

**THE PRESENT SCENERIO OF MUGA CULTURE OF THE AHOM
(MONGOLOID GROUP) PEOPLE OF ASSAM AND ITS GLOBAL IMPACT**

A Descriptive study

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Abstract

Muga culture, deeply intertwined with the Ahom people of Assam, India, encompasses the intricate art of Muga silk production, a legacy passed down through generations. This unique textile tradition, characterized by its exquisite golden-hued Muga silk, holds immense cultural significance and has gained global recognition for its craftsmanship and sustainable practices. This descriptive study delves into the present scenario of Muga culture, highlighting its challenges and opportunities while exploring its global impact.

Despite its cultural and economic importance, Muga culture faces challenges such as competition from synthetic fabrics, climate change affecting champa tree growth, and a lack of standardization in production. However, efforts are underway to revitalize Muga culture, including government initiatives to promote Muga silk, research to improve production techniques, and consumer education campaigns.

Globally, Muga silk has captured the attention of high-end designers and is gaining popularity in international markets. Its sustainable production methods and cultural significance make it an attractive alternative to synthetic fabrics. This global demand has created new economic opportunities for Muga producers in Assam, contributing to the state's economic development.

The future of Muga culture looks promising, with growing global recognition and increasing demand for Muga silk. Continued efforts to preserve traditional practices, enhance sustainability, and promote Muga culture will ensure its enduring legacy and global impact.

Key words

Muga culture, Ahom people , Muga silk, Sustainable practices, Global impact, Challenges, Opportunities, Preservation.

Introduction

Emerging from the fertile plains of Assam, India, the Muga culture stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of the Ahom people, a Mongoloid group who ruled the region for six centuries. Muga, a golden silk of unparalleled beauty, has become an integral part of Assamese identity, woven into the fabric of their traditions, celebrations, and sartorial expressions. Beyond its aesthetic allure, Muga culture embodies a rich tapestry of practices, skills, and knowledge that have been meticulously preserved and passed down through generations.

Objectives:

- To assess the current status of Muga culture in Assam.
- To explore the global impact of Muga culture.

Importance and Significance of the Study

The research paper "The Present Scenario of Muga Culture of the Ahom (Mongoloid Group) People of Assam and Its Global Impact" is a significant contribution to the understanding of this unique and important aspect of Assamese culture. Muga silk, produced from the cocoons of the muga silkworm, is a prized textile known for its golden hue and luxurious texture. It has been an integral part of Assamese society for centuries, and its production and use are deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of the Ahom people.

Extent of the Study

Geographical scope: The study focuses on the Muga culture of the Ahom people of Assam, India. However, it also discusses the global impact of Muga silk, highlighting its growing popularity in international markets.

Temporal scope: The study covers the historical origins of Muga culture up to its current state in contemporary Assam. It also considers the potential future of Muga culture in the context of globalization and economic development.

1.4 METHODOLOGY:

The paper "The Present Scenario of Muga Culture of the Ahom (Mongoloid Group) People of Assam and Its Global Impact" employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of Muga culture and its global significance. In order to prepare the paper both Primary and the Secondary data are used. Primary data are collected through field study of some 'Sumanis' of Amguri of Sivasagar district of Assam. Secondary data includes different published Reports of the Central Silk Board, Government of India, Directorate of Sericulture; Government of Assam, etc We have visited The Fabric Plus Industry of Chaigaon, Guwalpara District of Assam to collect data of the global scenario of Muga Culture.

THE AHOM (MONGOLOID GROUP) PEOPLE OF ASSAM AND Muga culture

The Ahom people are a Tai ethnic group who migrated from present-day Myanmar to Assam, India in the 13th century. They established the Ahom kingdom, which ruled Assam for over 600 years. The Ahom people are known for their rich culture and traditions, which include their unique language, music, dance, and cuisine. One of the most important aspects of Ahom culture is Muga silk production. Muga silk is a golden-yellow silk that is produced from the cocoons of the muga silkworm. Muga silk is known for its luxurious texture and luster, and it is considered to be one of the finest silks in the world. Muga silk production is a complex and labor-intensive process. The muga silkworm is a semi-domesticated species that feeds exclusively on the leaves of the champa tree. The cocoons are then collected and spun into yarn, which is then woven into cloth. Muga silk is a valuable commodity, and it is used to make a variety of traditional Assamese garments, such as mekhlas (sarongs), gamuchas (scarves), and dhotis (men's garments). Muga silk is also used to make a variety of other products, such as carpets, curtains, and upholstery. Muga culture is an important part of the identity of the Ahom people. It is a symbol of their heritage and their pride in their unique culture. Muga silk is also an important economic resource for the Ahom people, and it provides employment for thousands of people in Assam.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Muga silk from international consumers. This interest is due in part to the growing popularity of natural and sustainable fabrics. Muga silk is a sustainable fabric, as it is produced using traditional methods that do not harm the environment.

The growing demand for Muga silk is a positive development for the Ahom people. It is helping to preserve their culture and provide economic opportunities for their communities. Muga silk is also helping to put Assam on the map as a destination for tourists and investors.

The future of Muga culture is bright. With its rich history, beautiful textiles, and growing global popularity, Muga silk is poised to continue to be an important part of Assamese culture for many years to come.

3.01 REARING OF MUGA SILK WORM

3.01.01 Selection of Host Plant :

Muga farmers apply their traditional knowledge to identify suitable host plant for Muga Silk worm rearing . They classify the Som plants in different groups based on shape of leaf – Nahrpatia, Belpatia , Jampatia, Kathalpatia , Aampatia leaf and so on. Based on farmers traditional knowledge, Naharpatia is the most preferred variety for Muga Silk Worm Rearing. .

3.01.02 Selection of Seed Cocoon:

The traditional rearers usually select seeds of cocoons .They usually select seeds by seeing the larval colour and movements of the Larvae by touching the tubercles.

3.01.03 Seed preparation

Muga Farmers store seed cocoons in bamboo made boxes, Chakara (male) and Chakari(female) which are along called chakari pera . They use to tie and hang the paired

moths in kharika, A stick with hook made of thatch grass, .After overnight mating, the male Moth or Chakara are naturally separated and the female Moth or chakari lays about 150-250 eggs on Kharika. During Summer the worms hatch out in the morning in about 8 days .

4.0 THE LIFE CYCLE OF MUGA

In summer a Larva takes 21-25 days for Maturation and in Winter it takes 40-55 days for maturation, After maturity the larva wraps itself and becomes Pupa .This is called 'Leta Bandha '.Actually the larva undergoes metamorphosis inside the cocoon and becomes pupa. Pupa is the inactive resting stage of Silkworm. It is a transitional Period. During this period , biological activity of Larval body and its Internal organs undergo a complete change and assume the new form of Adult Moth. In this way, the life cycle of Muga is complete .

4.01 MUGA REARING

The above mentioned Kharikas with the headset worms are hanged on the host plants. The larva immediately crawl and start feeding .Farmers rear Muga Silkworm in natural Som plantation commonly known as Somani. During the rearing period the rearers restricts the entry of people to the rearing plot as they believe that the evil sight of outsider may cause 'Mukh Laga' Disease. When the leaves are exhausted, the Larva crawl down and the rearers collected these worms in a chalani and again these are hanged on an another tree .They tie Gari Bandh, a Barrier on Tree Trunk , to prevent crawling down of Muga Larva during Rearing . After passing through 4 moults, the Larva reach the mature stage .In the final stage , larva becomes ripe. The ripe worms come down from the trees naturally in the evening and searches for a suitable place for spinning of cocoon .Then they are collected by rearers and put in baskets containing Mango and Azar leaves, dry leaves of Banana, Bhomloti etc., which are set on *Jali* for the spinning of Cocoons. The spinning takes 2-3 days in summer and 7 days in winter.

4.02 POST COCOON PROCESSING

It includes all processes to obtain silk thread from cocoon

Stifling:

The rearers kills the pupa for the purpose of collecting yarns. The Process of Killing Pupa inside cocoon is termed as Stifling. Good sized cocoon of 8-10 days old are selected for further processing. Stifling is done by subjecting cocoon to hot water, heat of fire, heat of sun .

Degumming:

It is the process by which gummy substance is softened and compact filaments are released for reeling. Muga cocoons are degummed by traditional methods .The cocoons loosely tied in cloths are boiled in a 10% sodium solution for 15 to 20 minutes .Cocoon cooking or Boiling is done to make the cocoon fiber reel able by swelling and softening. After cooking, fibers ends are collected from boiled cocoons and then several fibers are reeled together by imparting twists (using phutukala pat).

4.03 REELING OF COCOONS

Almost entire reeling is done with a primitive machine called Bhir . The Bhir or Bhowri is the most common process used for Muga Reeling .The process of Muga reeling requires two persons: One person releases the filaments from cocoon while the other twist the filament into one thread and air. After that Bhir reelers reel in Bhowri with Warm water in 40-45 degree Celsius .After this the muga yarns becomes Nesa .

4.04 MUGA SILK HANDLOOM WEAVING

Muga Handloom weaving in Assam is age-old cottage industry. It has great cultural relevance specially for the Tai ahom people of Assam .After getting the Muga Yarns the Women wraps these yarns into Ugha and starts preparation for weaving .The traditional Handloom is locally called Sal which is used for weaving cotton and as well as for Muga silk . The accessories of ‘Sal’ are Letai, Chereki, UghaTulutha, Mahura,Maku, Garaka,Sali, Siri,Salimari,Phular Kathi, Dangmari, Kanot dia Mari etc. which are still being used today . After preparation of Sal,the Muga Yarns are combined with kuchi by using Vatar Mar(excess water of boiled rice) for preparation of weaving the muga Yarns .This method is called *Tahon Diya* . After this process the Sal is ready for weaving .

The Present Scenario of Muga Culture

Muga culture is an indigenous practice of sericulture, the rearing of silkworms, and the production of silk yarn and fabric, that is endemic to Assam, India. The muga silkworm, *Antheraea assamensis*, is a semi-domesticated species that feeds exclusively on the leaves of the champa tree (*Michelia champaca*). Muga silk is known for its golden yellow color and lustrous texture, and it is considered to be one of the most valuable silks in the world.

Muga culture is a vital part of the Assamese economy and culture. It provides employment for over 2 million people, and it contributes significantly to the state's GDP. Muga silk is also an important part of Assamese identity, and it is used in traditional Assamese clothing, jewelry, and handicrafts.

Global Impact of Muga Culture

The allure of Muga silk has transcended geographical boundaries, capturing the attention of fashion enthusiasts and textile connoisseurs worldwide. Muga's unique luster and vibrant hues have found their way onto international runways and fashion boutiques, showcasing the artistry and craftsmanship of Assamese weavers. This global exposure has not only generated economic opportunities for local artisans but has also ignited a broader appreciation for the cultural heritage associated with Muga.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its global recognition, Muga culture faces several challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability. The dwindling population of Mulberry trees, the primary source of food for Muga silkworms, poses a significant threat to the industry. Additionally, the influx of cheaper synthetic fabrics has impacted the demand for Muga silk, making it increasingly difficult for traditional weavers to earn a livelihood.

In response to these challenges, concerted efforts are underway to safeguard Muga culture. Government initiatives, such as the Muga Silk Project, are focused on expanding Mulberry tree plantations, promoting sustainable sericulture practices, and providing financial assistance to weavers. Simultaneously, non-profit organizations and community groups are working tirelessly to raise awareness about Muga silk, emphasizing its ethical production methods and cultural significance.

Findings:

1. Muga culture is facing various challenges, including a decline in the number of Muga silk weavers, a lack of awareness about Muga silk among the younger generation, and increasing competition from other types of silk.
2. Muga culture has a significant global impact, both in terms of its economic and cultural value.

Future Recommended Research

1. Market Research and Consumer Analysis
2. Enhancing Sustainability Practices
4. Economic Impact Assessment and Policy Recommendations
5. Promoting Cultural Exchange and International Collaboration

These research recommendations aim to address the challenges and opportunities facing Muga culture, ensuring its preservation, sustainable growth, and global impact for generations to come.

Conclusion

The Muga culture of the Ahom people stands as a beacon of cultural heritage, weaving together tradition, artistry, and global recognition. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is imperative to preserve and promote Muga culture, ensuring its continued vitality for generations to come. By embracing its unique identity and adapting to the changing landscape, Muga culture can continue to flourish, illuminating the world with its golden threads of tradition and craftsmanship.

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