

Role of the Sericulture Industry for the Socio-economic Growth in the Eastern Region: A Study on West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: The sericulture industry is one of the oldest industries in West Bengal, across different districts like Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, and others. The present research aims to evaluate the contribution of the sericulture industry in employment generation in West Bengal, understand the socio-economic impact of the individuals employed in the sector in West Bengal, and recommend strategies to improve the socio-economic aspects of the rural farmers of the state further. The research has been carried out by thematically analyzing five peer-reviewed journals, books, and government reports. The findings of the research suggest that the sericulture industry contributes significantly to socio-economic upliftment and employment generation in West Bengal, although challenges regarding resource and government support exist. In order to improve this situation, encouragement towards entrepreneurship, research, and development as well as training sessions for the rural silk farmers in West Bengal are necessary. The lack of data sources and primary data are the main limitations of the research and further study in this area is required to enhance knowledge in the research.

Keywords: Sericulture Industry in West Bengal, Socio-economic situation, silk farmers in rural areas, Indian sericulture industry, income sources of silk farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Sericulture Industry is considered as an ideal industry for the upliftment of rural women. The development/designing of cocoon handicrafts will attract attention of huge number of local masses, thereby boosting up their revenue returns and value addition in sericulture through handicraft market (Qadir *et al.*, 2024). The sericulture industry has long been a prominent industry in the eastern state of India, West Bengal. According to Hoque and Hasmi (2023), the districts of West Bengal like Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Nadia and others have showcased significant sericulture production during the year of 2021 to 2022. In addition to that, it has been witnessed that Malda has been the highest-producing district in West Bengal (refer to Fig. 1).

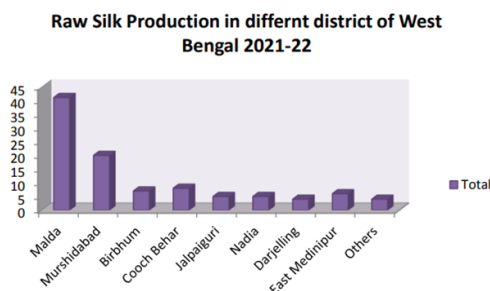


Fig. 1. Raw Silk Production across different districts of West Bengal. (Source: Hoque and Hasmi 2023).

There are four types of silks that are produced across different districts in West Bengal. These types are Mulberry, Tasar, Eri and Muga silk, and these silk types are produced by different types of silk worms. Apart from that, the industry is also responsible for generating employment for 1 lakh families across the rural West Bengal as of 2011 (Roy *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it can be understood that West Bengal has a vibrant sericulture industry and is capable of producing a diverse range of silk.

Aim and Objectives

Aim. The aim of the present research is to analyse the role of the sericulture industry for the socio-cultural development in the eastern region of India, specifically, in West Bengal.

Objectives

- To evaluate the contribution of the sericulture industry in the generation of employment in West Bengal.
- To understand the socio-economic impact of the sericulture industry on the silk farmers in the rural parts of West Bengal.
- To recommend strategies for improving the socio-economic aspects of rural silk farmers in West Bengal through the sericulture industry.

Problem Statement. Despite the high production capacity, the sericulture industry in West Bengal faces different challenges. According to Hoque (2023), challenges like fluctuation of cocoon, lack of storage facilities, financial constraints, and market limitations are the main challenges regarding the sericulture

industry in the Malda district of West Bengal. This situation is also similar to the sericulture facilities in other areas of the state. Therefore, despite having immense potential, the above-mentioned problems restrict the industry from making meaningful contributions towards the socio-economic growth of the rural farmers in the state. This is the problem that has been addressed in the study.

Research Rationale. The present research has the potential to add value to the overall economy of West Bengal and the eastern region of India. It has been discussed above that the sericulture industry has a high production capacity, although the constraints are the barriers to enhancing employment in the state. As the research provides strategies for increasing the social and economic aspects of the rural silk farmers in West Bengal, it can properly analyze the role of the sector in the socio-economic growth in the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction. In the current chapter, the available literature has been analyzed in order to assess the knowledge present in the research area. The chapter contains the themes that have been developed based on the objectives. Additionally, the chapter showcases the conceptual framework and the gaps present in the literature.

Importance of Sericulture Industry in the Growth of the Local Economy. According to Mala *et al.* (2024), the sericulture industry generates the source of income for a large number of people, especially in poor areas and it is a stable income source for the people. Apart from that, the viewpoint of Altman & Farrell (2022), suggests that it is a sustainable job source for a population as silk is a more environmentally friendly and sustainable fabric, unlike the fabrics made from petrochemicals. This reduces the risk of job losses for the population in the future. However, Kumar & Kumar (2024), suggest that despite the high production of silk in India, the job creation in the industry is slow in terms of growth, at the rate of 2.37% (refer to Fig. 2).

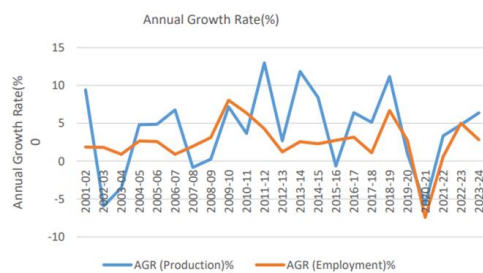


Fig. 2. Annual Growth Rate of Silk Production and Employment in India. (Source: Kumar & Kumar 2024).

Therefore, it can be understood that despite the high and sustainable prospect of job creation in the

sericulture industry, India lags in increasing the number of jobs in the industry despite growing production.

In the context of India, the sericulture industry plays a crucial role in securing the economic and social aspects for the general population. According to Reddy & Parasuramudu (2024), the sericulture industry in India supports the female members of rural households coming from marginalized communities. Therefore, the sericulture industry can be termed as a means of socio-economic uplifting for the women workforce in the rural and marginalized communities in the country. Similar impact can also be seen for other developing countries across the world. As mentioned by Andadari *et al.* (2022), the labour-incentive and agro-based nature of the industry is responsible for the community welfare and environmental improvement in rural Indonesia. As a result of this, this industry provides employment opportunities to a large section of the population in Indonesia. This indicates the importance of the sericulture industry for employment and economic growth in rural settings.

Socio-economic Impact of the sericulture industry on silk farmers. As per the research of Mala *et al.* (2024), the sericulture industry contributes significantly to socially uplift rural communities. However, from the study of Roy (2023), it can be understood that although the sericulture industry generates a significant source of income for the rural communities in West Bengal, the people employed in this industry, especially farmers, acquire minimal government support, which bars their socio-economic upliftment. From the study of Ssemugenze *et al.* (2021), it can be understood that the sericulture industry not only improves the economic condition of rural farmers but also economically impacts marketers, retailers, and the stakeholders of the overall silk industry. Therefore, it can be understood that the sericulture industry can provide multi-dimensional socio-economic benefits, although government support is required.

The increasing scope of research and development (R&D) in the sericulture industry also influences the socio-economic positions of rural silk farmers in India. As stated by the Government of India (2015), along with job creation, the sericulture industry provides employment to researchers and professional farmers in the rural area. Therefore, research and development on the sericulture industry in India impacts the social and economic positions of the farmers in rural areas. However, Khan *et al.* (2022), argued that the increased involvement of Technology in the sericulture industry demotivates rural farmers to reach further development.

Conceptual Framework

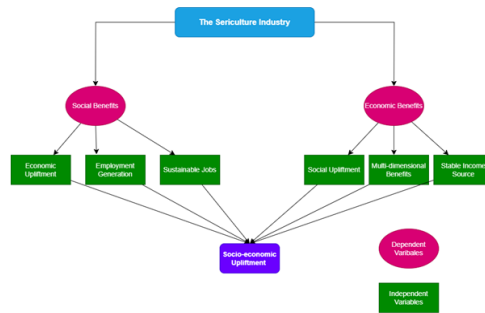


Fig. 3. Conceptual Framework.

Literature Gap. The present literature has pointed out certain issues in the sericulture industry in India and West Bengal. For example, the study by Kumar & Kumar (2024), pointed out the gap between silk production growth and employment generation in India. Similarly, Roy (2023), mentioned the lack of Government support for the silk farmers in West Bengal. However, these pieces of literature do not provide recommendations to improve the socio-economic aspects of silk farmers and the employees in the sericulture industry, which is the main gap found in the included pieces of literature.

Summary. The chapter reviewed a range of literature that indicates the potential social and economic benefits of sericulture for silk farmers. Additionally, it has also pointed out the lack of employment generation and government support for the sector. The lack of recommendations in this regard is the main gap found in the existing pieces of literature.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction. The present chapter describes the philosophy, and approach of the research along with data collection and analysis methods. The chapter also points out the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the collected data as well as the strategies used to extract meaning from the collected dataset.

Research Philosophy and Approach. The study involved the implementation of the interpretivism research philosophy. As defined by Ryan (2018), the interpretivism research philosophy lets researchers interpret the inferences from a set of qualitative data. In the present research, the collected secondary data has been interpreted in a qualitative manner and based on this interpretation, the conclusion of the research has been formed. This indicates the choice of research philosophy is appropriate for the present study due to the usage of secondary qualitative data.

The preferred research approach for the current study is the inductive research approach. The inductive research approach is used by researchers when they try to generate a unique finding or theory based on data

analysis rather than establish or reject an already existing theory (Kim, 2021). As the present study is only concerned with getting an insight regarding the implications of the sericulture industry on socio-economic growth, it is related to generating a new outcome. This is the reason behind choosing the inductive approach for the present study.

Research Strategy. The secondary qualitative research strategy has been adopted for the study. As per Cheong *et al.* (2023), the secondary qualitative strategy enables researchers to develop their knowledge based on the pre-existing papers written by experts in their research field. As a result, more concrete, authentic, and in-depth knowledge of a specific subject area can be acquired by adopting this research strategy. Considering this benefit, the secondary qualitative research strategy has been used for the present study.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategy. The necessary data for the research has been collected from five peer-reviewed journals, books, and government reports from West Bengal and India. The following table shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the papers used in the research.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed papers and books	Non-peer reviewed papers
Government Reports	Websites, Blog posts
Papers published within the last 15 years	Papers older than 15 years
Papers written in English	Papers written in other languages than English
Papers related to West Bengal and India	Papers related to other countries

The collected pieces of data have been analyzed by adopting the thematic analysis method. According to Clarke & Braun (2014), the thematic analysis method is used to identify the repeating patterns within a set of descriptive and qualitative data by color coding the repeating keywords.

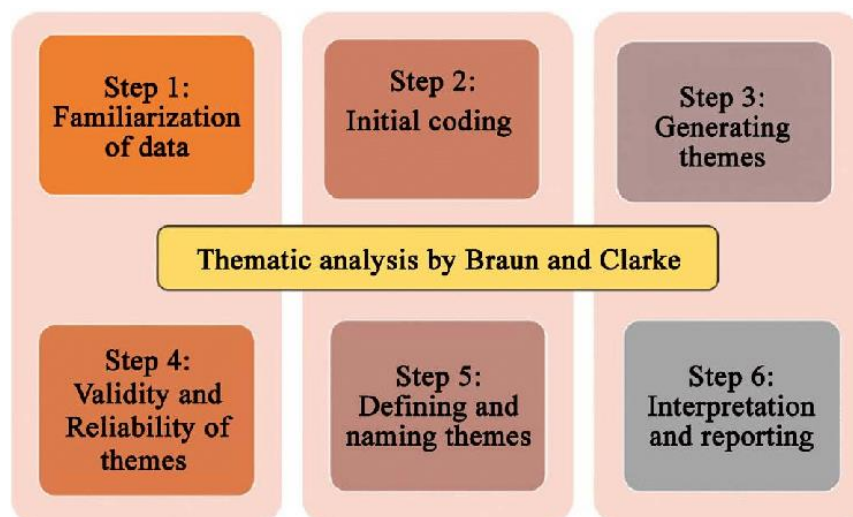


Fig. 4. Thematic Analysis Method. (Source: Clarke & Braun 2014).

In the present research, the important keywords available in the collected data set have been colour-coded and they have been used in order to develop themes. The analysis of the data has been carried out under these themes.

Ethical Considerations. The ethical standards in the present research have been maintained by abiding by the Copyright Act of 1957. This Act mentioned that literary works of other authors can be used for research purposes in India by crediting the original author of the literary works (The Government of India, 1957). Considering this Act, the authors of all the journals, resorts, and books used in the data analysis have been properly cited with in-text citations. Additionally, to ensure the highest level of credibility of the research work, research biases have been avoided and the interpretation of the collected qualitative data has been analyzed neutrally and critically.

Summary. The research has been carried out by collecting secondary qualitative data. Sources like peer-reviewed journals, books, and government reports have been used as data sources. These collected data have further been analyzed with the help of the thematic analysis method.

Data Analysis

Introduction. The current chapter demonstrates the analysis of the collected data through the thematic analysis method. The collected data has been familiarised by drawing parallels with the inferences from the data sources with the objectives and discussing the inferences under specific themes generated through the coding process.

Data Analysis Coding

Table 2: Coding and Theme Generation.

Objectives	Authors	Extracts	Coding	Themes
To evaluate the contribution of the sericulture industry in the generation of employment in West Bengal.	(Roy <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	“West Bengal has comparatively higher “Families involved per village” (48.9 in 2003) compared to other traditional states (Karnataka=13.3, Andhra Pradesh= 14.29)...the employment generation within the household through its spillover effect creates different <i>positive externalities</i> in the society...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • higher “Families involved per village” • employment generation • spillover effect • <i>positive externalities</i> 	High family involvement, Employment generation, spillover effect, resource constraints and government intervention: Contribution of the sericulture industry in Employment generation in West Bengal rural areas
	(Roy , 2023)	“Our investigation uncovered that multiple reelers share a single reeling machine, highlighting the <i>collective efforts</i> of individuals in overcoming resource constraints. The study underscores the urgent need for government intervention to uplift the conditions of weavers and industrial employees, as well as to promote equitable growth in the sericulture industry.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>collective efforts</i> • resource constraints • government intervention 	

To understand the socio-economic impact of the sericulture industry on the silk farmers in the rural parts of West Bengal.	(Government of West Bengal, 2025)	“Birbhum has the unique feature of both varieties of traditional Silk culture Mulberry & Tasar and also reach resources of silk artisans. 15980 Nos of rural families are traditionally engaged in sericulture (Mulberry) activities and 215 nos families in Tasar Sector across the District.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rural families are traditionally engaged • Tasar Sector 	Traditional engagement of rural families, Tasar sector: Socio-economic impact of the sericulture industry on silk farmers in West Bengal
To recommend the strategies for improving the socio-economic aspects of rural silk farmers in West Bengal through the sericulture industry.	(Sree, 2023)	“Sericulture will be a <i>dependable industry</i> especially for small and marginal farmers with minimum investment, low gestation period and high net returns. The production of cocoons and net profits increased as we progressed from 2012-13 to 2017-18 and few students who are passionate and impressed by the results turned out to be entrepreneurs in sericulture after their graduation.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>dependable industry</i> • small and marginal farmers • entrepreneurs in sericulture 	Entrepreneurship for small and marginal farmers, research and development, skill enhancement through training in-house industry: Strategies for improving the socio cultural aspects of rural silk farmers in West Bengal
	(Government of India, 2021)	“The R&D institutions of CSB, spread across the country, covering all activities on the silk value-chain pertaining to all the four silk sub-sectors, are intensively involved in training, skill seeding and skill enhancement on a sustainable basis...Under this category a variety of short-term training modules focusing on Entrepreneurship development, In-house and industry Resource Development, Specialized Overseas Training, popularization of sericulture technologies, lab to land technology demonstration programmes, training impact <i>assessment surveys</i> etc have Training Programme on Extension Management Approaches for Promotion of Sericulture Industry Page 14 been planned to be taken up.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&D institutions • Training, skill seeding and skill enhancement • short-term training • In-house and industry • <i>assessment surveys</i> 	
Underline	Highly important codes			
Bold	Moderately important codes			
Italic	Less important codes			

Thematic Analysis

High family involvement, Employment generation, spillover effect, resource constraints, and government intervention: Contribution of the sericulture industry in Employment generation in West Bengal rural areas

It has been found from the above thematic analysis that West Bengal has a high number of families that are involved in the sericulture industry. This involvement generates high employment opportunities for rural families in the state. Additionally, a spillover effect among the rural farmers in the state can also be witnessed which indicates that this industry is positively perceived by the rural population in West Bengal. However, challenges regarding resource constraints and Limited government intervention are the main issues in generating employment in the sector on a large scale.

Traditional engagement of rural families, Tasar sector: Socio-economic impact of the sericulture

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industry on silk farmers in West Bengal

The rural farmers in the Birbhum district of West Bengal are traditionally involved in the silk production sector. More specifically, the Tasar sector generates a large amount of employment in the sector which contributes significantly towards the socio-economic upliftment of the rural community in the district mentioned above.

Entrepreneurship for small and marginal farmers, research and development, skill enhancement through training in-house industry: Strategies for improving the socio-cultural aspects of rural silk farmers in West Bengal

In order to enhance the employment generation in the sector of discussion, small and marginal farmers in West Bengal can be encouraged to establish silk-based entrepreneurship. Apart from that, in-house production, focus on research and development as well as training sessions for skill enhancement of the farmers is also

crucial to increase the number of employment in the sericulture sector in West Bengal.

Summary. The discussion in the chapter indicates that the sericulture Industries contribute significantly towards socio-economic and Employment benefits to the rural farmers of West Bengal. However, resource constraints and Limited Government support are also present within the sector in the state. Entrepreneurship and skill development can help the sector generate more employment for the rural farmers in the state of discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction. The inference acquired from the thematic analysis has been summarised in the present chapter under the findings section. Additionally, the findings have further been analyzed by comparing and contrasting them with the literature review under the discussion in the chapter.

Findings. The findings from the research suggest that the sericulture industry generates a high number of employment among the rural farmers in West Bengal and the sector is also perceived positively by these farmers. Constraints like resource inadequacy and lack of government support have also been found. The importance of the Tasar industry can also be understood from the findings from the data analysis and it also contributes to social and economic upliftment of the rural population, specifically in the Birbhum district. Finally, it is suggested that rural farmers need to be encouraged to establish their own startups to extract more economic benefits from the sector. Additionally, enhanced research and development as well as proper training for skill development of the farmers has also been suggested.

DISCUSSION

The contribution of the sericulture industry to the generation of employment in West Bengal. It has been found from the research that the sericulture industry is responsible for high employment generation in West Bengal. This finding is supported by the study of Mala *et al.* (2024), which indicates that the sericulture industry has the potential to generate a source of income for a large number of people. However, based on the findings, it can also be said that in order to open up the maximum potential of the industry, proper resource allotment and Government support are also required.

Socio-economic impact of the sericulture industry on the silk farmers in the rural parts of West Bengal. From the research findings, it has been understood that West Bengal farmers have been involved with the sericulture industry for a long time. From the study by Ssemugenze *et al.* (2021), it can be understood that the industry of discussion has the capacity to provide sustainable and holistic improvement of the social and economic situation of the rural population. This finding can also be supported by the research of Hajam *et al.* (2024), which stated that along with economic activities, the sericulture industry provides rural communities with a sustainable medium of income.

Based on this, it can be understood that the sustainability of the sericulture industry is responsible for the long-term benefits acquired by the Tasar Farmers in the Birbhum district.

Strategies for improving the socio-economic aspects of rural silk farmers in West Bengal through the sericulture industry. Rural entrepreneurship based on the sericulture industry is effective for generating employment on a large scale. This is because such entrepreneurship can involve a wider section of the rural society in the industry, providing them with the capability to generate their income through the sector. For example, Savithri *et al.* (2023), mentioned that among 6,38,588 villages in India, 52,360 villages have been successful in generating employment through the internship in the sericulture industry. This essentially implies that the industry has the potential to generate high numbers and large-scale employment in rural areas. However, in order to realise this, proper research facilities and skill development of the farmers as well as the associated personnel in the industry are also crucial to enhance the highest level of potential in the sector.

Summary. The discussion in the chapter indicates that the outcomes from the research are aligned with the available knowledge in the research area. It has also been explored that entrepreneurship can enhance the range of employment by providing job opportunities to a wider section of rural society in West Bengal.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the rural section of West Bengal suffers from the inadequacy of resources and government support. Despite this, the sericulture industry provides a large scale of employment in the state. The Tasar sector generates employment for the rural community of Birbhum for a long time due to the sustainability of the sector. However, in order to reveal the full potential of the industry, silk-based startups need to be promoted among rural farmers by providing them with regular training and conducting proper research and development in the industry. The research also addresses the issue of employment in the sericulture industry in West Bengal by pointing out the recommendation to increase employment generation in this sector.

Limitations. The main limitation of the research is that it has been carried out by collecting a limited number of data sources. This reduces the concentration of information in the research. Additionally, the lack of primary data also restricts the research to collect the opinions of rural farmers regarding their social and economic upliftment through the sericulture industry in person. Further research is required to gain more knowledge in the area of the research.

Research Gaps

The main gap related to the present research is that it only considered West Bengal as the focus area. States like Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, and other states of India also have vibrant sericulture industries. However, this research only concentrates on West Bengal, which

narrows the scope of the research. Additionally, data related to other districts of West Bengal than Birbhum and Malda has been scarce, reducing the research scope further.

FUTURE SCOPE

The research has the scope to contribute to the knowledge regarding the current situation of the sericulture industry in West Bengal and its future prospects. Additionally, future researchers can also use the research to study the necessary infrastructure development in the sericulture Sector to enhance employment in the industry.

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Conflict of Interest. None.

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