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India's Silk Industry: A Growing Symbol of Rural Prosperity and Cultural Heritage

*Nitta Anusha[1], Ramesh M Maradi[2], Burjikindi Madhuri[3], Karan S[4], K Rahul[5], Pooja Makwana[5] and S. Gandhi Doss[5]
[1]CSB-REC, Mamring, Sikkim-737132
[2]CSB-REC, Shillong, Meghalaya -793004
[3]Scientist-B, CSB-RSRS, Kalipong, WB
[4]CSB-CSRTI, Mysore-570008
[5]CSRTI- Berhampore-742101
(Central Silk Board, Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India)
*Corresponding Author's email: anushanitta1997@gmail.com

The silk industry in India is one of the most important agro-based cottage industries contributing significantly to rural employment, women empowerment, cultural preservation, and export earnings. Recent statistics indicate substantial growth in mulberry cultivation, silk production, exports, employment generation, and cocoon prices. Production of both mulberry and vanya silks has increased steadily due to improved technologies, farmer participation, and government support. Despite these achievements, challenges such as climate change, disease incidence, import dependency, and inadequate infrastructure continue to affect the sector. Government initiatives and scientific sericulture practices are playing a major role in strengthening the industry. With increasing global demand for eco-friendly and natural fibres, the future of India's silk sector appears highly promising.

Key Words: Mulberry Silk, Vanya Silk, Rural Livelihood, Women Empowerment, Silk Export, Sustainable Development, Cottage Industry

Introduction

Silk has been an integral part of India's cultural and economic heritage for centuries. From the golden muga silk of Assam to the fine mulberry silk of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the Indian silk industry reflects the country's diversity, craftsmanship, and traditional excellence. Sericulture has emerged as one of the most important agro-based and labour-intensive industries, supporting millions of rural households through activities such as mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, reeling, spinning, weaving, and marketing. Recent statistics published by the Central Silk Board reveal encouraging growth trends in India's silk sector. Expansion in mulberry cultivation, increasing silk production, higher export earnings, and rising employment opportunities indicate that sericulture is steadily becoming an important contributor to rural prosperity and economic development.

Growth in Mulberry Cultivation and Silk Production

Expansion of Mulberry Cultivation: Mulberry silk forms the backbone of India's silk industry. The area under mulberry cultivation increased from 2,37,578 hectares during 2020–21 to 2,76,231 hectares in 2025–26 (April–January). This expansion reflects increasing farmer interest in sericulture due to its profitability and sustainability.

Increase in Mulberry Silk Production: Mulberry silk production increased significantly from 23,896 metric tonnes in 2020–21 to 31,119 metric tonnes in 2024–25. Bivoltine silk production increased from 6,783 MT to 10,160 MT, while multivoltine silk production rose

from 17,113 MT to 20,959 MT during the same period. The increase in bivoltine silk production is particularly important because bivoltine silk possesses superior quality, longer filament length, and higher market value. Growth in bivoltine production also helps reduce dependence on imported silk.

Importance of Vanya Silk: India is globally recognized for its unique vanya silks, including tasar, eri, and muga silk. These silks are closely associated with tribal culture, forest-based livelihoods, and eco-friendly production systems.

Growth of Eri Silk: Eri silk production increased from 6,946 MT in 2020–21 to 7,886 MT in 2024–25. Eri silk, often called "peace silk," is highly valued because yarn extraction does not involve killing the silkworm.

Significance of Muga and Tasar Silk

Muga silk is famous for its natural golden colour and luxurious appeal, while tasar silk provides livelihood opportunities to tribal communities in states such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Maharashtra.

Export Growth and Economic Contribution

India's silk industry contributes significantly to export earnings through silk fabrics, garments, scarves, carpets, and handicrafts.

Increase in Silk Export Earnings

Silk export earnings increased from ₹1467 crore in 2020–21 to ₹2905 crore during 2025–26 (April–January). Export value in terms of US dollars also increased from 198 million to 331 million US dollars.

This growth demonstrates the rising global demand for Indian silk products because of their traditional designs, superior craftsmanship, and eco-friendly production systems.

Employment Generation and Women Empowerment

One of the major strengths of sericulture is its employment-generating capacity. Employment generation increased from 87.3 lakh persons in 2020–21 to 97.3 lakh persons in 2024–25.

Role of Women in Sericulture

Women actively participate in silkworm rearing, spinning, weaving, reeling, and post-cocoon activities. Sericulture empowers rural women by creating income opportunities within villages and households. Government-supported programmes and self-help groups have further strengthened women's participation in the silk industry.

Rise in Cocoon and Raw Silk Prices

The increase in cocoon and raw silk prices has improved profitability for farmers and reelers.

Increase in Cocoon Prices

Prices of bivoltine reeling cocoons increased from ₹330 per kilogram in 2020–21 to ₹644 per kilogram in 2025–26.

Raw Silk Market Trends

Mulberry raw silk prices reached nearly ₹3964 per kilogram in recent years. Premium vanya silk products, especially muga silk yarn, also fetched exceptionally high market prices due to their rarity and quality.

Challenges Faced by the Silk Industry

Despite impressive growth, the Indian silk industry continues to face several challenges.

Import Dependency: India still imports raw silk, especially high-quality bivoltine silk, to meet industrial demand. This indicates the need to strengthen domestic production systems.

Climate Change and Disease Incidence: Climate variability, pest attacks, and diseases significantly affect silkworm growth and cocoon quality. Farmers also face problems related to irregular rainfall, rising temperatures, and humidity fluctuations.

Infrastructure and Technology Constraints: Small and marginal farmers often struggle with inadequate infrastructure for cocoon storage, reeling, marketing, and access to advanced technologies.

Government Initiatives and Development Programmes

The Government of India and the Central Silk Board have implemented several developmental programmes to strengthen sericulture. These initiatives focus on quality seed production, improved silkworm breeds, disease management, bivoltine promotion, farmer training, women empowerment, and technology dissemination. Cluster development programmes and capacity-building activities have improved productivity and farmer income.

Future Perspectives

With increasing global demand for natural fibres, eco-friendly textiles, and handmade products, the future of India's silk industry appears highly promising. Expansion of scientific sericulture practices, mechanization, digital extension services, climate-resilient technologies, and stronger market linkages can further improve India's competitiveness in the global silk market. Strengthening research, farmer training programmes, and quality silk production systems will be essential for achieving self-reliance in silk production.

Conclusion

India's silk industry stands as a remarkable example of how traditional knowledge and modern scientific technologies can work together for sustainable development. The steady growth in silk production, exports, employment generation, and farmer participation reflects the resilience and economic importance of the sericulture sector. Beyond economic contribution, sericulture preserves India's cultural heritage while supporting millions of rural families through livelihood generation and women empowerment. With continuous policy support, technological advancement, and farmer-centric development programmes, India has the potential to become fully self-reliant and emerge as a stronger global leader in the silk industry.

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