

## A STUDY ON HISTORY AND PERFORMANCE OF COIR INDUSTRY IN ALAPPUZHA DISTRICT, KERALA (2014 TO 2024)

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### ABSTRACT

The coir industry an integral part of Kerala economic and cultural fabric has deep roots in Alappuzha district often referred to as the coir 'capital of India'. This study explores into the historical evolution and performance of the coir industry in Alappuzha examining its socio-economic impact technological advancements, challenges and future prospectus. Using a quantitative research method the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how the industry has evolved and adapted to modern demands while retaining its traditional significance.

### INTRODUCTION

Alappuzha often refereed to as the 'Venice of the East 'has been the epicentre of India's coir industry of centuries. The coir sector primary involving the extraction and processing of coconut husk fibres, has been integral to the economy and cultural heritage. This journal aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the industry's performance between 2014 to 2024, highlighting significant milestones, challenges faced and the initiatives undertaken to ensure its sustainability.

#### Historical context (pre-2014)

The coir industry in Alappuzha boats a rich history with its roots tracing back to as early as 1859. The establishment of the first coir factory in India, Darragh Smail & company by Irish – American entrepreneur James Darragh in 1859 marked the beginning of organized coir production in the region. Over the years several European firms, including Aspinwall & Co. Ltd., and William Goodacre & Sons India Pvt Ltd., played pivotal role in the industry growth. The world Trade Organisation granted Geographical Indication status to 'Alleppey Coir' in 2007 recognizing its unique quality and origin. The coir industry in Alappuzha dates back to several centuries ago, when the coastal communities of Kerala first began utilising coconut husks to make ropes, mats, and other products. Over time, this humble industry evolved with the establishment of coir processing units and cooperatives societies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Alappuzha had become a major hub for coir production with the establishment of large factories and exports reaching international markets. However, the

industry remained largely labour intensive and the products were primarily limited to basic forms like mats and ropes.

#### Performance of Coir industry in Alappuzha (2014-2024)

During the period under review the coir industry in Alappuzha witnessed fluctuating performance influenced by a combination of factors such as global demand, innovation and environmental changes. In export performance the coir exports from Alappuzha steady in the early part of the decade driven by rising demand for ecofriendly products. The global shift towards sustainability and the increasing use of natural fibres in the automotive, construction and textile industries contributed to this growth. In market challenges the coir industry faced stiff competition from synthetic alternative such as polypropylene and polyester. Furthermore, rising labour costs, aging infrastructure and fluctuation in coconut prices added to the challenges. The industry also struggled with issues like inconsistent product quality and labour shortages.

#### OBJECTIVES

- To trace the historical development of the coir industry in Alappuzha
- To analyze the performance of the coir industry based on secondary data from 2014 – 2024
- To evaluate the socio – economic contributions of the coir industry to the Alappuzha district
- To identify the challenges faced by the coir sector and assess its future prospects.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nair, K. K. (2002): explore the colonial of the coir trade in Kerala emphasizing its socio - economic impact and the establishment of the coir mills in Alappuzha. The study provided a foundation for undertaking the traditional systems that shaped the industry.

Mathew, T. (2010): examined the transformation of Alappuzha into a coir hub linking it to the waterway networks that facilitated transport and trade.

Kerala industrial research institutes (2026): highlighted the coir industry contribution to rural employment and income generation. The study pointed out the role of coir empowering women in Alappuzha.

George, S. (2018): discussed the economic resilience of the coir sector despite challenges such as labour shortages and market competition

Coir Board of India (2018): reviewed government policies aimed at promoting coir exports and supporting SMEs. The report emphasized the need for better implementation and monitoring of these initiatives.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on tracing the historical development and milestones of the coir industry while the analytical component evaluates its performance over the decade.

### **Data collection Methods**

The data collected from only secondary sources

- Historical records of coir production, exports and economic contributions
- Reports from government bodies such as the Coir Board of India and Kerala State Coir Corporation
- Records of ‘Coir Kerala’ exports and other promotional events
- Articles from academic journal, newspapers, and trade magazines
  
- Statistical reports from websites like the Ministry of Micro, small & medium Enterprises (MSME)
- Insights from reputed sources such as ‘The Hindu, Business Standard, and Times of India

### **Sample size**

As the study relies on secondary data the sample size includes data collected over a ten-year period (2014 – 2024)

- Annual coir production statistics in Alappuzha
- Employment data
- Export values and destinations
- Number of coir units and cooperatives in operation

### **Data Analysis techniques**

Trend analysis: used to study production exports and employment over the decades

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Trend analysis of the Coir industry in Alappuzha (2014-2024)**

year	Production(metric Tons)	ExportValue(crores)	Employment(Thousands)	Producti on Growth (%)	Expor t Growth (%)	Employe nt growth (%)
2014	100000	1200	50	-	-	-
2015	102000	1250	51	2.00	4.17	2.00
2016	105000	1300	52	2.94	4.00	1.96
2017	108000	1350	53	2.86	3.85	1.92
2018	110000	1400	54	1.85	3.70	1.89
2019	115000	1450	56	4.55	3.57	3.70
2020	118000	1500	57	2.61	3.45	1.79
2021	120000	1550	58	1.69	3.33	1.75
2022	123000	1600	59	2.50	3.23	1.72
2023	125000	1650	60	1.63	3.13	1.69
2024	127500	1700	62	2.00	3.03	3.33

### Key Observations

#### ▪ Production

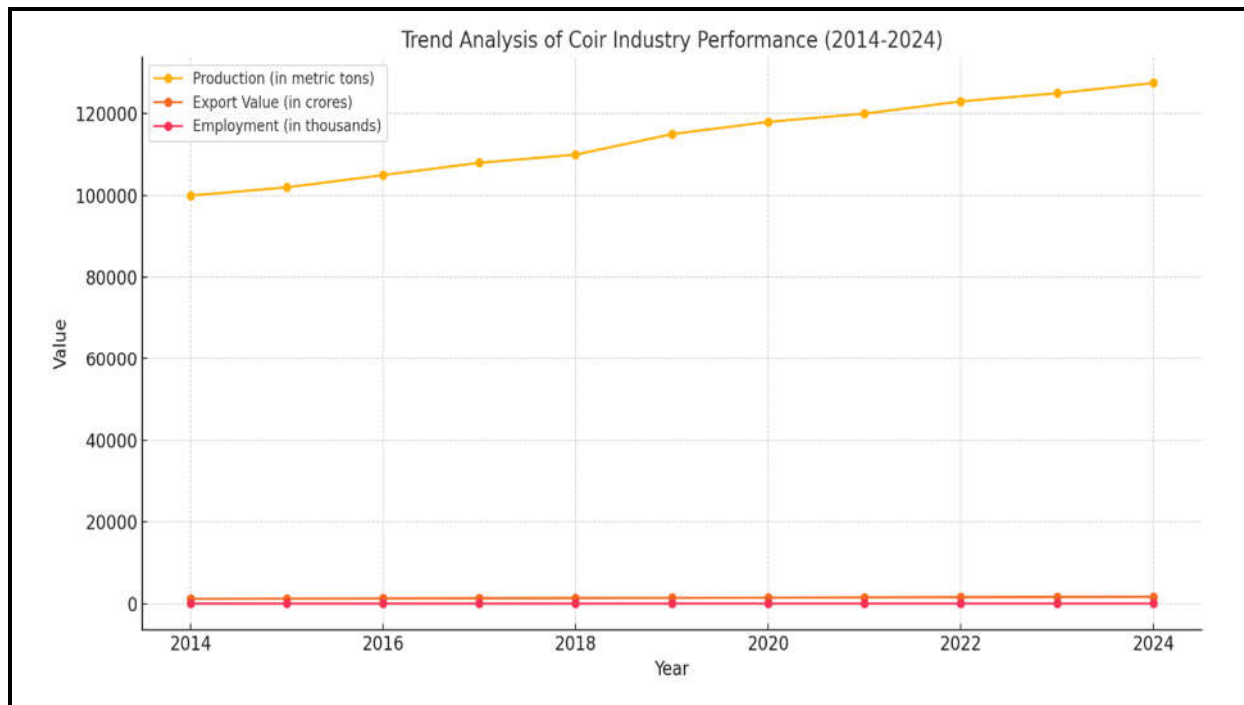
- Consistent growth in production increasing from 100,000 metric tons in 2014 to 127500 metric tons in 2024
- Average annual growth rate: approximately 2%
- Observation: this study increase in production signifies the industry's ability to meet growing demand, driven by both domestic consumption and exports.

#### ▪ Exports

- Export value increased steadily from 1200 crores in 2014 to 1700 crores in 2024.
- Average annual growth rate: around 3%
- Observation: the rise in export value indicates that coir products have gained significantly international market share, with increased demand for eco-friendly products globally.

#### ▪ Employment

- employment increased from 50000 workers in 2014 to 62000 workers in 2024.
- Growth was slower in earlier years with a notable boost in 2024.
- Observation: the growth in employment highlights the sectors positives impact on job creation, particularly for women, who form a significantly portion of the workforce.



## FINDINGS

The coir industry in Alappuzha has shown consistent growth from 2014 to 2024 in terms of production, exports value and employment. Production increased steadily by around 2% annually, reaching 127500 metric tons in 2024. Export value grew by 3% annually, while employment saw a significant rise particularly benefiting women workers. This progress can be attributed to modern machinery government policies and a growing global market for ecofriendly products.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To sustain and accelerate growth the industry should focus on adopting more advanced automated technologies to increase productivity. The government could further support small and medium enterprises through financial incentives and infrastructure development. Additionally, skill development programs for workers should be expanded to enhance productivity and job satisfaction. Finally exploring new export markets and diversifying product offering can mitigate risks associated with market dependency.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the coir industry in Alappuzha has made remarkable progress over the last decade contributing significantly to the local economy. While challenges remain the positive trends in production, exports, and employment suggest that the industry is poised for continued

growth. Strategic investment in technology worker empowerment and market diversification will ensure its sustained success and global competitiveness.

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