

Jute in South Asia



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Jute is a gift of Nature, a fibre derived from a plant that we, in South Asia, fondly call the ‘golden fibre’ on account of its colour and that it earns much needed foreign currency for the country. Let us look at the images of the jute plants, jute fibre and jute sticks as placed below:



Jute Plants



Jute Fibre



Jute Sticks

Jute sticks are used as fuelling and fencing materials in the rural areas of jute producing countries. These are good substitute for forest wood and bamboo for production of particle boards, pulp and paper.

- 1.2 Jute is a product of South Asia and specifically a product of India and Bangladesh. Nearly 98% of world jute is grown in these two south Asian countries. Nepal is the other country of south Asia that grows jute but its production volume is not very significant. Another south Asian country, Pakistan, does not produce jute but processes and manufactures a good quantity of jute goods through import of raw jute fibre mainly from Bangladesh. The table below shows that recent average total world production of jute is of the order of 2465 thousand tonnes a year of which more than 2423 thousand tonnes are grown in the south Asian countries.

World production of jute
(Average of 4 years 2001/02-2004/05)
In thousand tonnes

World (100%)	India (62.19%)	Bangladesh (35.4%)	Nepal (0.61%)	India, Bangladesh & Nepal 98.2%
2465	1533	872.75	16.83	2423

Compiled from FAO Statistics (2001/02-2004-05)

- 1.3 I may mention that cultivation of jute is quite arduous and painstaking. It has a number of stages of processing namely preparing the land, sowing, weeding, harvesting, retting, extraction of fibre, washing, cleaning and drying etc. It's a yearly crop and takes about 120 days (April/May-July/August) to complete the process of cultivation. Below are images of some jute cultivation activities.



Sowing



Harvesting



Retting



Fibre Extraction & washing



Drying of jute fibre

2. Jute Products and their uses:

- 2.1 Jute is a versatile fibre. It can be used independently as well as in blend with other fibres and materials such as plastics. The major manufactured products from jute fibre are: Yarn and Twine, Sacking, Hessian and Diversified jute products. Let us see how do they look and what are their uses.



Jute yarn



Jute Twine

- 2.2 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.



Jute Sacks



Hessian Cloth

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.



Geo-jute applications for road construction, vegetation and soil saving/erosion control activities respectively.

2.5 Diversified jute products (DJP) are an array of non-traditional goods produced by transforming jute to numerous value-added products through innovations and application of artistic skills. Pictures of some of the DJPs are placed 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 .



Curtains



Bag



Floor covering



Decorative table mats

3. 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 geo-textiles for construction of roads and embankments, soil saving and erosion control measures; it reportedly absorbs heat and keeps the earth cool;

4. Socio-economic importance & implications of jute for the south Asian countries:

4.1 Jute cultivation is a matter of culture to the marginal farmers of Bengal part of the Indian sub-continent; I mean 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 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. What I mean to say that 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.

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