

## **Traditioanal industries in Kollam**

<sup>1</sup> Ardra S, <sup>2</sup> Dr. ML Mini

<sup>1</sup> Ph. D. Research Scholar, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of History, NKR Govt. Arts College for Women, Namakkal, Tamil Nadu, India

### **Abstract**

The Kollam district occupies a very important place in the industrial map of Kerala state. Several traditional industries have flourished in important centres of this district even from very early days. Cashew processing and coir manufacture are the chief industrial vocations of the district. The handloom industry, clay and wood based industries also contribute to the industrial progression of the district. Almost all these industries continue to flourish in this district under the patronage of Government and quasi-government agencies even today. There have, however, been periods of stagnation and decline for these industries. Failures to adopt better techniques and to attain economies in organisation and production through co-operation have been some of the obstacles hampering their development.

**Keywords:** Kollam, industries, handloom, khadi, coir

### **Introduction**

The traditional industries have played a prominent role in the development of the economy of Kollam. The important traditional industries are cashew, coir, handloom, beedi khadi and village industries. Among the traditional industrial sector cashew and coir occupies an important place. All these industries were export oriented and were dependent upon the varieties of foreign market demand.

### **Cashew Industries**

Kollam is the most important centre of the cashew industry in Kerala and in the whole of India. Except 12 factories in Mysore and a few in Madras state, the bulk of the cashew industry in the country is located in Kerala where there are about 180 factories most of which are situated at places within a radius of about 25 miles of the Kollam town. The report on the techno-economic survey of Kerala (1960-61) attributes the heavy centralisation of cashew factories around Kollam to "the external economics of the development of skill in the region". It may also be mentioned that setting up a cashew factory requires comparatively very little capital, and this was always encouraged several small enterprises to start new cashew factories in and around Kollam. Within the past six decades the cashew industry has assumed national importance and it plays a vital role in earning foreign exchange for the country. The cashew dealers mainly seek foreign markets. India now exports roughly 40,000 tons of cashew nuts and from which getting foreign exchange worth over Rs. 18 crores.

Although cashew is grown widely in the state the total internal production of raw nuts is not sufficient to feed the processing factories up to even 50% of their capacity. In fact, the major portion of raw nuts required is imported. Figures for 1961 shows that while 65,000 tons of raw cashew nuts were procured from here, imports from East Africa accounted for

1,27,000 tons. East Africa supply and our domestic grown nuts were in the proportion 2:1. During the last ten years imports from East Africa have increased by 150%, but the total production has been almost steady during that period.

The extraction of cashew nuts is done through a special and careful processing. Roasting, shelling, peeling and grading are the various processes involved in the production of nuts. The cashew nuts are rich in protein, minerals, phosphorous, calcium and vitamins A and B. Compared to most other edible nuts, its fats content is less. The United States of America consumes about 60% of India's exports of cashew nuts. Other important markets are U.K, Germany, Canada and Australia. The industry is now producing over 20 lakhs cases of nuts annually.

There is an Export Promotion Council for cashew with headquarters at Cochin in order to attend propaganda work in overseas markets. The principal ports of shipments of cashew from India are Cochin, Mangalore and Kollam although small quantities are also being shipped from Calicut, Bombay and East Coast ports.

Cashew shell liquid which is a by- product of this industry is also an important item for export. A phenolic oil with high iodine value, it is used in various compounds in industrial applications. At present from Kollam cashew shell liquid is mainly exported as a raw material to U.S.A, U.K, Japan and other countries.

When the cashew industry was originally started about the year 1925, only very few persons were employed in it but now it employs about more than 100,000 workers. The labour employed directly in the cashew industry enjoys the benefits of the various labour welfare laws such as the Factories Act (1948), Maternity Benefits Act (1957) and the Employees State Insurance Act (1948). Minimum wages were introduced in the industry in 1958 after that every five years once rates have risen. Through the cashew factories employ a large

number of workers, they do not provide continuous employment throughout the year. The factories are often closed down owing to insufficient raw cashew nuts. Still now the city has around 67 cashew processing units with an employment potential of 10,300 persons. The availability of raw materials and the nature of markets, the cashew industry continues to be the backbone of the economy of the Kollam district.

### **Coir Industry**

The coir industry is the largest and most important industry in Kerala. It has developed on account of the natural facilities available in the state. The raw material for the industry is husk which is a by-product of coconut and is available in plenty in the state. Another factor in the development of the industry is the cheap facilities available in the coastal areas of the State for retting raw husks. The industry flourishes along the coastal areas providing employment to about five to six lakhs of people. It is important in the economy of the State both as an earner of foreign exchange and as a source of employment to a large section of the people. Kerala State accounts for over 95% of the production of coir and coir products in India and she is the largest exporter of coir products. During the last few years the increase in export of finished coir products has not been steady and this has seriously affected the industry. Taking into account the importance of the industry, the Coir Development Scheme was introduced during the First Five Year Plan Period. The scheme was continued during the Second and Third Five Year Plan periods. The poor condition of the labourers engaged in the industry, the existence of the unnecessary middleman, adulteration and similar factors which have hampered the progress of the industry had to be eliminated. With this end in view, Government have drawn up schemes to reorganize the industry on a cooperative basis and co-operatives of various types had been formed during the Plan periods. The framework of the industry at present is supported chiefly by the Primary Coir Yarn Societies and Central Coir Marketing Societies. The former are formed for retting and producing yarn. They undertake the marketing of yarn through the Central Coir Marketing Societies which are organized for the purpose. Mats and Matting Societies, and Rope Manufacturing Societies are also formed for the development of the manufacturing side of the industry which requires special attention at present. Another scheme is the Bristle and Mattress Fibre Manufacturing Society which is intended to promote the manufacture of fibre from unretted husks. In addition to the above there are Coir Cooperative Unions and Husk Retting Unions formed by the primary societies.

There are a number of private concerns engaged in the trade, but they are essentially unorganized. Husk, the raw material of the industry, is a by-product of coconut. Due to lack of transport facilities, most of the husks available in the interior parts of the District could not be utilized for industrial purposes. It is the practice to ret the husks in the backwater areas near the coastal region of the District. The bacterial action of the brackish water makes the fibre soft and moisture resistant and gives an attractive colour. The raw husks are kept submerged in shallow water for a period ranging from 4 to 9 months and after having fully retted, the husks are beaten up

with wooden beaters to remove the pith. The fibre thus produced is cleaned and used for the spinning of coir yarn. The spinning is carried on by using spindle wheels in certain areas, while in other areas hand spinning prevails.

In Kerala there is a special office at the State Level to attend to the development of the Coir industry. The Kollam District consists of Paravur, Kollam, Perinad, Adur, Chavara and Karunagapally Inspectorates and a Coir Development Inspector is put in charge of each Inspectorate.

Besides six Primary Coir Yarn Societies, one Husk Retting Union, one Central Coir Marketing Society and one Bristle and Mattress Fibre Manufacturing Society were registered in this District during 1961-62.

It is the policy of Government to bring the entire industry within the cooperative fold by a phased programme. Financial assistance by way of grants and loans is given to the societies for their better working. As in other Districts the Coir industry in Kollam is scattered and it's difficult to estimate the actual number of persons employed or the capital invested. With the further development of the industry more persons can be employed. The policy of organizing the industry on co-operative lines has resulted in raising the living conditions of the workers mainly by eliminating the middle-men. As per Greater Kollam Development Plan (GKDP), there are 8 coir cooperative societies running in the city and providing employment to 1500 persons. However, many coir units have been closed due to increase in the wages and declined in the demand for coir material.

### **Handloom Industry**

Handloom industry is the means of livelihood for about 5,000 families in this District. About 9,000 looms are working both inside and outside the co-operative fold. With the inception of the cess fund scheme for the development of this industry, there has been considerable improvement in the quality of production, marketing facilities, etc., which have considerably helped the growth of this industry in recent times. About 80% of the weavers are now within the Co-operative fold, and attempts are also being made to enlist the remaining persons in these co-operative institutions.

There is a heavy concentration of weavers in the area of Mayyanad, Chathannur and Kottarakara. In June 1962 there were 62 Co-operative societies in this district.

These Co-operative Societies work under the supervision and control of the Industries Department and also of the District Co-operative Bank, Kollam. Though during the initial period the working capital loans were advanced by Government, this is now being done by the District Co-operative Bank which is being financed by the Reserve Bank of India for the purpose. In July 1962 the total working capital invested including Government loans and Bank loans was above Rs. 11 lakhs. The average capital required for working one loom varies from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 depending on the counts of yarn used. The ordinary loom is widely used by the weavers. Now, attachments like dobbies, take up motion attachment, etc, are also put into use in these looms to effect improvement in quality. The products of this industry are marketed mainly inside the state through hawkers and sales depots opened in important towns. A small portion of the clothes produced finds its market in other important cities of India.

The following schemes are undertaken by Government for the improvement of the industry.

- Issue of share capital loans to Weavers Society.
- Issue of loans and grants for the working of dye houses and sales depots
- Issue of grants for the purchase of improved equipments like healds, reeds, dobbies, etc.
- Issue of rebate on the sale of handloom cloth with special rebate during festival seasons like Onam.
- Purchase and distribution of samples.
- Conversion of few handlooms into power looms for which share capital loan, working capital loan, loans for the purchase of looms, motors, etc are given.
- Celebration of All India Handloom Week with a view to popularize the Handloom products.

Various other schemes like providing housing amenities for weavers, supply of push cards for sale of products, weaving grants for the appointment of paid secretary for societies etc are proposed to be undertaken during the Third Five Year Plan period. It is estimated that all the looms in this area can be brought into the cooperative fold by the end of the Third Five Year Plan period and all possible help, channelled through the cooperative institutions for the all round progress of this industry. Still now around 29 handloom units are registered in the district with employment potential of 1.360 persons.

### **Beedi Manufacturing**

In the Kollam District there are 7,000 persons engaged in beedi manufacture. One of the most un-organised industries in the State, nothing reliable is known about its origin. It is common knowledge that this industry can be run with meagre capital. This explains the preponderance of small units which often consists of a single self employed individual. The making of beedies is a very simple process which can be mastered in about 4 to 10 months. No machinery is required. The six stages in the manufacture of beedies are the following: (1) preparation and blending of tobacco (2) cutting of wrapper leaves. (3) rolling of beedies and tying up, (4) closing the ends (5) warming and (6) labelling and packing.

The raw materials used are processed tobacco and wrapper leaves. The more popular and widely used tobacco is obtained from Gujarat and Maharashtra .It is not, however, unusual to obtain inferior tobacco from places like Guntur and mix it with the former superior variety to bring down production costs. The leaves of "*diosporos melanoxyton*" are used for wrapping the tobacco. A serious evil in the beedi industry is the highly insanitary conditions of the work places. The occupation of beedi rolling is carried on in all sorts of places, in large workshops housed in good buildings, small workshops, verandas of shops, small dingy rooms without windows, in temporary sheds, shades of trees, banks of tanks and canals, in short in all imaginable places. A good number of workers are doing their work inside the pan shops on the sides of roads and streets. The Minimum Wages Committee hardly came across an ideal workshop in the whole state in point of cleanliness and neatness.

In the beedi industry there are no fixed hours of work. The Government have fixed the minimum wages in this industry at Rs. 275 per 1,000 beedies. Wages being paid on piece rate

basis, the workers work according to their convenience and the employers are not worried as to when or how they work. It is quite common for the beedi workshops to be kept open from early morning to late in the night. In petty workshops it is not rare to find workers working up to 11 p.m. In brief the beedi workers work very long hours. On an average the workers work for 10 hours a day. Children are no exception to this. Irregularity of employment is however a peculiar feature of this industry. On an average a worker gets employed for about 20 days in a month. There are many who are even out of employment. The causes for irregularity of employment or under-employment are various. The most important of these is the inclemency of the weather. In rainy days tobacco will not be fit to be rolled into beedies and work will be suspended. When stocks accumulate manufacturers are reluctant to continue production as beedies deteriorate and get spoiled if kept in store rooms for more than 3 months. So overstock leads to curtailment or complete stoppage of work. Further if the supply of raw materials, namely, tobacco and wrapper leaves runs out or is short the quantum of available work will disappear or shrink. The regularity of work in this industry is also affected by the difficulties of ensuring regular clearance of their stocks.

### **Khadi and Village Industries**

The development of Khadi and Village industries is the concern of the Kerala Khadi and Village Industries Board. The most important centres of the Khadi industry in Kollam District are Odanavattam and Mylom in Kottarakara taluk and Thevelakara and Karunagapally in Karunagapally taluk. The Khadi industry alone provides employment to more than 12,000 people. The most important village industries of the District are Village Oil, Gurkhansari, Village pottery, Non-edible Oil and Soap, Bee-keeping and Hand-pounding of paddy. There are more than 100 institutions engaged in the development of these industries and all of them are being aided by the Khadi and Village Industries Board.

The Khadi and Village Industries Board also carry on other important activities in this District. It is conducting a Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan at Chinnakada, Kollam where all varieties of Khadi and Khadi silk ready-made garments and handicraft products are being sold to the public. It also conducts a Cotton Go-down at Kollam. This is a Regional Go-down for stocking cotton for distribution among the various Khadi producing centres in Trivandrum, Kollam and Alapuzha Districts. Now the district has 154 registered Khadi units giving employment to 660 persons. Moreover Gurkhansari from sugar cane are demonstrated to the cultivars. In addition there are Bee keeping Sun-stations at Pathanapuram, Punalur and Konni which run directly by the Board. In these sub-stations hives are supplied to intending bee-keepers at subsidised rates.

The traditional industries are one of the major sectors, which give employment to lots of people in Kollam district. It comprises cashew, coir, handloom, beedi, khadi and village industries. Technological stagnation, raising the cost of production, labour militancy, and fierce competition are the main factors for the decline of these traditional industries. The government of Kerala introduced some special schemes for the development of traditional industries.

## References

1. Travancore Archeological Series, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, 1921, 2.
2. Techno-Economic Survey of Kerala, NCAER, New Delhi, 1962.
3. City Development Plan for Kollam, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India and World Bank, New Delhi, 2014.
4. Sreedhara Menon A. Quilon District Gazetteers, The Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, 1964.
5. Statistics for Planning, Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1981.
6. Annual Report of Coir Board, Government of India, New Delhi, 2002.
7. GO. (P) No.13/2017/LBR, Labour and Skills (E) Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, March 2017.
8. *Diosporos Melanoxylon* is species of flowering tree. Locally it is known as temburini. The leaves can be wrapped around tobacco to create the local Indian beedi.
9. Reports of the Minimum Wages Committee, Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2013.
10. District Census Handbook, Kollam, 2010.