

Muga incurs loss



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Rituparna Goswami Pande 8 December 2007 15240 views

Just as the future of Assam's handloom dreams had found wings in the form of the GI status of the muga silk a sudden turn of events threatens to clip those wings in the bud as reports of heavy loss in the muga sector starts pouring in.

This winter the muga farmers are staring into eyes of a financial crisis with the failure of the Central Silk Board's (CSB) summer muga crop popularly known as the Bhadiya. Officially the loss is estimated to be of fifteen crores this year however the farmers and dealers claim it to be around fifty crores. The cause of this calamity has been stated as weather related.

Assam produces three different varieties of Silk viz, Pat Muga, and Eri or Endi. While the Pat variety is not exclusive to Assam, the Muga-the garden Silk and Eri, a warm variety are indigenous to Assam.

Muga - the golden yellow hued silk is a prerogative of India and the pride of Assam. This silk is obtained from semi-domesticated multivoltine silkworms called *Antheraea assamensis*. These silkworms feed on the aromatic leaves of the Som and Saalu plant and are reared on trees similar to that of tassar. Muga culture is specific to the state of Assam and is an integral part of the tradition and culture of Assam.

The government has undertaken numerous projects to promote this silken treasure of Assam. For instance take the 2 projects which were started by the Assam government in order to develop the silks of Assam and promote quality products, namely the development of Eri in Assam and the development of Muga in Assam in the year 2000. The total financial outlay of the project was Rs 1177.12 lakhs and Rs 1449.78 lakhs. These projects were implemented in four districts of Assam namely, Kamrup, Goalpara, North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. These projects resulted in the production of superior qualities of muga raw silk.

A recent development that promises to take this silken heritage to even greater heights is the Geographical Indication (GI) certificate. The legendary muga Silk of Assam has now been recognized globally and registered as the Geographical Indication of Assam under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. Mentionably, this is the first Geographical Indication of the state.

But the loss has come as a shock to the farmers and threatens to create impediments in the path of the muga success story. According to sources in the State Directorate of Sericulture the loss would have been much higher had there been no attempt on the part of the CSB to make it up with some precautionary measures.

Had the CSB not acted wisely the loss incurred to the winter crop katiya (autumn) would have been fifty percent but now it has been reduced to twenty five percent.

The state targeted to increase the muga silk production to 120 metric tones but due to the unavoidable reasons it will be reduced to 90 metric tones. The authorities should now try to concentrate on making up the loss and take this as a lesson learnt for the future.

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BY RITUPARNA GOSWAMI PANDE

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