care facilities to the handloom weavers in the country. The second one was for providing Life Insurance cover to the Handloom weavers in case of any death or accident. Both the schemes are being continued. Marketing and Export Promotion Scheme consists of two components, Viz (1) Marketing, and (2) Export Promotion. In connection with the first component, the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms is undertaking the following activities:

1. Organizing of Exhibitions, Events and Craft Melas.
2. Setting up of Urban Haats.
3. Setting up of Marketing complexes/Handloom Havelies.
5. Handloom House at Janpath, New Delhi

The Mill Gate Price Scheme (MPGS) was introduced during 1992-93 with the objective of providing all types of yarn to the handloom weavers’ organizations at very reasonable rate. The GOI reimburses the transportation expenses involved in the supply of the yarn. The national Handloom Development Corporation of India (NHDC), GOI undertaking is the nodal agency for implementation of the scheme. The scheme has been continued during the 11th Five-Year Plan. All types of yarn are
covered under the scheme. The scheme is also extended to individuals. The Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC) coordinates and provides help to the handloom and weavers group for better design, as well as in extending consultancy.\textsuperscript{105} The main objectives of these centres are to create a supply hub for manufacturing identified export products, provide training to the employees at various levels, increase the wage earning capacity of weavers, improve the work environment by providing basic amenities like toilets, water facilities, etc. and establishing market linkage with merchant exporters.\textsuperscript{106}

Modernization of handlooms is also envisaged by giving necessary assistance to the State Apex Society of Weavers and to the State Handloom Corporation to cover the looms in the Co–operative Sector and outside Co–operative respectively. The developmental efforts of the Department have made a good impact on the growth Handloom – Weaving industries in the State. It is hoped that with the sincere and dedicated efforts of all concerned, the department would be able to strive ahead and to motivate and also to bring the Sericulture farmers and handloom weavers of the State into closer contact with the latest techniques of the industries for increased productivity and a better economy.

Handloom Weaving sector, efforts are being made to increase production of hand woven fabrics in the state. Various need based schemes are implemented to step up production of best quality handloom to weave Dhara with new design pattern (Fig.4.3) (Fig.4.3a) (Fig.4.3b) so as to promote the socio-economic upliftment of the poor weavers. The activities also involve training and demonstration on appropriate techniques at all stages of operation on improved fly shuttle looms. Training facilities are provided to handloom weaving trainers under the scheme on Silk Weaving Technology Programme to private handloom weavers in clusters. Under materials which could be exposed in the local market and outside.
The coming of these government centers have encouraged the art rearing silk moth, dyeing, spinning and weaving as seen in and For the coming of British weaving was affected as mill made products were easily available and was replacing the hand woven textiles. But these centers are helping these weavers to redevelop their art of weaving Dhara with traditional motifs (Fig.4.4), Jainkup a checked shawl for female of these tribes for daily purpose (Fig.4.5) and Jainpein a wrapper worn by women of these tribes (Fig.4.6) are also woven on these centre by using the new equipments for weaving provided by the weaver service centre so that production is better and also help these weavers get a market.
References:

103) Handbook of Weaver Service Centers, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong, 2013
104) Handbook of Weaver Service Centers, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong, 2013
105) As informed by the Staffs Weaver Service Centre in Mawprem, Shillong. 2006.
106) Reference.: Union Ministry of Textiles, 2009-10
107) As explained by the Khasi and Jaintia Textile traders to the Scholar on the field Visit to these Regions.
(Fig. 4.1) chemical dyed silk at Weaver Service Center, Garikhana, Shillong.
(Fig. 4.1A.) chemical dyed silk at Weaver Service Center Sericulture dept Garikhana, Shillong.
(Fig. 4.1B.) Raw murlberry silk, at Laushmier, Shillong
Fig. 4.2. Weavers of these tribes encouraged by the Governmental Weavers Service Centre to weave full time by providing them Throw shuttle looms.
Fig. 4.3 Dhara with new design pattern woven at Weavers Service Centre, Garikhana, Shillong.
Fig 4.3 A. Dhara with new design pattern woven at Weavers Service Centre, Garikhana, Shillong.
Fig. 4.3 B. White Dhara with traditional motifs improvised by weavers at Weavers Service Centres, Garikhana, Shillong.
Fig. 4.4. White Dhara with traditional motifs an elephant and tiger improvised by weavers at Weavers Service Centres, Garikhana, Shillong.
Fig. 4.5 Jainkup, checked shawl for female of these tribes for daily purpose woven at Weavers Service Centers, Shillong.
Fig. 4.6 Jain Pien a wrapper worn by women woven at Weavers Service Centres, Shillong, using machine spinned yarns and are chemical dyed threads.