

Art of Silk Cocoon Crafting - Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Rural Women

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INTRODUCTION

Sericulture is an agro-based industry, the final product of which is the 'silk'. India holds a unique position in production of all commercially exploited silks of Mulberry (*Bombyx mori* L), Eri (*Samia ricini* B), Muga (*Antheraea assama* Ww), Tropical Tasar (*Antheraea mylitta* D) and Temperate Tasar (*Antheraea proylei* J). India ranks second, next to China in the production of silk. Sericulture involves cultivation of the host plant and harvesting the leaves for feeding the silkworm; the rearing of silkworm for production of cocoons; reeling and spinning of cocoon to produce raw silk and processing it to produce the finished product, 'silk fabric'. Sericulture is such an activity where a number of by-products called 'sericulture waste' are generated. Various sericulture wastes are converted into useful products which are used intensively not only in various research line but also in the manufacture of products of day to day need. All these by-products have economic value if it is processed properly. It is claimed that in sericulture nothing is a waste. The utilisation of these by-products plays an important role in the economy of the silk industry. Apart from utilisation of the silk waste, recent advancement has also been made for purposeful use of host plant products, larvae, excreta, pupae, pierced/ cut cocoons, etc. which have the potential to convert these waste into useful by-products of commercial value, generate additional income to the farmer and also employment generation.

Cocoon handicraft

A major concern of the silk industry is not only in the production of good quality silk which after processing convert it into silk fabric, but also to utilize the silk waste products obtain during the reeling process into a value-added product.

Utilisation of the sericulture by-product so far has not met with the tremendous scope and importance among the people. Besides production of silk, by-products can be put in a better way for turning the silk industry into a more profitable and economically a viable unit. Several aspects on use of by-products need to be explored as early as possible.

The purposeful use of by-product has enhanced the value of sericulture activity by 10-25%. Among the by-products, the cocoon craft is the eye catching art in the silk industry which will give wonderful scope to develop

human skills in addition to generate self employment and revenue by converting these waste cocoon into decorative fancy items. Utilisation of pierced cocoon, cut cocoon, defective cocoons is steadily increasing in handicraft industries and gaining much popularity. These waste cocoons are cut, cleaned, and dyed to make beautiful items like garlands, flower vases, dolls, show piece, pen stands, jewellery, wall hangings, decorative door and window strings, wall plates, crafts clocks, greeting cards, bouquets etc.

		
<p>Fig. 1:Earrings</p>	<p>Fig. 2:Wall Hanging</p>	<p>Fig. 3:Wall hanging</p>
		
<p>Fig. 4:Wall Hanging Buddha</p>	<p>Fig. 5: Garland</p>	<p>Fig. 6:Wall Hanging</p>
		
<p>Fig. 7:Cut Flowers</p>	<p>Fig. 8:Show piece</p>	<p>Fig. 9:Flower vase</p>

The cocoon crafted stuffs maintain its lustre for years. These handicrafts can be used at homes and work places to add its aesthetic and artistic look. Cocoon crafting can be taken as a commercial activity particularly by women folks and in return obtain good economic returns with their creative skills. If such activity of cocoon craftwork is adopted commercially, it will attract many cocoon growers, buyers and local people towards the upliftment of this craft business (occupation) thereby boosting up their revenue returns and value addition in sericulture through handicraft market.

These decorative items prepared from waste cocoons are gaining popularity in India in the recent times. Besides, considering the increasing demand from different states of India, Government organizations, NGOs, progressive farmers and new entrants in sericulture, several short duration training courses on cocoon handicrafts are also organized by Central Sericultural Research & Training Institute, Mysore.

Proper use of these by-products can be converted into industrial and market oriented materials. These handicrafts (craftworks) are generally sold in handicrafts emporium at net profit of about 50% and now it has become a source of income for many rural families for their livelihood.

The use of these cocoon craft so far has not been popular among the silkworm rearers of North East India. The tribal as well as general silkworm rearers of North Eastern region of India consume pupa in different forms. They consider the silkworm pupa as delicacy and the cocoon is more or less a by-product.

The majority of the farmers belong to economically poorer sections and unaware about the purposeful and potentiality of the cocoon handicraft. The cocoons produced were either used for their own silk purpose or sold to the reelers and the value addition through by-products was never thought of.

The useful conversion of by-products through indigenously available processing

techniques will bring additional income leading to socio economic upliftment of the rearers. The cocoon art craft certainly boosts up the Sericulture. The Research and Development institutions, Sericulture departments, NGOs, policy makers should work on awareness and to popularize the concept of value addition with fitting trainings, projects and global marketing outlets for effective by-product utilization of silk cocoon. For new aspirants in order to start with the silk cocoon handicraft, can start with very limited inputs with the following requirements listed below:

Materials required for cocoon crafting:

Basic raw materials: The basic raw materials (cut/pierced cocoons) can be procured from any government or private grainages. The unused or rejected (dead/double) cocoons can also be used as a substitute raw material to earn more returns.

Other miscellaneous materials: The items required are mostly based on the handicraft to be designed such as, scissors, zig-zag scissors, drawing sheets, coloured thread, cotton thread, blade, drawing brush, coloured dye, cardboard, needles, fabric glue, craft paper, velvet paper, adhesive tape, colour tape, stapler, plastic ornamental material, fabric paint, soft binding wire, water colour, colourful beads, dyeing vessel, etc. are used during cocoon craft preparation.

CONCLUSION

The useful conversion of by-products brings additional income lead to socio-economic advantage of rural people. The waste cocoon though having less commercial value can generate good returns if it is utilized for preparation of cocoon handicrafts skilfully. Rural women folk can take up the activity and earn more as an aid to their livelihood. Cocoon crafting is a self-employment with minimum input but with considerable profit if the activity is taken up with enthusiastic and skilfully to give a creative touch.