

THE ONLINE VISIT FOR JUNE 2022 WAS PROPOSED WITH THE FOLLOWING PROGRAM.

Awareness Campaign on

1. Sualkuchi, situated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, It has large number of cottage industry engaged in handloom, for which it is also known as the "Manchester of Assam". It has also made Assam the land of Golden Threads.
2. Cultural exchange program with paired state Rajasthan

This was aimed to enhance

Tourist Awareness campaign, School students awareness campaign, visit
(Online /offline)

Tourist Stakeholder Awareness workshop

SUWALKUCHI

THE MANCHESTER OF THE EAST

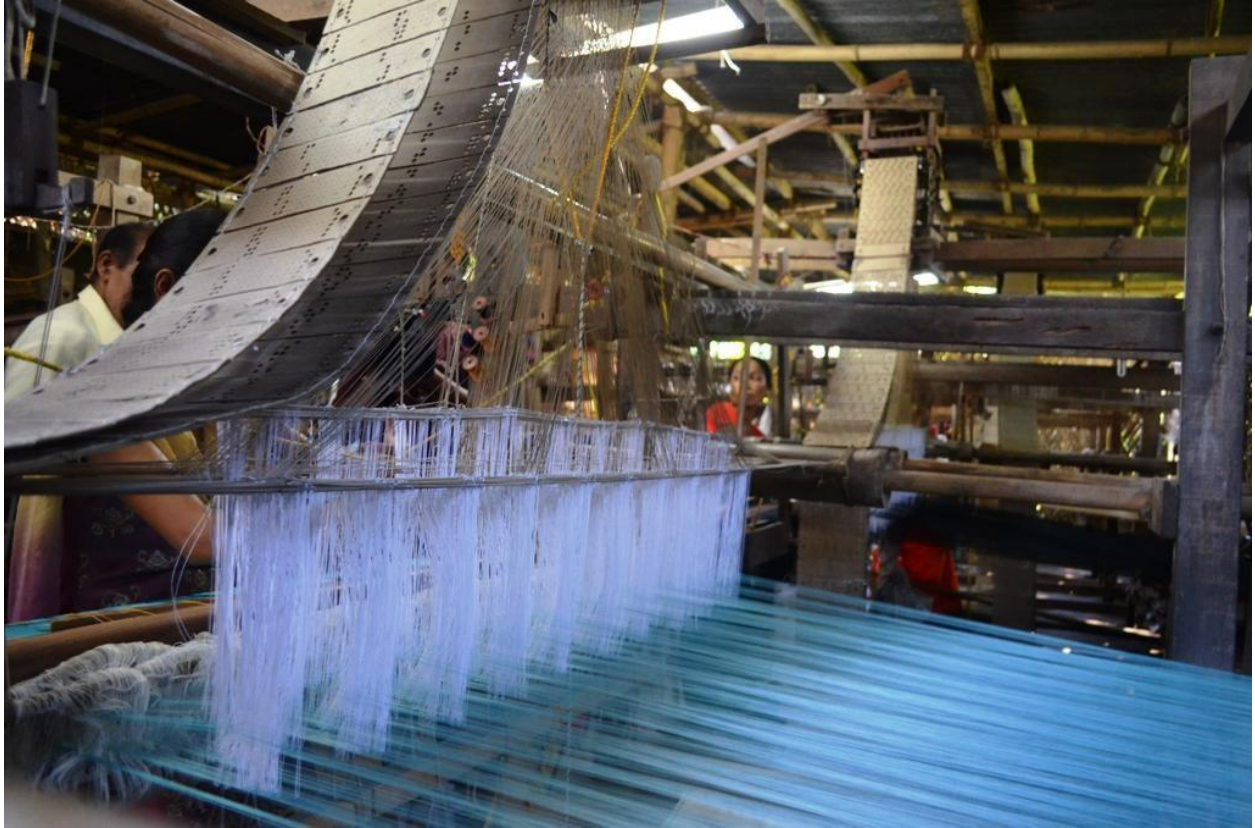
The state of Assam is located in the North Eastern region of the country and is often called as the gateway to North East India. Assam is a land that is a delightful blend of culture, heritage, faiths and beliefs of numerous ethnic communities of the state who have been inhabiting the place since times immemorial and have a culture and tradition that is





rich and is based on the powers of nature and they have passed on these cultures and traditions across their generations. The culture and traditions of the indigenous people combined with the music, dance and literature are all interwoven into the social fabric and they cross all barriers of caste, creed and religion. Known to all tourists across the World as a top biodiversity region that is home to varied flora, fauna and avifauna, every year thousands of tourists come to visit the famed land of Kaziranga National Park – the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Indian One Horned Rhinoceros and the big 5 and also the 495 species of birds that inhabit the forests of Kaziranga National Park. But two other things that define Assam to the outside World are the famous Assam tea (sourced from the lush green tea gardens of Upper Assam) and the heritage silk varieties of Assam viz. Muga, Eri and Paat.

Sualkuchi (Assamese pronunciation: [xualkusi]) is a census town in Kamrup district in the Indian state of Assam. It is situated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, about 35 km from Guwahati, Sualkuchi is a block of Kamrup District. It has large number of cottage industry engaged in handloom, for which it is also known as the **"Manchester of Assam"**.



Kautilya in his book Arthashastra mentions Sualkuchi as “golden land” because of the colour in the clothes woven by the folks of Sualkuchi. He has also written that there was a principality named Suvarnakudya, (present day Sualkuchi) in ancient Kamrup famous for its silk industry. As per 2001 census it provides residence to 21, 252 local people ‘excluding the migrants i.e. migrant weavers and other labours. The 1951 census had, classed it as a “very large” village with a population of 7598 out of which only 487 persons (6.40%) were dependent on agriculture.

Walking down the lanes of Sualkuchi one’s soul would certainly get filled by the soft and rhythmic dhak-dhuk of the shuttle flying across the

frame looms found in every home. Since, time immemorial the folk of Sualkuchiare engaged in the art of weaving and even today in the twenty first century where everything is fast changing with the advancement of technology, the methods adopted for weaving are almost same but the weavers have become more adept to the art. An attractive feature of weaving at Sualkuchi is engagement of the whole family into the profession. The weavers mostly do not have any institutional background in handloom weaving. They learn the art of weaving from their parents with regular practice. Weaving has become the prime source of income generation for both farmer weavers and only weavers.





The Ahom reign brought vast progress in the handloom sector of Sualkuchi. But the same could not happen during the British regime in India. Instead, tax was made applicable on using of Som and Soalu trees for rearing of Muga cocoons. The inhabitants of Sualkuchi even with such constraints carried on their duties related to handloom industry. Till pre-independence period Sualkuchi had faced difficulties in running the handloom industry.



Having a long tradition of silk weaving at least since the 17th century, Sualkuchi is the prime centre of the silk hand-loom industry of Assam. Although the weaving industry of Sualkuchi remained almost confined within the Tanti Community of Tantipara up-to the 1930, later people belonging to other communities also started to take up silk weaving gradually. Now, even the fishermen of the Koibortapara hamlet of Bamun-Sualkuchi and the Brahmin families have also given up their ascriptive caste occupations to a larger extent and they have taken up silk weaving as the main source of income. The weaving industry of Sualkuchi received a big boost during the Second World War. The growing demand for fabrics and their increasing prices, encouraged a few Tanti families to introduce weaving commercially and they started

weaving factories engaging hired wage weavers. Today, the factory system with semi-automatic Fly shuttle handloom has already been extended to entire Sualkuchi and 73.78% of the households of the town are being engaged with commercial weaving of hand-loom. The Census of Hand-looms in Sualkuchi conducted in 2002 reveals that Sualkuchi has 13752 active commercial hand-looms, of which 54.75% are performed by the woman weavers, who are basically hired from the outside of Sualkuchi. Although the hired wage weavers were originally the local poor from the Bamun-Sualkuchi area of the east and Bhatipara hamlet of the west, a flow of migrated wage weavers from different parts of Assam has emerged gradually since eighties of the last century and presently migrant weavers are dominating the wage weavers of the town. The Hand-loom industry of Sualkuchi encompasses cotton textile, silk textile as well as Khadi cloth which are, in fact, traditional cloth endowing high social and moral value in and outside the state. However, Sualkuchi is well known for silk textiles both mulberry and muga silk. In fact muga, “the golden fibre” is produced only in Assam and it has also tremendous export potentiality. Such activities are intimately linked with the culture and tradition of the Assamese people since long past.



Even Gandhiji, the father of the nation was also highly surprised about the art and culture of weaving of the Assamese women when he visited an exhibition of eri and khadi clothes in Sualkuchi on the 9th of January, 1946. He was greatly astonished when he saw that one of the expert weavers of the silk town had depicted him in the cloth produced in his hand-loom.

Sualkuchi is said to be the largest silk weaving village in the World and also the Manchester of the East. At Sualkuchi you will find numerous cottage industries that are engaged in the weaving of Mekhela Chadors from Muga silk as well as Pat silk. The three major silk varieties of Assam are the Muga silk (golden silk), Eri silk (warm silk) and the Paat silk (white silk) and all of these silk varieties are obtained from three different silk worms. While the Muga silk is derived from the

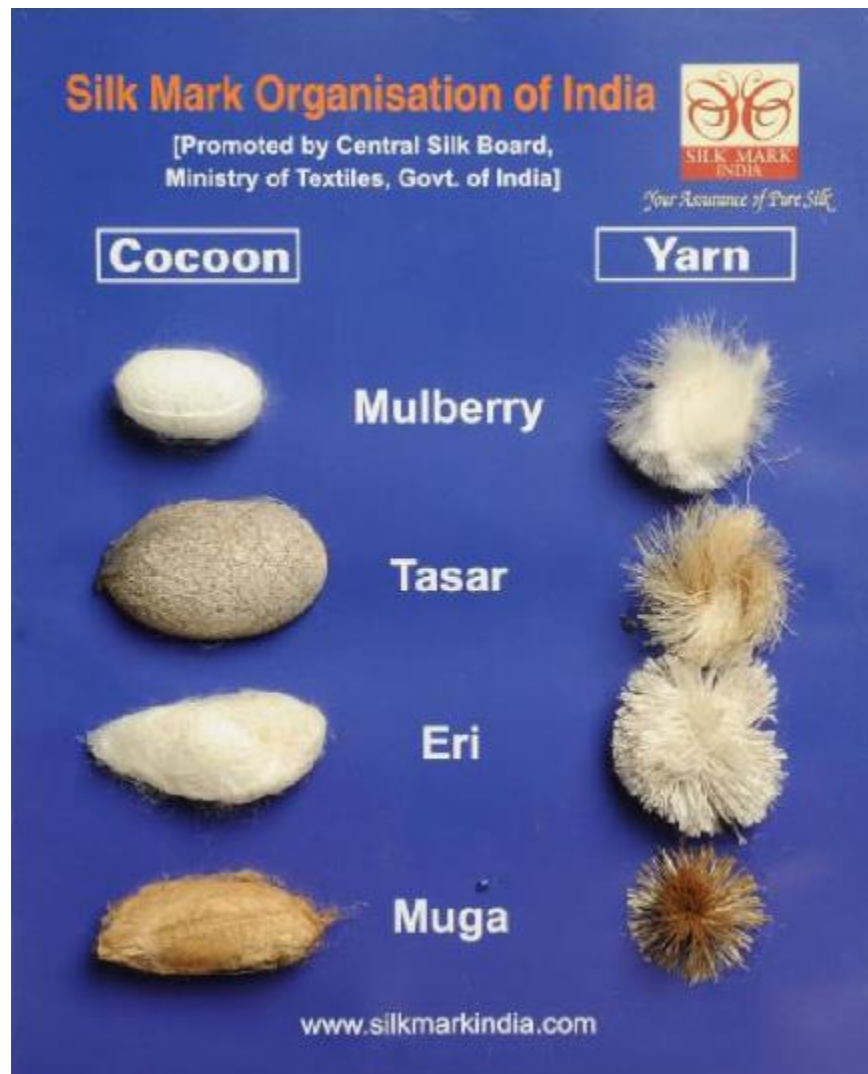




AantheraeaAsamenisis silk worm varieties that feed on the leaves of the Sualu and Som trees, the Eri silk is derived from the silkworms that feed on castor leaves and the Paat silk is derived from the silk worm that feed on the Mulberry tree leaves. When you visit Sualkuchi town you will be welcomed to the place with the various silk emporiums that are present along the main road and across these silk emporiums you will see the

various hand woven wonders of silk varieties of Assam with their bright hues being displayed here. It is believed that the earliest signs of silk weaving was started at Sualkuchi since the 11th century and this town had become an important industrial town of Assam once the Ahoms patronized the Muga silk and this silk variety had become an important export of Assam thus allowing a spike in demand and providing more opportunity to the weavers of Sualkuchi. Since then there has been no looking back for this tinsel town and it has gone on to be renowned across the World for its variety of silk and its silk weaving and the demand for the hand woven silk varieties of Sualkuchi has been constantly on a rise.

It is said that when Mahatma Gandhi had visited Sualkuchi in the year 1946 and he saw the Assamese women weaving on the looms at Sualkuchi town he said that “Assamese woman can weave dreams on their looms.” Not only at Sualkuchi but the people of various regions of Assam are known to be expert weavers and apart from the silk weaving on looms that is mostly an occupation of the women folks, the men folks are also expert weavers and they are known to be artists of bamboo and cane and they weave out exclusive handicrafts from these two naturally available materials all they weave out baskets, fishing tools, musical instruments, furniture’s, interior decors, mats, etc. using this bamboo and cane. Each community is known to have a different



way of weaving and separate looms to weave out these wonders and this is reflected in their attires. Assam is home to several tribal communities who have inhabited the place since time immemorial and as Assam was the gateway to India for various nations mostly South East Asia, the state had become the settling grounds of different civilizations who had come to Assam seeking greener pastures and they found the fertile banks of the Brahmaputra River where they settled and started to practice agriculture and hunting to sustain themselves. Assam opened out its

heart to everyone and the people adapted to the land of red rivers and blue hills as their own with their mind, body and soul. The culture of Assam has been enriched by the contributions of the various races, ethnicity and traditions and this has made the community of Assam secular in character. These tribal communities of Assam practice their own traditional methods of worship and they follow the principle of Doni Polo wherein they worship the forces of nature mostly the sun, moon and nature.





Sualkuchi is known to be the centre of commercial silk weaving in Assam and the place being located conveniently to Guwahati city finds an easy transport route to ship out materials to various parts of the state and the country as well. Silk weaving in Sualkuchi is believed to have been introduced in the 11th century and it found patronization by the Ahom Kings and Sualkuchi developed and flourished as the silk weaving village of Assam employing hundreds of artisans who began to work on Muga silk weaving and the demand for this silk variety started

to grow. Once you visit Sualkuchi you will be surprised to see the various shops and emporiums that are lined up alongside the road and the various colourful silk fabrics are put up on display here. Apart from the silk emporiums there are various silk weaving units and in case you seek permission from an owner you will have the opportunity of witnessing this silk weaving of Sualkuchi in person as well. The silk weaving units of Sualkuchi are mostly a cottage industry and family run business and these have been run by the families across generations employing local weavers who weave in the various looms that are kept at these units. At Sualkuchi one can find both men and women engaged in the silk weaving industry and also various migrant workers who come from various parts of Assam to weave out the wonders on the traditional looms of Sualkuchi.

Conclusion:

People involved in muga rearing, weavers, traders, zoologists, scientists and women folk of Assam are satisfied with the decision of the Directorate of Sericulture, Government of Assam, to create a wild muga sanctuary in South Kamrup. This is the first attempt by the Government of Assam after muga received GI status long back and this will be a timely step to protect muga





Muga And Paat Silk Mekhela