Past, Present and Future of Jute Industry

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ABSTRACT

Jute is an extremely important fibre and ranks second next after cotton in terms of global production and consumption. India has been the major producer of jute globally. The jute industry in India is said to be about 150 years old. Jute industry has a very rich traditional heritage and has witnessed several highs and lows since then. At present, jute industry is facing few problems which are supposed to be resolved with the brilliant reformative measures suggested by Ministry of Textiles, India. The upcoming era advocates eco-friendliness and less carbon footprint. In reference to this jute seems to be a promising fibre which will rule the future of this globe with application in all the major segments.

INTRODUCTION

In ancient periods, during the Indus valley civilization, in Africa and India jute stems were weaved to make burlaps for storage and jute leaves were used as a source of food. Numerous historical documents stated that during the Mughal rule, in the reign of Akbar poor villagers used to make clothes with jute fibres. Weavers especially in Bengal used small weaving machineries to produce small scale handlooms, threads, cloths and other house hold commodities from ‘white jute’ during this period.

Development of Jute Industry in India:

After knowing the numerous attributes of jute in every part of industry and house hold, during the 17th century the French and Dutch imported jute from Bengal. Later in the 19th century the East India Company came to know about the properties of jute and exported jute to Britain. During the reign of East India Company in India, jute industry bloomed. Margaret Donnelly I was the first jute mill owner in Dundee, India during the 1800s. They had monopoly in India and East India Company
traded for jute raw material singularly with them. During the years of 1830’s, the Dundee spinners learned how to spin jute yarn by technologically modifying the power-driven flax machines. Therefore, the jute industry in Dundee saw a considerable increase in the production and export of raw jute from the Indian sub-continents which was the only supplier of this primary jute materials.

**Calcutta as the Hub of Jute Industry Development:**

Eventually it was discovered that Calcutta can be the hub for jute industry. Jute mainly grows in Bengal, there was port facility for export and cheap and huge labour supply made Bengal favorable for the establishment of jute industry. Thus, the first jute mill was established at Rishra, on the River Hooghly near Calcutta in 1855. Within a span of few years, 5 more jute mills were opened around Calcutta with 950 working looms. Initially jute mills were concentrated in the areas of Dundee and Calcutta but eventually countries like France, Germany, Belgium, Italy and many more started manufacturing jute. Furthermore, in proceeding three decades India and mainly Bengal saw a huge bloom in the jute industry. There were around 68377 looms along the sides of river Hooghly, near Calcutta. These looms alone were able to fulfil the worldwide demand of raw jute as well as jute products around the world.

**Post-Independence Development of Jute Industry:**

In the initial years of jute production the fibres were coarse packaging materials but with experience, finer quality was produced in India which is now known as burlap or hessian. This quality was highly appreciated in the world and production and demand increased manifolds making India and mainly Bengal leading manufacturer of burlap.

The scenario post-independence was different, after the East India Company left India most of the jute mills were taken over by marwaris and after partition Pakistan wanted share of the jute industry infrastructure knowing the prospect of it. But most jute industry were set in Bengal and was impossible to shift. So, Pakistan eventually set its own jute mills and started manufacturing also. But when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan it took away most of the jute mills and to control the situation Bangladesh established Bangladesh jute Mill Corporation.

**Present Scenario of Jute Industry:**

In the current scenario, jute industries are mainly centralized in the subcontinents of India. India is the world’s biggest producer of jute, followed by Bangladesh. Jute is primarily grown in West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Andhra Pradesh.

There are about 70 jute mills in the country, of which about 60 are in West Bengal along both the banks of river Hooghly. Jute production is a labour-intensive industry. It employs about two lakh workers in the West Bengal alone and 4 lakh workers across the country.

Jute is the only crop where earnings begin to trickle in way before the final harvest. The seeds are planted between April and May and harvested between July and August. Jute is the second most abundant natural fibre in the world. It has high tensile strength, acoustic and thermal insulation, breathability, low extensibility, ease of blending with both synthetic and natural fibres, and antistatic properties. Jute can be used: for insulation (replacing glass wool), geotextiles, activated carbon powder, wall coverings, flooring, garments, rugs, ropes, gunny bags, handicrafts, curtains, carpet backings, paper, sandals, carry bags, and furniture.

**Problems faced by Jute Industry:** A ‘Golden Fibre Revolution’ has long been called for by various committees, but the jute industry is in dire need of basic reforms due to these problems.

- **Shortage of Raw Material:** Despite of the Government efforts to increase area
under Jute, India is not self-sufficient in raw material. The raw material is imported from Bangladesh and some other countries. The problems are further aggravated by import of finished jute products both legally and illegally. These problems never allow jute industry to be competitive. This necessitates a “Golden Fibre Revolution” in India.

- Obsolete Mills and Machinery: The mills and machinery in jute sector are obsolete and need technology upgradation. The Government had launched a Jute Technology Mission (JTM) in 2006 with four mini Missions. on Jute Research; Development / extension of raw jute agriculture; marketing of raw jute and processing, utilisation and industrial aspects of raw jute. But this mission was unable to achieve targets and use the allocated funds.

- Competition: Indian Jute industry faces competition in the global market with countries such as Bangladesh, Philippines, South Korea, Japan etc. The industry also loses competitiveness due to obsolete technology, higher prices and industrial sickness in the jute mills. The industry has become stagnant, unproductive and inefficient due to over dependence on jute sacks; and non-diversification.

Reformative measures taken by Government of India: Government is implementing the following schemes and measures to support the jute manufacturing units and to strengthen the jute sector:

(i) Under the Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) [JPM Act], 1987, Government specifies the commodities and the extent to which they are mandatorily required to be packed in Jute Packaging Materials. At present, a minimum of 90% of food grains and a minimum of 20% of sugar are to be compulsorily packed in jute sacking.

(ii) Whenever the market price of raw jute falls below a certain level, the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) procures raw jute at Minimum Support Price (MSP), fixed on the basis of recommendation of the commission for Agricultural Cost and Prices (CACP), from jute growers to safeguard their interest.

(iii) Incentive Scheme for Acquisition of Plants and Machinery (ISAPM): Government of India launched ISAPM for Jute Industry and Jute Diversified Products Manufacturing Units, with effect from 1st October 2013. The basic aim of this scheme is to facilitate modernization in existing and new jute mills and up-gradation of technology in existing jute mills and to provide assistance to a large number of entrepreneurs to manufacture value added biodegradable Jute Diversified Products (JDP) as well as for modernization Jute up-gradation of technology.

(iv) Jute-ICARE (Jute: Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise): This pilot project launched in 2015 is aimed at addressing the difficulties faced by the jute cultivators by providing them certified seeds at subsidized rates, seed drills to facilitate line sowing, nail-weeders to carry out periodic weeding and by popularizing several newly developed retting technologies under water limiting conditions. This has resulted in increased returns to jute farmers.

(v) The National Jute Board implements various schemes for market development, workers welfare and promotion of diversification and exports.

(vi) Government has issued a notification on 5th January, 2017 imposing Definitive
Anti-Dumping Duty on jute goods originating from Bangladesh and Nepal. Based on the current level of imports, the industry has estimated that this is likely to generate up to 2 lakh MT of additional demand for jute goods to be met by the Indian Jute industry.

(vii) Government has made it mandatory for the entire chain from importers and traders to the level before the end-users, to register with the Office of Jute Commissioner, and furnish monthly reports on the imported goods.

(viii) Government through its Office of Jute Commissioner, Kolkata has also directed all manufacturers, importers processors and traders to mark/ print/ brand the words Made in- Country of Origin" on imported bags. Customs have also been requested to maintain a strict vigil so that no unregistered importers/ traders can import jute and no unbranded jute goods can enter India.

Future of Jute Industry:

For India, jute could be the fabric of the future. Amid a global push to reduce the use of plastic for environmental reasons, India is promoting jute as a material for reusable shopping bags, home furnishings, clothing, even diapers and women’s sanitary pads. Extracted from the bark of a tall, reedy plant, jute requires less water than cotton and almost no pesticides, absorbs more carbon dioxide for its size than most trees, and is totally biodegradable. The Indian jute industry sees a potentially huge market in countries like the US which have introduced regulations against plastic bags and foam products. Companies are already supplying jute for use as geotextiles - a material used by civil engineers to stabilize loose soil for road construction. The hope is that the growing interest in jute as a consumer product in India and abroad will help stimulate innovation.

CONCLUSION:

In spite of witnessing several ups and down, jute industry in India is still surviving and it blankets the globe with its production cycle. Although, it is facing a number of problems and requires several remedial measures for it to retain its pace of growth. The future years are surely going to be the years of golden fibre because of its biodegradability, zero carbon foot-printing and many others.

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