

# Mushroom Cultivation: A New Way To Earn Livelihood For Women In Rural Assam

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**Abstract:** There are hundreds of identified species of mushrooms which since time immemorial have made significant contribution towards human diet. Mushroom cultivation can help reduce vulnerability to poverty & strengthens livelihood through generation of a fast yielding and nutrition source of food and a reliable source of income. Women belonging to rural areas, socioeconomically deprived communities or minority concentrated areas suffer from various kinds of injustice & prejudice, especially when it comes to the matter of the upliftment of the social and economic status of women. Mushroom cultivation might be a very good option for them in order to develop self reliance among themselves and thus can help to a greater extent to improve their socioeconomic status so that the women will be able to stand on their own feet with dignity and pride and thus will be able to contribute to the process of societal reforms and nation building.

In my present paper, a study was done on a lady who successfully established herself in this field. The study is about the struggles, motivational initiatives and her success in cultivating quantitative amount of mushrooms which resulted in a considerable increase in her income per annum and how she changed the economic scenario of her native village and the villagers. This can be taken as an inspiration for all the women in the Assam by which they will be able to live an independent life.

**Key Words:** Mushroom, Women in Rural Assam, Tezpur, Economic status.

## 1.0.0. INTRODUCTION

### 1.0.1. Status of women in India

Women are not born, but made. What better than India to exemplify this statement. As history bears, India has witnessed many famous and successful women. But such examples are very few. Women form about half of population of this country, but their situation has been grim. For centuries, they have been deliberately denied opportunities of growth in the name of religion and socio- cultural practices. Before independence women were victims of widespread illiteracy, forced child marriage, rigidity in fidelity and the denial of individuality. Even though in the recent years, India is now moving away from the male dominated culture and patriarchal practices, discrimination is still highly visible in rural as well as in urban

areas, throughout all strata of the society. A woman in Indian society has been victim of humiliation, exploitation & torture.

#### 1.0.2. Rural women

The vulnerability condition of women is more miserable in rural India with respect to various socio-economic aspects. India now has half century's experience in dealing with inequalities and disparities rooted in several millennia of its evolution, yet we still see sharp inequality of caste, creed, religion and linguistic marginalization divide. Gender cuts across all these layers making women of disadvantaged groups or religious linguistic minority groups the most deprived members of our society. The constitution of India grants deprived women equality of status and opportunities with other citizen to accelerate the process of educational and socio-economic justice. A prime minister's high level committee (**Sachar Committee**) was appointed in 2005 to look into the socio-economic condition of Muslims. Review and recast was done and it was modified as **15 point programme** approved in 2006 for welfare of minorities and in order to enhance the opportunities for education of minorities ensuring an equitable share in economic activities and employment. However, women belonging to the linguistic minority group are most deprived sections of the minority community. Hence several initiatives were taken by the Government to rebuild the women which specially include educational and economical constitutional provisions for minority women. The salient features of these provisions for women are -

- (i) Article 15(3) of the part III of Indian constitution states that the state shall not prevent in making any special provisions for women on the basis of sex, religion, race or caste.
- (ii) Article 30 of the constitution provides the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

#### 1.0.3. Economic status of women in India and self-employment

The status of women is intimately connected with their economic status, which in turn depend upon rights, roles and opportunities for the participation in economic activities. Now the economic status of women is accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. Since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in factories, stores and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. There are estimates that over 90% of working women are involved in informal sector such as small trader, family farms, artisan etc. The notion of work and employment especially for rural and minority women is more complex. Self employment is very necessary to them. The form of organization should be so strong that it can continue for long period of time and small obstructions should not extinguish it. This paper focus on a new way by which women especially from minority and rural areas can stand on their own feet and they will be able to earn their livelihood.

#### 1.0.4. Mushroom cultivation- a new way to earn livelihood

Cultivation of mushrooms has now become very popular. This delicate fungus is known as **magic food**. The mushrooms are the protein suppliers of this century.

Table1. Nutritional values of per 100g mushroom

	PER 100g	VITAMINS	PER 100g	MINERALS	PER 100g
Water	92.4 g	Vitamin C	2.1 mg	Sodium	5 mg
Energy	22 kcal	Vitamin B1	0.08 mg	Potassium	318 mg
Protein	3.1 g	Vitamin B2	0.4 mg	Calcium	3 mg
Carbohydrates	3.3 g	Vitamin B3	3.6 mg	Phosphorus	86 mg
Fat	0.3 g	Vitamin B6	0.1 mg	Iron	0.5 mg
Dietary fibre	1 g	Vitamin B12	0.04 µg	Magnesium	9 mg
		Vitamin E	0.01 mg	Copper	0.3 mg
		Vitamin D	0.2 µg	Zinc	0.52 mg

Apart from being a power house of nutrition, mushrooms also have the potential to easily improve livelihoods. The agro-climatic condition of North-East India is excellent for mushrooms and at the same time the demand is growing like 25% per year in Indian market. Mushroom is future food with the biggest growth in market size and demand shooting up. It leads to the best profits with minimal care and investment. This can be a very good livelihood option for most of the rural women of Assam. The salient points depending on which they can take up this project are mentioned below:-

1. Very low cost of production: - Production cost of 1 kg mushroom is less than Rs. 30 in rural areas.
2. The climatic condition of Assam, being in NE India is very suitable for mushroom growing. We can take up all kinds of mushrooms as this region has temperature and humidity range favourable for majority of mushrooms.
3. Availability of inputs/substrates i.e. straw is abundant in these areas.
4. Low cost of labour.
5. Short crop duration.
6. Low cost maintenance.
7. Very low cost breeding materials ( recyclable bamboos, wood fuel, saw dust)

We have already seen some entrepreneurs who have taken initiatives to form groups of rural women and are successful in making them self-employed. This paper emphasize on such a lady who worked hard to form little groups of women from rural areas of Tezpur and trained them to earn their own livelihood from cultivation of mushrooms. This work is all about her initiatives, struggles and her success in

empowering the women. The women of Assam are seen to be very hard working and enthusiastic. This paper is hoped to influence them to come out and do something good for them and for the upliftment of the society in broader way.

## 2.0.0. STUDY BACKGROUND

To study this case, a lady named **Amrit Madhuri Devi** from Tezpur locality was selected who took an initiative to make the women of backward nearby area financially strong by cultivating mushroom. Her example can be taken as an inspiration for all the women. On her interview, she informed that her worst economic condition lead her to take this initiative so that no other women face the same problems as she has faced. According to her, Indian women are spontaneous and they have the stamina to do everything like men. Only thing they need is inspiration. In India, women are seen to be victims of domestic violence and prejudice. One of the main reasons behind this is noticed to be the economic dependency of them. To empower women financially in our nearby areas was her main motive.

### 2.0.1. First start-up

Her first start-up was initiated in the year 2008 individually. She made a group of 10 ladies from backward rural area of Tezpur and inspired them to come forward. All of the 10 ladies invested Rs.100/- each i.e. Rs.1000/- in total and started to cultivate 100 bags of mushroom. The result was very impressive as they got Rs.5000/- after marketing. The huge profit inspired them to cultivate more mushrooms and to inspire other ladies of nearby areas. Thus these all started and increased in a vast way. Now she has about 10 groups of ladies coming from rural area and minority and the profit is so high that each of them are financially independent now.

Table.2 The investment, expense details and income of the first start-up.

Investment	Expense		Income
Rs.1000/-	Spawn	: 5kg × Rs.60/- = Rs.300/-	Rs. 5000/-
	Polythene bag	: 100 bags × Rs.3/- = Rs. 300/-	
	Rope	: 1kg = Rs.100/-	
	Bamboo	: 2nos. = Rs. 200/-	
			Rs.900/-

## 3.0.0. ANALYSIS OF DATA

### 3.0.1. Tabular representation of data

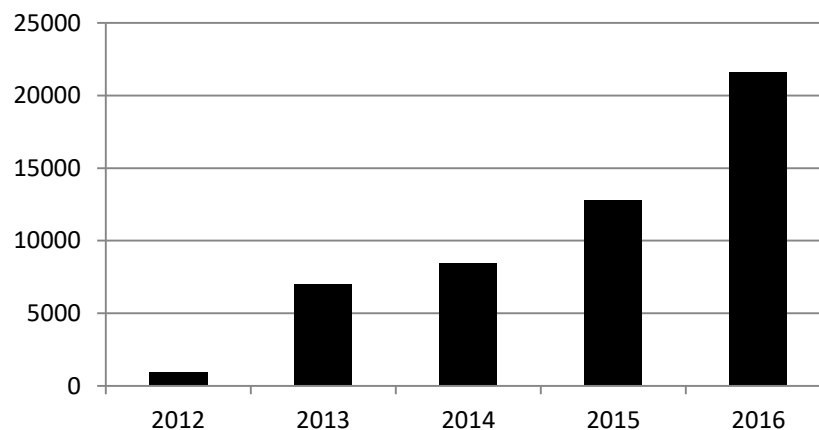
The details of last 5 years have been focused here in this paper.

Table 3. The investment, income and profit of year 2012-16 in yearly basis.

YEAR	INVESTMENT	INCOME	PROFIT
2012	6700/-	7600/-	900/-
2013	3000/-	10,000/-	7000/-
2014	3550/-	12,000/-	8450/-
2015	5200/-	18,000/-	12,800/-
2016	4400/-	26,000/-	21,600/-

### 3.0.2. Graphical representation of data

A bar diagram has been made by taking the profit in rupees on Y axis and year on X axis:-



### 4.0.0. INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

The average investment, income and profit of last five years is analysed and the following interpretation can be drawn-

- I) In the last five years, the average investment is seen to be Rs. 4570/- and average profit is Rs. 10,150/-.
- II) The investment in the first year is highest i.e. Rs.6700/- due to the expense in making cultivation house, spawn etc. In the next years, it is seen to be decreased because the cultivation was done on the same cultivating house.
- III) From the graphical representation year wise, the bars show an exponential increase in profit.

### 5.0.0. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Assam, the contribution of women to economic development has always been neglected since time immemorial. These types of low cost businesses are very useful nowadays to uplift the females in our society. Though cultivating of mushrooms has started in Assam, it is done in very minute quantity. The reason is the lacking awareness or knowledge in this area. Measurements should be taken to encourage the women for cultivating mushrooms such as Govt. Policies should be there for helping them with financial loans and workshops should be done in rural areas by entrepreneurs and scientists describing the benefits of taking the mushroom cultivation as a livelihood option. Some DBT sponsored research programme should also be done in rural colleges to provide people with essential help and knowledge regarding this area and which will open the door to increase productivity.

Hence with proper guidance, awareness and with the optimum use of the village resources, the women will be able to earn their own livelihood which will lead to a better economic scenario of rural Assam.

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