

Jute is spun into yarns and twines of various counts. Heavy and coarse yarns/twines are used as ropes/cords and for weaving cloths for sacks and gunny bags. Lighter yarns are used for weaving Hessian cloth and the lightest and finest yarns are used in carpet manufacturing industries and for production of fabrics suited for value added diversified jute goods.

Sacking and gunny bags are the major traditional jute products. These are used for packaging agricultural and industrial commodities like, rice, wheat, vegetables, corn, beans, cement and fertilizer etc. Sacking consumes more than 50% of the total production of jute fibre.

Hessian is jute cloth which has many uses, including as: carpet backing cloth, packaging material for cement and fertilizer industries and wrapping material for other fibres such as cotton and wool, seasoning and insulation materials for construction industries, soil saving and erosion control materials and as fabrics for diversified jute products like home textiles and shopping bags etc.

Diversified jute products (DJPs) are an array of non-traditional goods produced by transforming jute to numerous value-added products through innovations and application of artistic skills. Let us see pictures of some of the DJPs below. Catalogues of diversified jute products produced by National Centre for Jute Diversification (NCJD) of India and that of Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) of Bangladesh can be viewed in the website of the International Jute Study Group (IJSG) www.jute.org.

That use of DJPs account for hardly 10% of total jute fibre consumption. This segment of the jute industry is scattered and decentralized and is composed of mainly SME entrepreneurs. They do not have enough resources; skills and expertise to enter into international markets with their products. They need support and assistance in the areas of product development, design and marketing etc. The support of the UNDP to the Government of India a few years back in this regard is worth mentioning. The CFC, the co-sponsor of this symposium is financing a project for development of entrepreneurship of DJPs through the IJSG. More needs to be done to promote diversified jute products along with traditional use of jute.

BENEFITS AND ADVANTAGES OF JUTE AND JUTE GOODS

- The young tender leaves of jute plants are eaten as vegetables;
- Jute cultivation, according to jute scientists, enriches the fertility of the soil for the next crop;
- The lush green jute plants help protect environment and maintain ecological balance by providing much needed oxygen to the atmosphere;
- Jute and jute goods are bio-degradable and re-usable.
- The production process of jute goods is simple and unlike synthetics it does not involve use of harmful chemicals;
- Jute bags preserve the quality of dry food items like rice and wheat as air can pass through jute bags easily. Jute bags are safe for storage purposes. They are stable and do not slide down when stacked. Jute bags are also easy to handle both manually and mechanically;
- According to jute scientists, geo-jute cloth is useful substitute for synthetic geotextiles for construction of roads and embankments, soil saving and erosion control measures; it reportedly absorbs heat and keeps the earth cool;

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE & IMPLICATIONS OF JUTE FOR THE SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

Jute cultivation is a matter of culture to the marginal farmers of Bengal part of the Indian sub-continent, the territory now constituting Bangladesh and the West Bengal province of India. The climate and soil of the area are especially suitable for jute cultivation. Historical facts suggest that jute cultivation and production of jute goods have been going on in this part of south Asia from ancient times.

Jute is a cash crop for millions of poor and marginal farm families of the south Asian countries. Even though the cultivation process of jute runs for four months of a year, jute related activities such as transportation, trading, industrial processing and production of diversified jute goods continue round the year. Tens and thousands of people, considerable portion of which are women, are engaged in these activities. They derive their income from these activities and maintain their livelihood.

The jute economy impacts on social and economic development and plays a vital role in reducing poverty and hunger. Jute harvesting takes place at a time when marginal farmers and workers are faced with shortage of their food stocks. The cash derived from sales of jute fibre and the wages received by workers are an important contribution to food security for this vulnerable segment of the population.

The socio-economic importance and implications of jute can be better understood from the obtaining situation of the jute sectors of the south Asian countries as presented in the following table:

Table 1 - Jute sectors of South Asian countries at a glance

| SL | Item | India | Bangladesh | Nepal | Pakistan |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Average of last 4 years | | | | | |
| 1 | Jute cultivation area | 900 000 ha | 450 000 ha | 12 000 ha | 0 |
| 2 | Production of fibre | 1 533 000 | 872 750 | 16 830 | 0 |
| 3 | No of jute mills | 77 | 145 | 6 | 10 |
| 4 | Workforce | 4.6 mill | 2.5 mill | 50 000 | 20 000 |
| 5 | Production of jute goods | 1 600 000 mt | 500 000 mt | 16 000 mt | 129 000 mt |
| 6 | Export of jute goods | 286 000 mt | 450 000 mt | 10 000 mt | 13 500 mt |
| 7 | Export of raw jute | 0 | 400 000 mt | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | Internal use | 82% | 18% | 37% | 75% |
| 9 | Export earnings | US\$ 270 m | US\$ 400 m | US\$ 10 m | US\$ 14 m |

Compiled from Statistics and data collected from FAO and concerned organizations of jute producing countries

We find from the statement that:

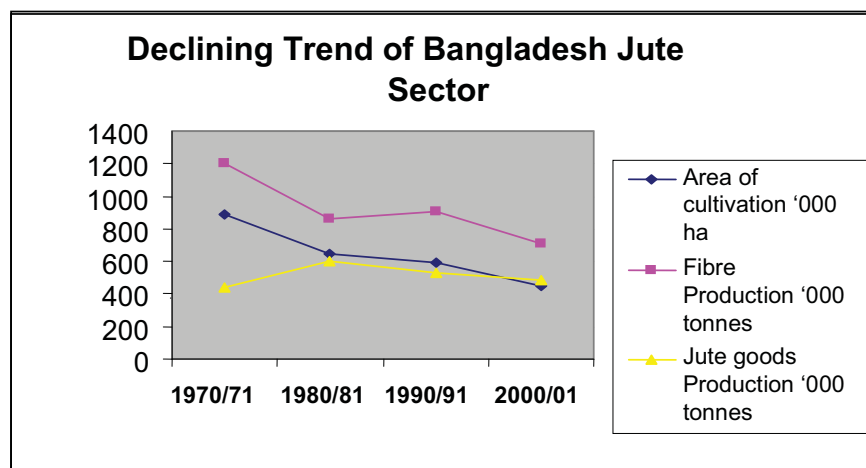
- a. India is the largest jute producing, manufacturing and consuming country; it has about one million hectares of land under jute cultivation and produces 1.6 million tonnes of jute and jute goods annually.
- b. The size of the Bangladesh jute sector is half of that of India's; it is the only jute fibre exporting country.

- c. The jute sectors of Nepal and Pakistan are not big as that of India and Bangladesh but have important contribution in employment generation and income earnings of poor farmers and industrial workers;
- d. More than 70% of the jute goods produced in south Asian countries are used by themselves;
- e. About 7 million people of the south Asian countries are directly involved in jute related activities;
- f. The jute producing countries earn a substantial amount of foreign currency from export of jute goods and jute fibre.

Jute was the principal packaging material for global agricultural produces a few decades back. It was the major export earning commodity of the poor jute producing countries like Bangladesh. World population has increased and so also has increased many folds the production of global agricultural and industrial produces but demand for jute packaging materials has not increased but declined. Current world cereal production is estimated by FAO as 2180 million tonnes this year (2008). I have made a rough calculation that 43.6 million tonnes of jute bags of 1 kg weight each would be needed to pack the total quantity of the above mentioned cereal products. If only 5% of the world cereal commodities are packaged in jute bags the jute industry and the jute economy will find its way to regain its lost position easily. That will consume more than 2 million tonnes of jute bags alone in the backdrop of current production and consumption of some 1.2 million tonnes of jute sacks a year. In fact the rejuvenation of jute economy and the welfare of the producers and consumers of jute lie in wider use of jute as packaging material for such goods which have implications on health and environment.

Bangladesh jute industry, which grew up on export orientation, has been hard hit at declining demand of jute packaging materials in the international market. The composite segment of its jute industry which produces traditional jute packaging materials such as sacking and Hessian cloth has suffered tremendously on account of this reason. More than 50% of this segment's installed capacity is now idle. During the early 1990s this segment used to produce 450,000 tonnes of jute goods. It now produces hardly 200,000 tonnes. Incidences of closure and under utilisation of installed capacities of jute mills have

Figure 1 - Jute sectors of South Asian countries at a glance



happened at random in Bangladesh. The country's, for that matter the world's largest jute mill, Adamjee Jute Mills, which used to employ more than 20,000 workers, has been closed down. More such mills are being either shut down or laid off resulting in loss of jobs, labour unrest and social security problems. The sliding trend of the Bangladesh jute sector may be visualised from the following chart:

India has, however, averted such a situation and tackled it through offering minimum price support to the farmers and introducing compulsory use of jute goods for packaging of its huge domestic agricultural produces.

There has been hardly any investment for technology development in the jute sector except some innovations in respect of diversified uses of jute. Those innovations, however, have largely remained in the laboratory of the research institutions for lack of support for commercialisation. As more than 70% of jute and jute products are used in the south Asian countries and India in particular, the image of jute remains a 'regional' commodity and hence it has not attracted much global attention for research and development.

CONCLUSIONS

Jute continues to be an important commodity for employment and source of income of millions of poor people of the producing countries of south Asia. Jute deserves international support and cooperation as a natural corollary to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Programme and Millennium Development Goals for socio-economic development, protection of environment and reduction of poverty. Jute was an important item for international trade and it still remains the preferred packaging material. As many as 45 and 62 countries of the world imports jute fibre and jute goods respectively from south Asian countries on account of its bio-degradable and environment friendly characteristics. There is no need to undertake any big project to salvage jute from its present difficult situation. The benefits of jute should be marketed more robustly to create demands for jute goods worldwide. In that event, the jute industry will itself take necessary corrective measures. In the meantime the following catalyst role may be played by the international community and the stakeholders of the natural fibres as the case may be:

- member countries of the UN system should be encouraged to adopt appropriate policies for use of jute products instead of synthetic substitutes in packaging cereal commodities in particular;
- super markets and shopping outlets worldwide should be encouraged to use jute shopping bags instead of polythene/polypropylene shopping bags;
- geo-jute and jute geo-textiles should be used instead of synthetic alternatives in construction of roads and pavements, soil saving and erosion control activities etc.
- entrepreneurs may be encouraged for using jute as basic raw material for pulp and paper manufacturing industries and
- finally and importantly, there should be coordination and understanding among the stakeholders of the various natural fibres with regard to better utilisation of these God gifted commodities for the humanity in liaison with each other.

The resolution by the UNGA to hold the IYNF in 2009 is a welcome and timely step to create awareness and to remind the international community of the many advantages of natural products over man-made alternatives. But mere propagation of the advantages and disadvantages of using natural fibres and artificial synthetic alternatives respectively will not suffice as business does not care for rhetoric and words of idealism. The UN member countries should be encouraged to adopt appropriate policies and enact laws to use more natural fibres instead of synthetic fibres. The international community is urged to take steps in this regard.