

# Coir - An Industry with High Potential for Growth

Coir is a traditional industry of India which was largely confined to the State of Kerala until 4 decades back. Over the years, the industry has been able to proliferate in to the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Gujarat, UT of Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, North Eastern States etc. The origin of the manufacturing sector of coir industry in India dates back to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mr. James Darragh, an Irish born American together with Mr. Henry Smail established the first coir factory in the ancient port town of Alleppey in the year 1859. The manufacturing sector of the coir industry originated and thrived at Alleppey owing to the geographical facilities available and the skill of coir workers in that area.

Traditionally, Coir has been a boon to people who were socially and economically backward and the industry helped them to sustain for decades. In many areas of the country, coir related activities were used to be taken up by the people for whom alternate avocations were not available. The relatively small amount of investment required for setting up the production contrivances and the low level expertise demanded by the production and manufacturing techniques made it an ideal source of income for rural artisans with limited means. In the process of production and manufacture, the industry offers livelihood to about 7 lakhs rural people, of which a major portion lives below the poverty line.

The Government of India set up Coir Board under the Coir Industry Act, 1953 for the overall sustainable development of Coir Industry in India. The functions of the Board include undertaking, assisting and encouraging scientific, technological and economic research, modernization, quality improvement, human resource development, market promotion and welfare of all those who are engaged in this industry.

It is estimated that that during the year, 2010-11, a total quantity of 5,25,000 tonnes of coir was

produced in the country. Export of Coir and Coir products earns a sizeable amount of foreign exchange to the country. Coir products are exported to around 111 countries

around the world. Major importing countries of the products are the USA, U.K., Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Australia, Spain etc. During the year, 2011-12, coir products worth Rs.1052 crores was exported from the country. Coir products have been one of the items of the export basket of India which could withstand the onslaught of global economic recession and maintain its tendency of growth. It is estimated that the contribution of coir industry to the GNP is Rs. 2,500 crores.

Coir Products belong to the genre of cent percent nature friendly and bio-degradable products. The great potential of this industry to save scarce non-renewable natural resources is yet to be popularized nationally and internationally. Coir Geotextiles, Coirply, Coirpith Organic Manure, Coir Garden Articles are a few of the items which can be of great help to revitalize the environment.

Coir is an industry that meets all the national priorities. More than 80% of the workers engaged in this industry are women and through generation of rural employment it makes immense contribution to poverty alleviation especially in the States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

The industry is of great significance to the coconut producing States of India as coconut husk, the raw material for Coir industry, is available in abundance in regions of concentrated cultivation of coconut and this can be used for generation of rural employment and income to a sizeable amount of population with relatively low investment.



**Prof. G. Balachandran**  
Chairman, Coir Board