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PRODUCTION PROBLEMS FACED BY COIR UNITS: A STUDY IN POLLACHI TALUK OF COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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Abstract

The coir industry plays a significant role in the rural economy of Tamil Nadu, particularly in Pollachi Taluk of Coimbatore District, which is a prominent hub for coir-based activities. Despite its traditional relevance and employment potential, the sector continues to face a multitude of production-related challenges that hinder its growth and sustainability. This study aims to identify and analyze the key production problems encountered by coir units in Pollachi Taluk. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and interviews with coir unit owners, workers, and local industry stakeholders. The findings reveal that the sector suffers from issues such as irregular raw material supply, out-dated machinery, shortage of skilled labor, high cost of production, limited access to finance, and environmental constraints. Additionally, lack of technological innovation and inadequate government support further exacerbate the operational difficulties. The study emphasizes the need for targeted policy interventions, improved infrastructure, and capacity-building initiatives to revitalize the coir industry in the region. Addressing these production problems is crucial for enhancing productivity, generating employment, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this traditional rural industry.

Keywords: Coir production, Production problems, Fibre.

Introduction

The Indian coir business has advanced significantly, from making basic ropes to providing a variety of lifestyle goods. The establishment of the first coir factory in 1859 in Alleppey, Kerala, by an Ireland-born American marked the beginning of the transformation of coir-making in India from an unorganised cottage industry into a professional and modernised industrial sector. After the first coir factory was built, Indian coir's distinctive qualities were evident. Today, India stands as the leading manufacturer of coir in the world. Coir is in great demand due to its natural, biodegradable, and environmentally friendly qualities. It has secured an important position in international markets, not solely because of its value as a commodity, but also due to its significance in trade. The golden-textured Indian coir fibre, which has earned the unofficial brand name "Golden Fibre," quickly captured the European and global markets. At present, the Indian coir industry holds a remarkable 89 percent share of the global market for value-added coir products. The world production of coir fibre is estimated at 3,85,000 tonnes, while the combined global production of other similar hard fibres - such as sisal, henequen, and abaca - is two to three times higher than that of coir fibre.

The coir business is the one that creates the most jobs in the nation, employing an astounding half a million people. Equally important are the fact that up to 80% of the industry's workers are women and that the majority of these individuals come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, hundreds of business owners are directly and indirectly engaged in a variety of activities, from the production of coir fiber to the development and promotion of coir-based value-added goods. For these new entrepreneurs, the industry's potential and relatively minimal investment requirements present an interesting prospect. In 1940, the coir industry in Tamil Nadu started to grow. By the end of 2009–10, the state had 1260 coir units and was the nation's second-largest producer of coir fiber. It is notable for being the only supplier of coir fiber in Kerala, which contributes 70% of the country's total brown fiber production. In Tamil Nadu, the brown fiber industry is still expanding spectacularly and quickly. In addition to a few units that focus on geo-textiles, the state's primary products are curled coir and coir ropes. The Coimbatore district, which was chosen for this study, exhibits indications of a discernible expansion of this sector, particularly because of its advantageous location and industrial advantages. 120 new coir units were registered in 2021–2022, while 38 units renewed their registration through the Board's various offices.

Raw materials, such as quality coconut husks, are not always available in sufficient quantity or consistency, leading to interruptions in production. Additionally, many coir units continue to rely on manual or semi-mechanized methods, which hinder productivity and product standardization. The absence of skilled labor further aggravates the situation, as training opportunities and technological exposure remain limited. Environmental factors, such as seasonal variations and improper waste disposal systems, also affect production efficiency. The growth and sustainability of coir units are challenged by these problems taken together, along with a lack of funding and access to contemporary infrastructure.

Understanding and addressing these production-related problems is crucial for enhancing the competitiveness of coir products in both domestic and international markets.

Considering the socio-economic prospects of the industry in the state in general and Coimbatore District in particular, higher output, improved mechanization, higher return and pertinent policy measures for better results are the need of the hour especially to promote the industry in non- traditional areas like the study area. In this regard, a study of the production issues in coir units would aid the government in formulating policies.

Review of Literature

Lakshmi Devaraj (2021) focuses on “The personal financial problem of coir workers in private and public sector in Alappuzha district of Kerala”. The study focus on the socio economic impact regarding the living condition include occupation, housing status, other income related aspects, low education level among the workers , poor financial capability of workers .the researcher analysis the indebtedness and saving of workers which is very low and lack of financial literacy. The finding of the study deals with low level of saving and investment, comparison between the private and public sector workers personal financial aspect is low. The government must take a decision regarding the workers for their welfare and coir workers are the assets for coir units.

Prashanthkumar C.P and Dr. Duggappa M.C (2018) in their article on coir manufacturing industry “A Study On Problems And Prospects Of Coir Product Manufacturing Industries – With Special Reference To Tumkur District In Karnataka” this study analyzed important variables related to coir production aspects namely production, Finance, Labour and Marketing and the above aspects the researcher attempted to understand the problems related to coir manufacturing in Tumkur district, Karnataka.

Poornimadevi (2017) has examined “The problems and prospects of coir industry in Pollachi, Coimbatore district”, concluded that most of the coir entrepreneurs were satisfied of income earned in the industry. Though it seemed good, it is the joint hand responsibility of both government and relevant bodies to take the industry to the next level. The study revealed that in international market, our Indian coir product exporters have numerous opportunities to grasp the market share. This is the duty of industrialist to produce and market quality products to market at global market at par with international competitors for sustainability.

Senthilkumar R (2015) in his study that “Problems and Prospects of Coir Industry; Asia Pacific Journal of Research” even though Coir Industries in India are facing lot of problems, it has various opportunities for further growth and development. The coir industry has wide future prospects in terms of availability of coconut husks, providing employment, reducing unemployment, generating income, alleviating poverty, improving the standard of living of the people, creating great demand in both domestic as well as international markets, developing entrepreneurship and promoting the country’s economy. He

concluded that the Government of India, through Coir Board, can promote the coir industry in terms of solving the various problems faced by the coir industry in India and opening the gateway for future prospects.

Mohanasundaram (2015) in their study titled “Production Problems Faced by Coir Units: A Study in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu” the coir industry is also prone to problems and constraints. Both at the state and at the national levels the problems like inadequate finance to meet the increasing cost of production, non-availability of raw material such as coconut husk in the years with scanty rainfalls, obsolete production technology, difficulties in the adoption of modern technology, labour scarcity during the harvesting periods of agricultural crops, absence of an effective marketing system, lack of marketing infrastructure, concentration of markets and demand in select regions, production in only sunny days, irrational selection and mismanagement of human resources in all its functional areas, environmental problems and unhealthy competition between mechanised units and non-mechanised units and lastly the not-so encouraging government support, apply brakes in the further growth of this sector in the country. The industry in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, also witnesses the major problems seen at the macro-level but at varying degrees. Hence, this study is an attempt to study major production problems faced by coir units in Coimbatore District.

Azhakesan (2014) in their study entitled “An Economic Analysis of Coir Industry in Kanyakumari District”, observed that the different marketing problems encountered by coir units, the first two major factors that affected the progress of the unit were competition from large units and competition from small units ranked first and second. Slackness in demand, price control, transport and others were ranked third, fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.

Shunmugapriya and et al, (2011) conducted on “The Promotion of Coir Industry”, the opportunities and challenges of coir industry, indicated that though coir industry is booming in India, there are numerous challenges for its sustainable growth. Differences exist in language and communication, culture and inadequate direct interaction between the conditions and needs in the partner country invariably hamper innovations. It is found that majority of coir mills and even factories are lacking capital up upgrade their equipment. There is lack of co-operation between all the parties involved to implement several priority actions. Labour shortage problems faced by coir mills and factories are in the forefront as a major challenge. It is found that about 69 per cent of the units suffer from lack of improved technologies in factories and so research and development activities have not done effectively in coir industries to introduce new and improved machines with high productivity. As the major constraint affecting productivity and quality is found to be working with out-dated and inefficient traditional spinning methods, due concentration on research and development activities is the need of the hour to bring out adequate technological reformations.

Amutha (2013) in their article found that “A Study on the Prospects and Problems of Coir Industry with Special Reference to Coimbatore District”, the own land holders had significant difference of opinion with the lease land holders in respect of the support of Coir Board in purchasing raw materials at cheaper prices, providing training for increasing productivity and in marketing coir products. All the coir units situated in different locations invariably faced similar problems. Sole- traders and partnership firms of coir units had no significant difference in respect of marketing problems. She also pointed out that the marketing related problems faced by the registered and unregistered coir units were statistically not significant. Capital invested by the coir manufacturers had significant relationship with the marketing related problems. Greater the capital invested lesser will be the marketing related problems.

Pandi (2005) explored the “Problems and Challenges of Industrial Co-operatives with special reference to Coir Co-operative Units in Tamil Nadu” pointed out that the causes for losses of the co-operative coir units were the problems of production, labour, marketing, finance and supervision. He identified the high cost of production. AS the main problem of power and fuel supply were the main reasons for the high cost of production.

Chilar Mohamed and Shahul Hameed (2003) in their article on “Indian Coir Industries Challenges and Future Prospects”, stated that with the advent of synthetic fibre in European countries, Indian exports of coir and coir products had met with a serious setback. They concluded that some form of technological improvement in the coir industry had become urgent so as to maintain its position in the world market for its products and sought innovative marketing methods including development of new drop products which alone could reverse the stagnation in India’s coir exports.

Objectives of the study

The objectives framed for the present study are:

- To find out the problems faced by the coir industry in production of coir industry in Pollachi Taluk of Coimbatore District.
- To offer suggestions for improving the overall performance of coir industry based on the findings of the study.

Research Methodology

In this section, reasons for the selection of the study area, the collection of data, the sampling design and data analysis are described.

Selection of the Study area

Coimbatore district consists of two revenue divisions namely Coimbatore and Pollachi. In Coimbatore district, coconut is cultivated with an extent of 84531 hectares, and annual production is estimated at 12120 lakh nuts, and the productivity is 14338 nuts per hectare. Among the various taluks in the district, Pollachi stands out as a major contributor to this production. Often referred to as the "Coconut Capital of Tamil Nadu," Pollachi is characterized by its favorable agro-climatic conditions, well-distributed rainfall, and fertile soil—factors that significantly enhance coconut cultivation. The total number of coir units available in the cluster area is around 189 units, of which 78 units are engaged in fibre extraction, 17 units engaged in Yarn Spinning, 8 units engaged in Curled Coir Rope Making, 1 unit engaged in Rubberized Coir Manufacturing and 85 units engaged in manufacturing Pith Blocks. The total number of beneficiaries is estimated to be around 3600 members, which includes the labour force in the cluster.

Collection of Primary Data

The present study is based on primary data. It is an empirical research based on the survey method. For collecting required primary data from the owners of Coir units, well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule was used

Sample Design

The present study aims at understanding the “Production Problems Faced by Coir Units: A Study in Pollachi Taluk of Coimbatore District”. The study is mainly based on the primary data collected from the coir manufacturer. The research design adopted in this study is explanatory and descriptive in nature. Convenience sampling technique was used in the study to select sample members of coir manufacturing residing at Pollachi.

Data Analysis

A schedule of interviews was used to gather primary data from coir unit owners in order to analyse the issues these units faced throughout production. They provided primary data, which was analysed using Garrett's Ranking Technique.

Production Problems in Coir Units: An Analysis

The production issues that unit owners typically deal with include obtaining the necessary funding, acquiring raw materials, locating skilled labour, power supply issues, and obsolescence and modernization issues. The owners of units are given a list of issues they confront in order to get their feedback, taking into consideration both the general and location-specific issues that are prevalent in the business. They identified and prioritized the following issues: labor scarcity, insufficient green husk supply, and high maintenance costs for heavy machinery, insufficient funding, unstable power supply, out-dated manufacturing methods, and the challenge of drying fiber during wet seasons.

In this section, the Garrett's Ranking Technique was used to transform the issues that the coir unit owners had identified and ranked into scores. Each problem's mean score was calculated and put in descending order. As a result, the key issues were determined and ranks were assigned. For both small and medium-sized coir units, the ranks for these issues were determined independently and displayed in tables.

Table 1: Production Problems Faced By Coir Units: Garrett's Ranking Analysis

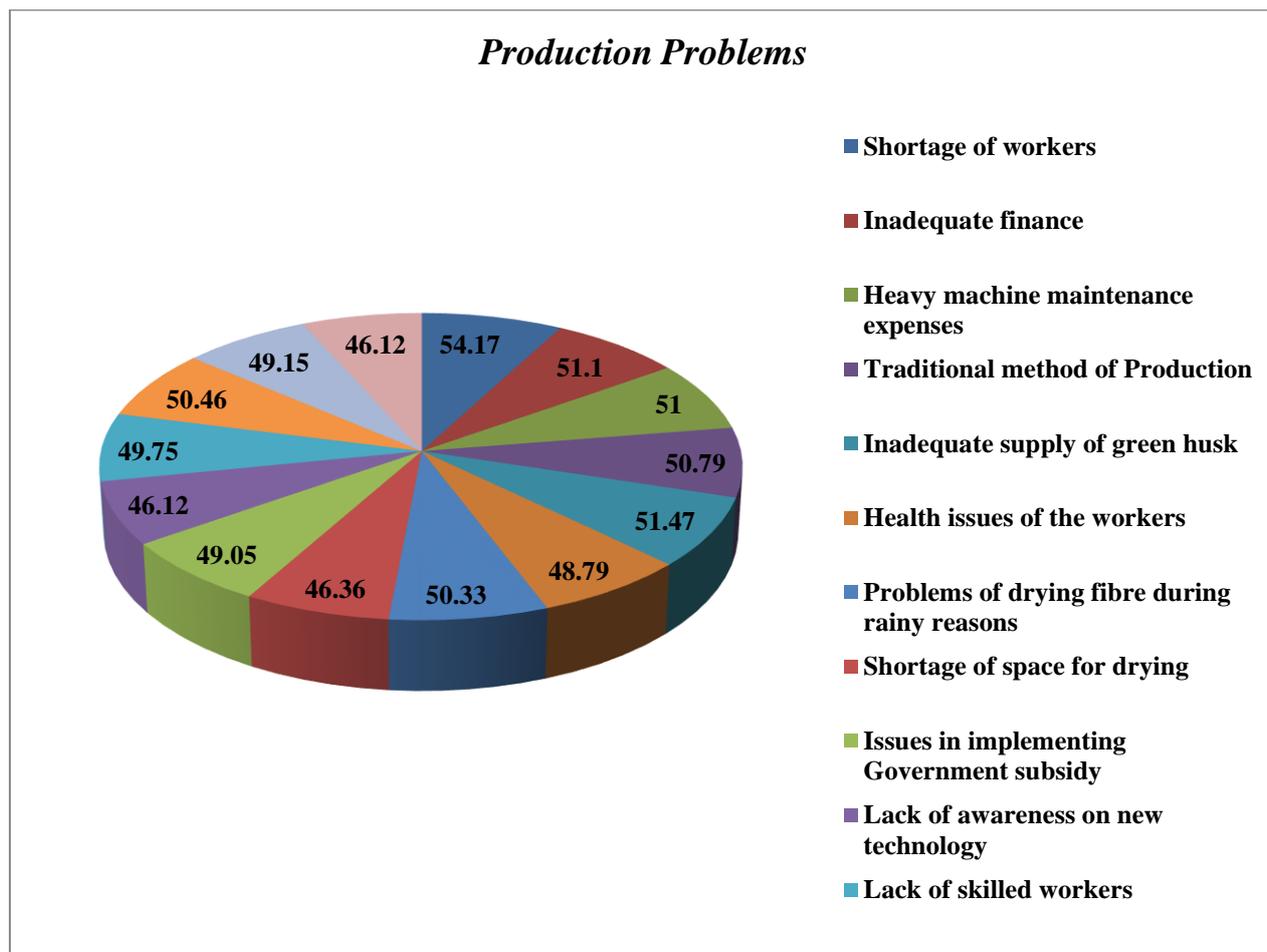
S. No	Production Problems	Total Score	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
1	Shortage of workers	8667/160	54.17	I
2	Inadequate finance	8176/160	51.10	III
3	Heavy machine maintenance expenses	8160/160	51.00	IV
4	Traditional method of Production	8127/160	50.79	V
5	Inadequate supply of green husk	8235/160	51.47	II
6	Health issues of the workers	7807/160	48.79	XI
7	Problems of drying fibre during rainy reasons	8052/160	50.33	VII
8	Shortage of space for drying	7417/160	46.36	XII
9	Issues in implementing Government subsidy	7848/160	49.05	IX
10	Lack of awareness on new technology	7379/160	46.12	XIII
11	Lack of skilled workers	7960/160	49.75	VIII
12	Power shortages	8073/160	50.46	VI
13	Wage issues	7864/160	49.15	X
14	Labour Welfare measures	7379/160	46.12	XIII

Source: Primary Survey*Note: Average Score = Total score/ Total Respondents

The table 1 shows that the production problems faced by coir units, analyzed using Garrett's Ranking Method. The analysis reveals that "Shortage of workers" is the most critical issue, ranked first with the highest mean score of 54.17. "Inadequate supply of green husk" follows closely, securing the second rank with a mean score of 51.47. "Inadequate finance" and "Heavy machine maintenance expenses" are also major concerns, ranked third and fourth, mean score of 51.10 and 51.00 respectively. The persistence of "Traditional methods of production" occupies the fifth position, mean score of 50.79 indicating the slow adoption of modern techniques. Issues such as "Power shortages," mean score of 50.46 "Problems of drying fibre during rainy seasons," mean score of 50.33 and "Lack of skilled workers" rank mid-level mean score of 49.75, highlighting operational challenges.

On the lower side, problems like "Wage issues," ninth rank with a mean score of 49.15, "Issues in implementing Government subsidy," tenth rank with a mean score of 49.05 "Health issues of the workers," eleventh rank with a mean score of 48.79 and particularly "Shortage of space for drying," twelfth rank with a mean score of 46.36 respectively. "Lack of awareness on new technology," and "Labour welfare measures," which are jointly ranked last, with mean scores of 46.12, indicate areas needing policy attention but perceived as relatively less severe compared to labour and input shortages. Overall, the table underscores that labour availability, raw material supply, and financial support are the primary challenges affecting coir production units.

Fig 1: Ranking of Production Problems faced by Coir Units at Pollachi Taluk of Coimbatore District



Findings of the Study

In this study, production problems faced by coir units are analysed. For identifying the major problems in production in coir units, Garrett's Ranking Technique was used. The findings of the study are:

- Production problems faced by coir units were analysed and identified three major problems namely the analysis reveals that "Shortage of workers" is the most critical issue, ranked first with the highest mean score of 54.17. "Inadequate supply of green husk" follows closely, securing the second rank with a mean score of 51.47. "Inadequate finance" and "Heavy machine maintenance expenses" are also major concerns, ranked third and fourth, mean score of 51.10 and 51.00 respectively.
- The persistence of "Traditional methods of production" occupies the fifth position, mean score of 50.79 indicating the slow adoption of modern techniques. Issues such as "Power shortages," sixth position mean score of 50.46 "Problems of drying fibre during rainy seasons," seventh position mean score of 50.33 and "Lack of skilled workers" rank mid-level mean score of 49.75, highlighting operational challenges.
- On the lower side, problems like "Wage issues," ninth rank with a mean score of 49.15, "Issues in implementing Government subsidy," tenth rank with a mean score of 49.05 "Health issues of the workers," eleventh rank with a mean score of 48.79 and particularly "Shortage of space for

drying," twelfth rank with a mean score of 46.36 respectively. "Lack of awareness on new technology," and "Labour welfare measures," which are jointly ranked last, with mean scores of 46.12, indicate areas needing policy attention but perceived as relatively less severe compared to labour and input shortages.

Suggestions of the Study

Based on the study's results, the following workable recommendations are made to enhance the coir units performance:

- This study reveals that the biggest production issue facing the coir units in the study area is a "shortage of workers." Thus, it is recommended that the Coir Board and the state government support business owners in producing value-added coir goods such as carpets, maurzouks, rugs, and mats. This will strengthen their financial position, enabling them to offer their employees better and more competitive wages. Even in the busiest agricultural seasons, additional workers will be drawn to the coir units if competitive rates are offered. In this way, the main issue of a labour shortage could be resolved.
- This study reveals that one of the main production issues is "inadequate finance." Therefore, it is recommended that in order to help coir units fulfill their working capital needs during peak seasons; the government may provide financial assistance. Commercial banks, cooperative banks, and other financial institutions offer lending facilities at low rates of interest. Additionally, given their financial challenges in running coir units, commercial banks, cooperative banks, and other financial institutions are advised to hold Coir Loan Melas.

Conclusion

The social and economic significance of the coir business to the region led to its selection for study. Many members of marginalized socioeconomic groups, primarily from lower castes and outcasts, are employed in the sector; women make up the vast majority of these workers. Due to its special characteristics of durability, biodegradability, and environmental friendliness, coir and coir products are making good development in both the local and foreign markets. The business currently holds a remarkable portion of the global market for value-added coir products.

The current study is a modest attempt to shed light on a few particular aspects of the operations of the coir facilities in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore District given the state of the industry. The present study's conclusions are universal across most Indian units and are not exclusive in any way. The study draws attention to issues that the industry in the study area is facing that cannot be resolved quickly. However, the majority of their operational issues would be resolved by enhancing value addition and information and technology access. The sector has every chance to make a significant impact on Tamil Nadu's industrial environment and eventually aid in the expansion of the national economy.

Conclusions of the investigation have led to a number of good recommendations. Production-related coir units can perform better if the relevant authorities take these recommendations into account and put them into practice.

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