

# Women empowerment by way of Muga Silk Industry

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## Abstract:

*This is an analytical discussion regarding the importance of women empowerment for the sustainability of socio-economic growth. Economic empowerment is one of the basic tools for social empowerment. In this article, it has been shown about the role of female weaver to empower them in the family as well as society through engaged themselves as a weaver in the Muga and Mulberry industry. Reasonably, 200 units of silk factories are taken as sample and on the basis of that data are collected to analysis the study. The analysis highlights the female weavers' participation in percentage as well as the male participants, and also shown weavers participants from owner's family member and hired group.*

## Introduction:

In spite of phenomenal growth of science and technology, the status of women in the world is still pitiable. They are not treated equally by men in our society. Categorically, they are always treated as second class in all respect. In India, gender inequality prevails in great way in all relation to religion, education, politics, income related work, decision making process and so on. Indian mythology quotes, "May you a mother of hundred sons". This is a common Hindu wedding blessing. This implies son's means men are placed superior to women in their count. This thought is still alive in many parts of the world particularly in third world nation. So, it is the need of the society to empower them otherwise we can never claim us as a part of the civilized society.

## Women empowerment: A general view

Empowerment is a relatively recent movement in the context of human development so far as western world is concerned. Empowerment literally means "to invest with power." Power is defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of other with and without restrain. To extend to which as person or group holds such power is related to the social influence that can wield. It also control over resources bodily categorized as intellectual and physical.

Therefore empowerment provided women, the ability to gain control over resources, develop physical and psychological capacity to challenge the prevailing gender customs.

Economic empowerment is one of the keys, which help to achieve position in the family and in society. If the female are economically empower it would boost them to respond to challenges; to confront their traditional role and change their life. The rise in feminist ideas in all over the world given importance on women's rights as a result the position of women are gradually improving but at a very slow rate.

*The position of female can be imagining by the UNDP reports. Women do 67% of world's total work but against this they earn only 10% of world's total income. They are the owner of miserably 1% of world's property.* Most of the female work does not come under monetary exchange. For example, the works that are not coming under the jurisdiction of income earning are preparing food, hauling water, collecting fire wood, taking care of their children and the senior members of the family and so on. In case of income related job, particularly in private sector (unorganized), they are not paid equally to men. Moreover, they are not paid in due time. Many peripheral problems also faced by them in getting their regular payments against their labour.

But these income related discrepancies we do not see in the weaving sector of the silk industry. Without any gender discrimination, women weavers respectfully earn their income and as a result they are able to achieve a better position in their family as well as in the society.

Like financial power education also plays a significant role in social empowerment. But the study reveals, in both the cases the position of male is far above to female. According to census report of the government of India 2010-2011 the literacy rate is 74.04%. Male literacy rate in the country is 82.04% and female rate is 65.46%. In case of Assam literacy rate is 73.18. Male literacy rate is 78.81% and female rate is 67.27% at the same time period. (Census of Assam Government Report) In famous quote of Napoleon Bonaparte, "Give me good mother I will give you good nation".

Family is the base of a society and we can say women are the base of a family. The children spend most of the time of their childhood with their mother. So, no one can influence a child like as a mother. An educated mother can guide her child in right way even she can boldly point out the drawback of our customs so that in coming time these can be reformed. Education can influence women in numbers of ways and which have tremendous impact on the development of the society as a whole.

Sound economic condition measures the status of an individual, a family, a society and a country. Personal economic empowerment helps him or her to acquire a respectable position in the family. The impact of this thought influenced the urban women immensely. They loved to regard them as working women rather, mere a house wife. It is also a fact, women participation in economic development is ignorable now a days. Even in the village also initiative of taking the matter seriously and many women came forward to make them economically empower. This is all together a good symptom for the socio-economic progress of a society.

Since ancient times, women are engaged themselves some economic activities like agricultural work, rearing of poultry, animal husbandry, rearing of silk worm and so on. But most importantly the Women folk engaged themselves in weaving in the North East India. They are born weaver and learn the art at home. Most of them engage them in this art to supply the family needs and whatever surplus comes out of their activity they send them to the market for sale and earn extra money for the family need.

Women empowerment by way of muga silk industry:

In the traditional Silk Industry, Muga and mulberry weaving sector is completely different and it is almost 100% commercial based. Every stage of its production and activity is based on money (Wage). Everyone who is working under this industry gets their remuneration on the basis of their skill and ability work. According to their work, remuneration is paid on daily, weekly, monthly wage basis. Viz. payment for weaving of each plain Mekhela and Chaddar (Traditional dress of Assamese) used to be Rs 120/- and Rs 150/- respectively in 2011. Each weaver gets Rs 5/- for 100 Muthi phul (to and fro process of embroidery shuttle 100 times) embroidery and Rs 1.50/- for 100 mutha of buta (to and fro process of embroidery thread movement by hand 100 times) embroidery in 2011.

Generally we look wage discrimination in unorganized private sector. Women workers are paid lesser compare to men for the same amount of work done. But it is the weaving sector where weavers may be male or female there is no discrimination in payment. Moreover, the female weaver gets some special benefit compare to men. For example the female weaver who is not local they get the facility of staying in the Mahajans house without paying rent, they no need to pay current bill and etc. Since they stay in the owner's house, so, they can weave in the factory at night hours (overtime) and as a result they weave more cloth and earn more money (wages). Moreover leave period also very less compare to male weaver

as they stay in the owner's house. As the female weaver stays the owner's house they are considered like family member of the owner and therefore, during puja or any festival mahajan (owner) used to give them festival bonus.

In silk industry, almost 60% of weavers are women. The owners of the handlooms generally like to employ women, because they are disciplined and dedicated to do their work punctually. Women in North East India are born weaver. They traditionally earned the knowledge of weaving in handloom sector of the industry.

One (single) weaver can earn from weaving Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 8,000/- per month. It can be more or less on the basis of their work done. The incomes vary on the basis of their skill and ability to work. Payment for weaving a Mekhela (dress material for women to be used in the lower part of the body) or a Chadar (dress material to be used by women in the upper part of the body) varies from one unit to the other depending on the type of embroidery work – Phool/Buta – flower/bud one on the dress material. Payment is purely on the basis of work.

Following field Study reveals the latest position of human labour employment in weaving sector of Muga and Mulberry industry of Assam.

There are colloquial terms used identifying the sizes of the weaving firms. They are small, medium and big. The term is on the basis of number of handlooms possessed in a particular family. Generally, the family having 1 to 3 units of handlooms is said to be as small firm, 4 to 6 units as medium firm and 7 and above units of handlooms is taken as big firm. This type of identification based on numbers is used to show the employment from owners' family and hired labour involvement in different size of firms in the weaving sector of the industry.

Table-8 (A)

Percentage of Male and Female Weavers in various firms

Sl. No.	Nos. of Handlooms	Weaver		Owner			Hired Weaver		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1.	1 to 3 (small size weaving firm)	44.97	55.03	31.95	37.28	69.23	13.02	17.75	30.77
2.	4 to 6 (medium size weaving firm)	42.64	57.36	14.29	19.19	33.48	28.14	38.38	66.52
3.	7and more (Big size weaving firm)	40.21	59.79	3.09	5.15	8.25	37.11	54.64	91.75

Source: *Field Survey*

Fig.-1

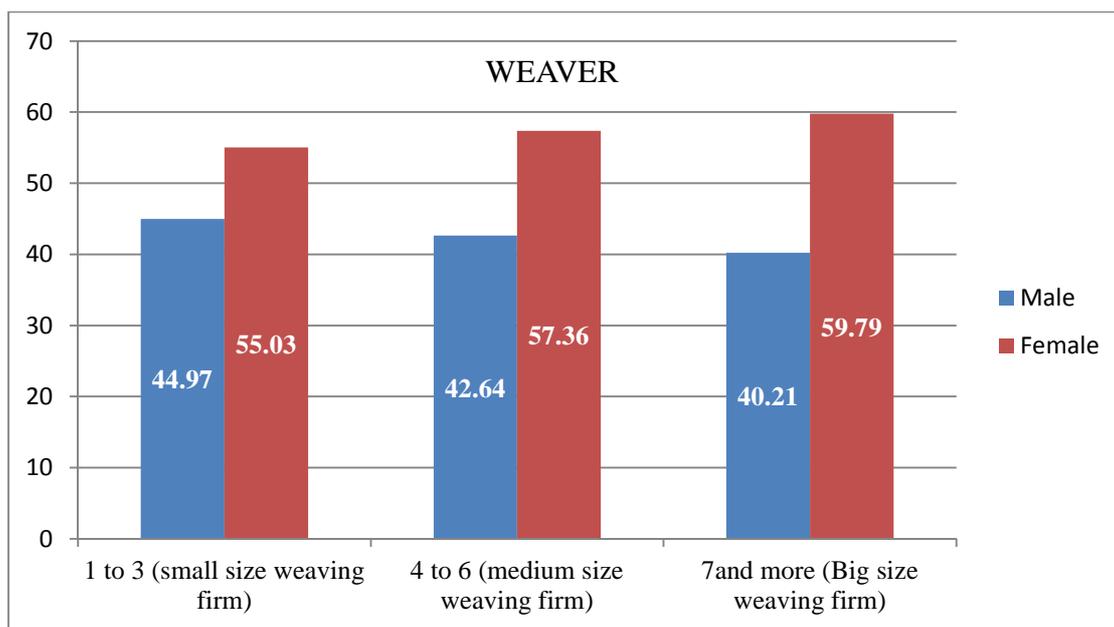


Fig.-2

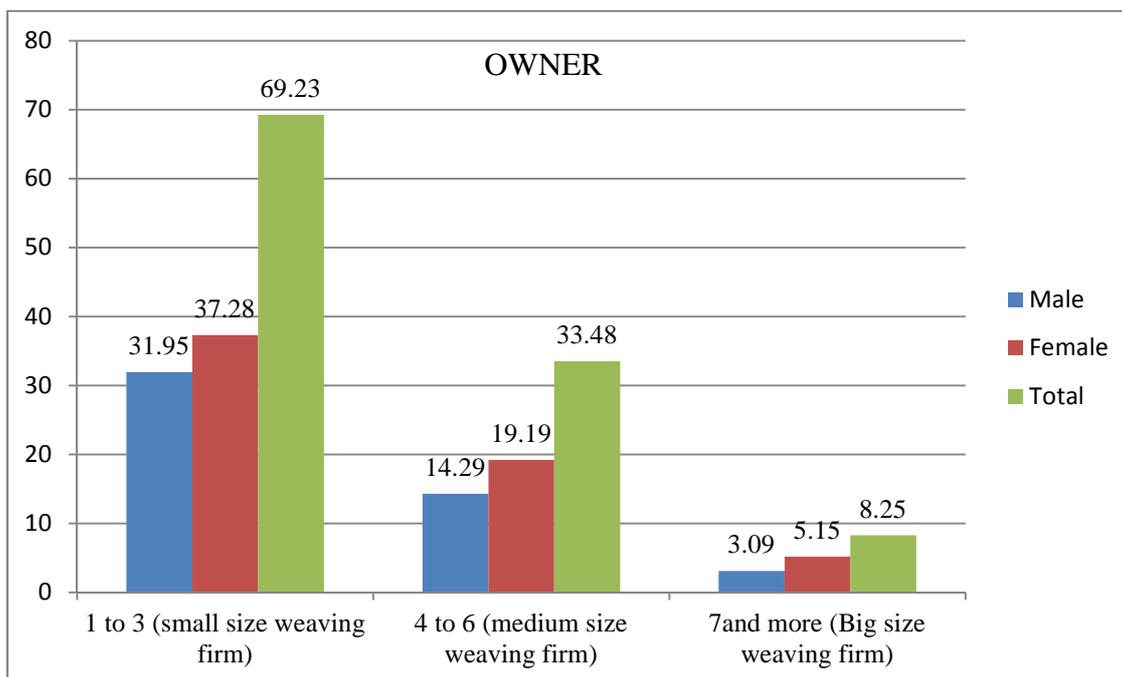
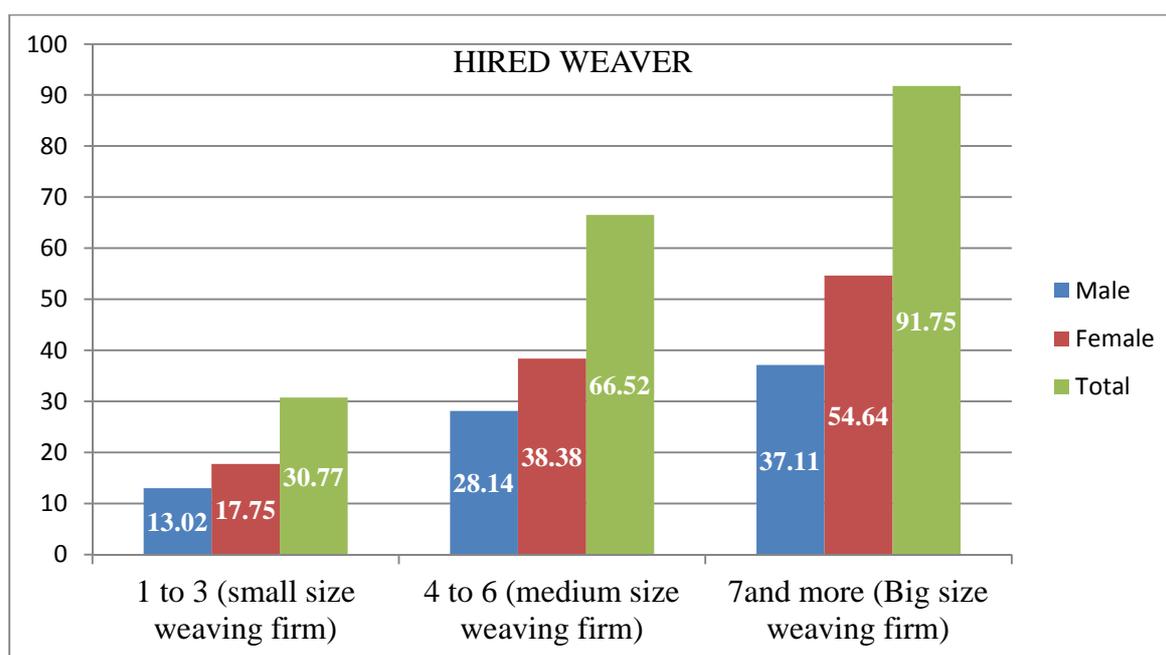


Fig.-3



In Assam muga handlooms are mostly concentrated in Soalkuchi which is known as Manchester of Assam. This has more than 90% of muga handlooms. 200 families having handlooms have been taken for the purpose of the study. I have categorized the handloom industry into three types of firms such as- small, medium and big in the said table for the purpose of analytical convenience. Small firms with 1-3 handlooms mainly depend on weavers from owner family where hired helpers are rarely taken. In medium firms having 4-7 handlooms hired weavers perform important works though weavers from owners' families also contribute to a certain extent. The contribution of hired helpers however cannot be ignored. In big size firms possessing more than 7 handlooms, the contribution of weavers from the family is negligible and there is a great dependence on hired weavers. Continuous help from the hired helpers are also taken by the big firms.

In small firms 44.97% are male weavers and 55.03% are female. Out of total weavers 31.95% are male and 37.28% female from the owner's family. Owners' families contribute as high as 69.23 percent of the total weavers engaged for the purpose. It may also be observed that, 13.02% male and 17.75% female weavers are found hired among the total works. Thus the percentage of hired weaver is 30.77%.

In medium size firms 42.64% are male and 57.36% are female weavers. Out of total weavers 14.29% are male and 19.19% are female from owners' family. Thus family labour

constitutes 33.48% of total labour employ. Again out of total weavers 28.14% are hired male and 38.38% hired female weavers. Hired weavers constitute 66.52%.

In big size firms 40.21% are male and 57.79% are female weavers. Out of total weavers only 3.09 of male and 5.15% of female weavers come from owner's family. So the total percentage of weavers from owner's family is 8.25%. Again out of total weavers 37.11% are hired male and 54.64% are female weavers. Percentage of hired weavers stands at 91.75%.

The above discussion clearly shows each and every type of firms the number of female weaver is more than male weaver. Moreover with the increase in the firm size the number of hired weaver goes up. Again in case of hired weaver also number of female weaver is more than the male weaver.

Through the weaving the female weaver gets employment opportunities and make themselves financially self dependent. Not only that the female weaver contribute financial help to their family. Again some of them take full responsibility of a family. Generally the supply of weaver is less than its demand so the fluctuation of raw material prices does not influence much the employment of weaver. The price of raw material has a direct impact on price of the finished product. To develop the industry sufficient supply of raw material is very important, therefore the government should have taken proper initiative to increase the supply of raw material and moreover they should take care of the prices so that they should not fluctuate much.

Sexual harassment is very common in the working place of women. But this type of incidence is very rare in case of the weaver. There is always having a great demand for weaver. If any incidence happen weaver have option to go for work in other firm which the owner of the firm never be wanted.

The government has given importance on the development of the industry but which is not sufficient. Some self help groups are getting facility from the government for rearing and reeling etc. But the weavers are not getting minimum facilities to develop themselves.

The weaver can earn up to Rs.8000 per month which is not so good as well as not so bad also, as it is much above the poverty line.

### Recommendation:

Economic Empowerment is one of the important pillars of empowering a person and which develop self confidence and position in the family as well as society. Through the weaving, the female weaver is getting self dependency in finance. Their power to give self opinion in the family decision and the family member also gives importance on their opinion. As they are financially self dependent therefore, they get courage to raise voice against any kind of harassment. They can even take strong decision like divorce if necessary. More over in the work there is no discrimination between male and female worker the filling of equality grows in their mind. This is a very good symptom from society's point of view. The number of female employee is more than male. So this helps to think them as a prime unit of the industry. As a whole through the weaving they achieve economic empowerment which leads them to empower themselves in all respects.

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