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#### Vishaka GV

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

#### Rathore MS

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

#### Chandrashekharaiyah M

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

#### Nadaf HA

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

#### Sinha RB

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

#### Corresponding Author:

#### Vishaka GV

Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed  
Organization-Central Silk Board,  
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

## Tasar for Tribes: A way of life

**Vishaka GV, Rathore MS, Chandrashekharaiyah M, Nadaf HA and Sinha RB**

#### Abstract

In India most of the population lives in villages and has a vast diverse culture and tradition throughout the country. Even though India is pretty much developed in all aspects but still we see the tribes existing in many parts of the country. Tribes, usually live in forest patches with enormous flora and fauna. There are places where tribes live and not aware of outside world, not aware of simple technology and there are tribes where they can't even have single meal a day and situation goes pathetic. The forest areas where in tribes live has dense trees among which Arjun, Asan and sal plants do exist. These arjun, asan and sal plants generally called as tasar silkworm food or host plants. Hence, these plants can be utilized by tribes in growing or rearing tasar silkworms out of which huge cocoons can be harvested within a very short span, generating man days and money by selling the cocoons. Thus, the money from tasar can fetch bread and butter to tribes. Therefore, Tasar sericulture can be proved as the best profession for upliftment of tribes. The greatest advantage of tasar culture is that it does not require any investment and with simple methods sound cocoon crop can be harvested. Tasar can grow as an indispensable part of tribal culture and medium for the transformation weird wild to economy.

**Keywords:** Sericulture, tasar, tribes

#### Introduction

The master creators of the world famous Indian tasar belong to aboriginal forest populous who have been rearing tasar silkworms for centuries. The term tasar has been apparently derived from the Sanskrit word *trasara* meaning shuttle. Tasar is a variety of silk produced from tropical tasar silkworm (*Antheraea mylitta*) and temperate tasar silkworm (*Antheraea proylei*) by feeding on Arjun (*Terminalia arjuna*), Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*) and Oak plants (*Quercus sp.*). These silkworms constitute a significance component of forest based faunal diversity. Tasar (Tussah) is copperish, coarse silk, unique in nature and has its own feel and appeal. It is mainly used for weaving sarees, furnishings and interiors. The Indian Tropical Tasar silk is specific to India and it is a special gift to the world and thus, the versatility of Indian tasar silk is unmatched.

Tasar silk production is a forest based agro-industry being practiced by the tribal residents in jungles. It holds a great promise for the rural populace, especially for tribal people in providing their livelihood. Tasar Sericulture industry is gaining momentum for the reasons that this industry creates more employment avenues up to 2.5 lakh rural aboriginal families of the country and gives high returns with low investments for sustainable development.

Tasar culture is the main stay for many tribal communities in India. The dense humid tropical forest sprawling over the central and southern plateau is the habitat of tropical tasar silk moths. Tropical tasar culture are extensively practiced by tribal families in the States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and other states as they are associated with it either in collection of nature grown cocoons or rearing of silkworm on forest / natural flora <sup>[1, 7, 11, 17, 18, 19]</sup>.

Furthermore, it is practiced especially in tribal belts of Surguja, Raigarh, Bilaspur, Korba and Bastar district of the Chhattisgarh state <sup>[3, 5]</sup>. Odisha is also a major source of livelihood for rural poor, mostly in the tribal dominated districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Koraput, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Nawarangpur, Jajpur, Deogarh and Dhenkanal <sup>[9]</sup>. The state is traditionally a Tasar belt. Tribal people of Ranchi, Saraikela-Kharsawan, Giridih, Deoghar and Kuchai blocks of Jharkhand have been traditionally doing tasar culture in natural forest as well as in their homestead.

While, temperate tasar sericulture is largely confined to north-eastern states and found in

abundance in the sub-Himalayan belt of India covering from Jammu and Kashmir in west to Manipur in east including Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland [8]. It is a seasonal crop taken-up from June/July to January/February months and 3 crops in a year for quick and better returns.

### **Tasar for UP lift ment of tribes livelihood**

During last few decades, the advancement in agriculture, industrialization and urbanization has depleted the forest coverage which resulted in the erosion of biodiversity. Tasar culture being traditional practice in the concentrated tribal belts in different States plays a pivotal role in providing livelihood to tribal populace who are dependent on biodiversity utilization for their sustenance.

Tasar culture in India is not only an industry but also a tradition. It remained obscure for a pretty long time as an exclusive craft of the tribal, hill folks and aboriginal inhabiting the remote forest areas of central plateau and north eastern areas.

The greatest boon of tasar culture is that it does not have any investment on electricity, plantation, rearing appliances and extra essentials as tasar silkworms are reared on the forest trees in the untamed conditions. Perhaps, Tasar culture not only prevent the destruction of forest but also endow with a productive exploitation of cosmic natural resources with awfully minimum investment along with massive employment generation in rural areas and progress of down-troddens [11].

The tasar silkworm is polyphagous in nature so it is a boon to tribals as they depend on collection and sale of wild tasar cocoons which are grown naturally [12].

The culture of residence tribes in the subtropical jungle belt of India is intimately interwoven with Tropical Tasar and as a special craft that embrace a unique distinction in their customary wisdom and communal evolution. And it had been a lucrative occupation for the tribes from time immemorial.

Tasar, today, is an indispensable and growing part of tribal culture and medium for transformation of the whole rural economy in relation to the national structure [16]. The industry has rich natural resources (Host plant) and man power (Tribal) and the challenge is to utilize these to bring about a balanced development in keeping the tradition and way of life.

The tasar sericulture plays a great role in safeguarding of bio-resources. It also grants persistent lofty economic returns, engenders employment opportunities and has prospective to pave a strong basis for tasar silk based rural cottage industries. It is suggested from the diverse studies of global description that endorsing and encouraging sericulture will help to rebuild the ecological balance and not only check environmental degradation but also conserve endangered silk insects, associated flora and fauna for posterity [20].

Above all, tasar sericulture is entrenched tradition for majority of the tribes who reside near the forests. Historically, for tribes of Surguja district tasar sericulture was one of the cultural activities, however, due to social and climatic conditions; it stayed as a subsidiary basis of earning for them. Similar to the men folks, the women of the county also undertake hard outdoor work, therefore the entire family of the rearers can engage themselves in tasar sericulture. The tribes of Surguja district share a great extent of culture with folks in neighboring Jharkhand and Orissa where tasar silkworm rearing is extensively spread. In the last decade or

so, the utilization of tasar silkworm seed has augmented manifolds due to contribution of more number of beneficiaries and remunerative price for seed and commercial cocoon.

Financial independency of tribes, specially women all the way through adopted rearing of tropical tasar silkworms is a steppingstone to by and large empowerment and contains many fold implications; in the first case, it aid a positive addition to attentiveness and an enhanced status in household, community and society in terms of involvement in judgment and have control over resources and earnings. In the second case, it endorses self-respect, good health and edification and an amplified participation in the democratic process, environmental attentiveness and lastly, prevents migration in search of income to other areas of plane. The victory of the tribes in tasar sericulture has not only opened new-fangled horizons of avocation, but also has brought in much needed social changes like forest management, awareness for biodiversity conservation, Self-help group (SHG) activity for empowerment and social up lift ment.

Sericulture is potential practices which facilitate year-round income, livelihood and successively have key role in rural development. Sericulture is labour intensive practices in all its phases of operations and for producing each kilogram of raw silk it generate employment for nearly eleven people, out of which 6 persons are women. More than 60.00 lakh persons are employed as full time workers in the production chain out of which 35-40 lakh persons are women [14]. It plays a vital role in the flow of income from the urban rich sections of the society to the rural poor.

Tasar sericulture will aid in improved livelihood of tribes specially women and not only help to protect the natural resources and its biodiversity along with, but also lend a hand to retain and increasingly flourish the continuous breathing of tasar tradition and its currency in the fast changing world.

Tasar cultivation has emerged as a forest based commercially attractive economic activity. The silk culture plays a principle role in the protection of our bio-resources. It also provides sustained high economic returns, generates employment opportunities and has potential to pave a strong foundation for silk-based rural cottage industries (10). It is recommended from the various studies of global account that promoting and encouraging sericulture will not only check environmental degradation and help to rebuild the ecological balance, but also conserve endangered silk insects, associated fauna and flora for posterity. Tasar culture had provided income vis-a-vis livelihood by creating 50-125 mandays. Cent percent respondents were found to be consuming better food, enjoy better housing (98.00%) having better cultivation (75.00%), good clothing (73.33%) and availing transport facilities due to tasar cultivation [6].

12000 families are actively engaged in tasar culture in tribal belts of Odisha. The state has four types of forests of which tropical humid forest constitutes 80 % of the total forest area and primary tasar food plants are abundantly available. Thus, the state has 15,000 hectares of natural forest and about 6000 hectares of economic plantation is presently being used for tasar farming. The reared race dabba constitutes 66.62 % of the total production, whereas wild cocoon collection accounts for about 33.38 % during the last five years. Annually more than 45,500 kahans of tasar cocoons are produced and marketed in the state. The tribal farmers earn about 7.3 crore rupees out of it with a very nominal investment on seed. The production of tasar cocoons has increased over the years. Considering the vast forest wealth, availability of skilled

weavers and human resources in the state, tasar industry has a bright future<sup>[9]</sup>.

The tasar culture is a good mean for the tribals to make use of the natural wealth of tasar food plants, i.e., Arjuna, Asan and Sal, which are available in plenty amount in the tribal areas. The study also revealed that a family can earn income of Rs.2.000 to Rs.4000 in a period of about 40-50 days. The tasar culture can provide larger employment at door and extra income to the tribal people living in the state<sup>[11]</sup>.

There is huge scope for sericulture development in the tribal areas. It has high potentialities of raising the per capita income of tribal people. Hence, there is need to develop and improve sericulture industry with planned efforts which in turn will open up new ways for industrial entrepreneurship on small scale in those tribal areas. This will again be helpful to solve the problem of shifting cultivation in the tribal belts. Therefore, high priority should be given to the preparation, implementation and development of these integrated schemes for sericulture development in tribal sub plans. This will provide better fame for the poor tribal making planned development process much socially purposeful and lucrative for them<sup>[13]</sup>.

Therefore, in order to protect the Tasar bio-diversity and to improve the lifestyle of tribes inhabiting in and around the forest of Districts Chhattisgarh, Surguja, high level effort have been put by the Central Silk Board, Govt. of India to produce additional Bivoltine (BV) quality Tasar Seed Cocoons with the help of adopted silkworm seed rearing mainly through tribal women self help groups. Their seven-year's success journey of Tasar Seri-business from 2002-03 to 2008-09 fairly indicates that there has been an cumulative per farmer average annual income of Rs. 3198=00, which lies around 27 % of their overall annual income. In terms of seed production, their aggregate contribution was 51.47 % and 47.52 % respectively. It transparently indicates that same efforts at national level definitely bridge the current demand and supply gap of 74.02 Lakh tasar disease free layings<sup>[2]</sup>.

It was observed that Raw Material Bank (RMB) of central government was more functional found to be helping farmers in price fixation and marketing of cocoon but less involved in providing the information to the farmers about new technologies. However, PRADAN (NGO) and Pilot Project Centre (State government) were found to be involved more in disseminating the information about improved technology of Tasar culture.

It was in recent past that this tribal tradition assumed importance and attracted the attention at national as well in International level. The rich production potentials within the country and steady demand of the products in foreign countries is promoting the commercial exploitation of this craft and thus, culminated in the transformation of age-old tradition to an industry of immense potentiality.

The progress of tasar industry in different tasar growing states is showing gradual increasing trend and therefore seems to be satisfactory in performance. Regarding marketing, the capacity to purchase by the apex society is required to be increased gradually by enhancing working capital funds and due to slump in the export front, the indigenous marketing system with diversification of the products are required to be looked into. In view of the both scope and potential of tasar industry in tasar growing states, expansion on the industry to the potential pockets of the state might help in poverty alleviation programme. Since the country is having considerable size of tribal population, sericulture industry is

especially helpful for their economic up gradation.

### **Role of central silk board**

The biggest challenge spurring now is to improve their self-sustaining local systems, re-creating people's belief in their own capabilities and the wealth of their own indigenous talent for self-development and improvement. Any activity having aim at economic development of the tribal people has to be integrated with their culture and must be collective, why because collectivism is the essence of life for tribal community people and "The tasar sericulture industry" suits it very perfectly. Conservation of forest biodiversity necessarily requires community involvement, importantly tribes; because of their strong association and their treasured tradition.

In this regard, multi level effort is being made by central silk board reaching the tribes deep down the forests. Central silk board through unit's viz., CTR&TI, Ranchi, BTSSO and BSM&TC is able to produce quality disease free layings (DFL's) and supplying to the tribes. Along with the seed supply efforts are also been made in transferring the technology to the tribes. Central silk board has implemented Tribal sub plan (TSP), Mahila shasakthikaran Pariyojna (MKSP), Capacity building training and skill enhancement programmes, Vanya cluster promotion programme and many more for up lift ment of tribes. MKSP is specially for women empowerment and building confidence among tribal women. Central silk board in collaboration with state sericulture departments is playing a vital role in order to help poorest among poor to improve their standard of living and for up lift ment of their lives.

Determined attempts have been made for adoption of tasar culture as multi-pronged strategic approach by introducing a technology-based integrated farming model, empowering and capacitating communities to take the lead in implementation and marketing of the produce, providing strong backup support with an effective monitoring system. The scientific cultivation technique of silk need is being promoted in the concerned areas with time to time training, monitoring and marketing of the products for betterment of the tribes.

Endeavour of central silk board in Tasar culture was not only for generating rural livelihood, employment, income and preventing rural migration but also for its role in protection and preservation of ecology, heritage and socio-cultural values.

### **Conclusion**

Tasar silk sector eminently qualifies as one of the most appropriate agro-based cottage industry for tribal development, environment protection, rejuvenation and as prominent poverty eradicator measure. This sector not only important for generating rural employment but also prevents rural migration. It is noteworthy that adopting the tasar culture by tribes conserve the environment by non-cutting and felling of trees because tasar culture is now their way of life. It is remarkable that tasar culture is suited the life style of tribe because practice of tasar culture is simple and can be done without any cost and skill. In present day world when manmade fiber manufacturing units are invariably polluting the environment, there is no doubt that sericulture should prosper as an eco-friendly culture to meet the requirement of exclusive fabrics of the people. And tasar culture remarkably suit to the tribes has greatest advantage in providing food, shelter and all basic necessities by only depending on tasar culture. So, as a matter of fact, the tasar culture greatly

influence on the lives of tribes in generating penny in a very short span.

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