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## Review Article

## Sustainable practices in traditional jobs of Kerala: A contextual analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Kerala boasts a remarkable heritage of traditional occupations that thrived in the previous century. These vocations encompassed a range of fields, from working with coir, handicrafts, gold smithery, black smithery, to ayurvedic practices, and beyond. The present study seeks to comprehend the sustainable prospects of these age-old crafts within the state of Kerala. To achieve this end, a secondary analysis was conducted between 2010 and 2023, drawing from fifteen relevant articles subjected to contextual scrutiny. The findings of this research indicate that socio-economic factors exert a significant, adverse effect on the sustainability of traditional occupations. In addition, the integration of technological advancements has also played a role in this development. The promotion of sustainable practices entails the consideration of other factors such as dearth of youth participation in traditional jobs, scarcity of resources, urbanization, industrialization and advent of modern technology,. As such, a holistic and systematic approach can help to empower traditional occupations within Kerala.

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## 1. Introduction

In the state of Kerala, a variety of traditional jobs have long been prevalent. For instance, the Coir Industry Workers employ their expertise in crafting products from the supple fibers of coconuts to create utilitarian objects such as sturdy mats, ropes, and brushes. Meanwhile, Fishermen adeptly engage in the activities of fishing, both in inland and coastal waters. Carpenters are skilled craftsmen, who make use of their mastery of wood to create a wide range of wooden objects including furniture, boats, and other attractive products. Additionally, Blacksmiths are highly skilled workers who forge metal to create tools, agricultural implements, and ornamental pieces with intricate designs. Similarly, Weavers are those skilled craftsmen who are primarily engaged in traditional handloom weaving of

fabrics like sarees and dhotis, utilizing locally produced natural fibers. Also prevalent in Kerala are Potters, artisans who sculpt pottery and ceramic products, including pots, vessels and decorative items. In addition, Toddy Tappers collect sap from coconut or palm trees to make alcoholic beverages like toddy. Tilling the land has been a traditional occupation as well, with farmers growing rice, coconut, spices, and rubber being important crops.<sup>1-11</sup>

Traditional Medicine Practitioners (Vaidyas) provide herbal and natural remedies for a range of ailments based on traditional knowledge. Kalaripayattu Trainers inhabit yet another occupational classification of Kerala society. They teach, in a highly skilled manner, the traditional martial art form of Kalaripayattu. Additionally, Artisans engage in crafting traditional products, including metal utensils, wood carvings, and stone sculptures that are highly valued for their artistic qualities. Similarly, Kathakali and Theyyam Performers add another layer to Kerala's cultural

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fabric. Finally, Toddy Shop Workers are involved in the preparation and serving of food in establishments where toddy is also served. Ayurvedic Practitioners, meanwhile, are professionals trained in the ancient system of Ayurvedic medicine and offer natural healing treatments.

### 1.1. Statement of the problem

The traditional range of fields, from working with coir, handicrafts, gold smithery, black smithery, to ayurvedic practices, seeks to comprehend the sustainable prospects of the age-old crafts in Kerala. The integration of technological advancements has also played a role and the promotion of sustainable practices entails the consideration of other factors in traditional jobs, scarcity of resources, urbanization, industrialization and advent of modern technology. A holistic and systematic attempt to empower the traditional occupations of Kerala is relevant.

## 2. Objectives

The prevalence of traditional occupations has dwindled significantly, owing to urbanization, industrialization, and technological advancements. The present study endeavours to comprehend the sustainable practices employed in traditional jobs prevalent in Kerala.

## 3. Scope, Materials and Methods of Study

Secondary data was used within the framework of the contextual analysis. The study concentrates on sustainable practices in conventional job settings. The search for data involved perusing online search engines, such as Google Scholar and the Social Science Research Network. Kerala has remarkable heritage in traditional occupations. To comprehend the sustainable prospects of these age-old crafts, a secondary analysis was conducted between 2010 and 2023, drawing from fifteen relevant articles subjected to contextual scrutiny. For that, pertinent articles within the range of 2010 to 2023 keywords were utilized. The outcome of the latter will provide a lucid depiction of the topic and its associations with other variables.

## 4. Results and Discussion

To analyse the sustainable practices linking with the traditional jobs in Kerala, a literature perspective was attempted.

A study explores the role and importance of traditional occupations as contemporary careers. It investigates the conflicts and harmonies between modern values and the practice of traditional occupations. The concept of "traditional occupations" is clarified, and the potential of these roles in agriculture and crafts for fostering inclusive and sustainable societies is examined. The article also highlights how this potential impact career guidance

practices (Ratnam, 2011).

The issues in Kerala's handloom sector and highlight challenges such as inadequate technical expertise among management, financial shortages, strong competition from power loom industries and nearby states, and an inability to meet the demand for diverse products as key problems (Varghese & Salim, 2015).

A study's objectives include assessing livelihood options, evaluating handicrafts' market status, examining raw material sources and sustainability, and analysing support from local NGOs, government programs, and financial institutions. The findings highlight challenges like raw material scarcity, lack of market demand for certain products, and low wages. The study underscores the need for stronger support from both government and NGOs to address these challenges and promote sustainable development among tribal populations (U. Harikrishnan. & Krishna, 2015).

A study examines the evolving rural employment structure and its implications for the rural labour market. There has been a shift from agriculture to non-agricultural work, with the non-farm sector becoming a prominent driver of rural development, contributing significantly to the rural economy. This transition has resulted in fewer people engaged in agriculture, especially among both male and female workers. This shift has also caused changes in occupations among different social groups, with greater reliance on rural non-farm jobs, particularly in construction, and reduced dependence on agriculture. This transformation has led to a substantial movement of rural labour from agriculture to non-farm activities and increased migration from rural to urban areas, especially among male workers seeking higher-paying jobs, consequently tightening the labour market (Joy, 2016).

A study aims to assess the socio-economic status of the fishermen community in a specific area. The objectives include examining their conditions, identifying their challenges, and proposing policy measures for improvement. The study uses primary and secondary data, collected through structured surveys using random sampling. The findings indicate that the Chombala fisheries area, including mechanized and motorized sectors, is developed, with better socio-economic conditions in the mechanized category. Recommendations include offering alternative employment during fishing bans, improving infrastructure for fish storage, direct fish export from Chombala, and affordable fuel distribution for the fishing community's benefit (Jasna & Palai, 2016).

Another study for textile workers on employee satisfaction and Employees' State Insurance (ESI) benefits in the public sector. The study proposes improving medical assistance quality to expand coverage, addressing dissatisfaction with doctors and ESI staff that limits access to services. To address this, the study recommends changing

attitudes, enhancing monetary benefits, and ensuring timely payments to handle unforeseen circumstances (Asha, Lekshmi, & Nayana, 2017).



**Figure 1:** Traditional weaving in Kerala  
(Source: <https://lc.kerala.gov.in/images/coir.pdf>)

A study aims to thoroughly assess the existing labour-related problems in this sector. The spinning mill industry in Kerala, a labour-intensive traditional sector, has historically played a significant role in providing employment to rural unskilled labour. Despite its establishment since the late 19th century and its contribution to the state's industrialization, the industry currently faces challenges. These challenges pertain to both management and employment issues (Chacko, 2017).

A study discusses the significance of small-scale and cottage industries in the Indian economy, particularly due to their employment generation, contribution to industrial output, and exports. It highlights the challenges of low productivity and traditional industries in India. The focus of the study is on the khadi industry, established to economically uplift rural communities. The research aims to assess the living standards of khadi workers and their families. The study investigates the socio-economic status of khadi workers and the issues faced by both workers and the khadi industry, using selected units in the Malappuram district of Kerala. The findings reveal that only female workers are drawn to the khadi industry due to low wages. The study suggests the implementation of schemes to fulfil workers' basic needs and the enhancement of training programs to improve the situation (Ameen & Kirubashini, 2017).

The coir industry in Kerala, historically prevalent in coastal regions, is currently experiencing challenges such as closure or relocation to other states. The traditional coir spinning practices, predominantly found in rural areas, have hindered the adoption of modern methods, contributing to the decline of the industry. The research was conducted in the Kollam and Alappuzha districts of Kerala, primarily involving female workers who heavily rely on the coir industry for income in coastal areas. The industry faces multiple issues, including labour shortages, insufficient government support for traditional methods, and concerns



**Figure 2:** Coir industry in Kerala  
(Source: <https://lc.kerala.gov.in/images/coir.pdf>)

related to low wages and worker health (Ashik, 2018).

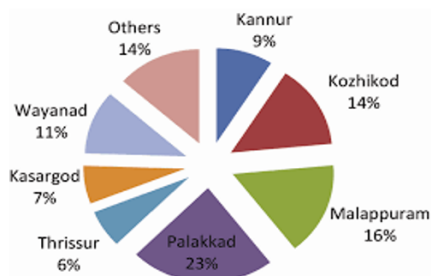
A study focus is on the social and economic characteristics of coir workers in Kerala, based on a survey conducted in Cherthala taluk within Alappuzha district. The coir industry is a vital traditional cottage industry in India's southwestern coastal belt, with Kerala playing a central role. It is an agro-based, rural, and export-oriented sector, contributing significantly to income, employment, and foreign exchange. In Kerala, the coir industry provides employment to around 4 lakhs individuals across 2.13 lakh families, making it the second-largest source of non-agricultural employment for rural communities. Alleppey is a focal point for Kerala's renowned coir industry (Aswathy, 2018).

The community's lack of awareness about global trends in the sector and their limited financial resources to adopt new technologies has disproportionately impacted their socio-economic well-being. This vulnerable situation has led to a pessimistic outlook on their future prospects. The research is based on primary data collected from 300 goldsmiths in the Kasargod and Thrissur districts, selected through random sampling. The study's findings indicate a noticeable decline in the community's socio-economic conditions, reflected in their income levels falling below the state average. Consequently, the younger generation is reluctant to continue the traditional goldsmith occupation, contributing to a weakened belief in the sector's ability to provide a sustainable livelihood (Pradeep & Devasia, 2018).

A cross-sectional survey conducted to assess the impact of floods on various aspects of the heritage and livelihoods in the Aranmula region. The study examined elements like Palliyodams (snake boats), traditional artisans, worship places, and traditional houses. Data was collected from 52 Palliyodakaras (villages), 21 flood-affected Aranmula Mirror Artisans, traditional houses, and around 50 worship places in the Aranmula Heritage Zone. The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The study revealed that floods had severe negative effects on the heritage sites' livelihoods. The flood damage was particularly significant for items like Palliyodams, Palliyodapura (Boat Sheds), Adayabharanam

(boat ornaments), Palliyoda nayambukal (rudder-oar), and Palliyodakkadavu (snake boat landing area). Most Palliyodams required extensive maintenance, and nearly half of the Aranmula Mirror Artisans experienced material losses due to the flood. The study underscores the urgency of revitalizing Aranmula heritage and people's livelihoods, as well as the importance of safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural elements through a comprehensive plan (Harikrishnan, 2019).

A study highlights the significant contribution of the fisheries sector to government revenues in India but points out that the social and economic conditions of fishermen across the country, particularly in Kerala, are subpar. In Kerala, fishermen's socio-economic status remains low, leading to inadequate outcomes in education, health, occupation, and income. To address this, the abstract suggests that the microfinance industry could play a pivotal role in improving the fishermen's status. The primary objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of microfinance initiatives on the fishermen community in Kerala. Specifically, the study aims to measure improvements in socio-economic status that lead to personal economic well-being among fishermen. The study also includes an examination of the current socio-economic status of the fishermen community in Kerala and its classification based on various criteria (Mathew & Joseph, 2020).<sup>12–16</sup>



Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/District-wise-distribution-of-area-under-traditional-rice-varieties-in-Kerala-2010-11\\_fig2\\_323813051](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/District-wise-distribution-of-area-under-traditional-rice-varieties-in-Kerala-2010-11_fig2_323813051)

**Figure 3:** District wise distribution of area under traditional rice varieties in Kerala (2010-11)

A focus on traditional rice cultivation dynamics in Kerala examines economic, institutional, and socio-demographic factors influencing the production and marketing of traditional rice. The research utilizes a multinomial logit model and discriminant function analysis to identify key factors influencing farmers' marketing behaviour, and it employs various cost measures to assess the economics of rice farming. Socio-demographic factors are analysed using descriptive statistical methods. The main determinants of farmers' marketing behaviour are holding size and institutional support. The study reveals that traditional farmers tend to be older, less educated, and use limited marketing channels. Majority expressed

satisfaction with their farming endeavours. The article suggests that by improving market support mechanisms and processing facilities, traditional rice cultivation could regain momentum in key areas (Krishnankutty, Blakeney, Raju, & Siddique, 2021).

A study aims to assess the level of mechanization within Kerala's coir industry and identify factors influencing the adoption of mechanization in coir manufacturing. The research employs primary data gathered from 115 coir manufacturers in Alappuzha district through simple random sampling. The study first evaluates mechanization using two indices: the extent of mechanization (EM) and mechanization index (MI). The coir industry in Kerala is then categorized into four levels of mechanization – traditional, low mechanized, medium mechanized, and high mechanized – using the MI. The findings reveal that a significant portion of coir-producing firms in Kerala are situated in the traditional and low mechanized categories. To understand the factors driving mechanization, the study employs Tobit regression analysis. The results indicate that firm size, involvement in promotional programs, and the average education level of the workforce positively influence the mechanization index. Conversely, the presence of labour unions has a negative impact on mechanization (Raseena, 2022).

## 5. Empowering Sustainable Practices in Traditional Jobs: Findings, Implications and Recommendations

Many of the traditional jobs are going to be insecure among the individuals or industries due to the various factors. Recently the economic review of 2022 presented a report on traditional industries which highlighted various issues faced by the sector. These include exploitation by intermediaries, reduced demand for bamboo products during off-seasons, intense competition from the private sector, availability of cheap Chinese alternatives, reluctance of artisans to pursue their craft due to unfavourable work conditions, minimal interest among youth to enter the sector, shortage of skilled workers, regulations surrounding bamboo procurement and cutting from forests, absence of a proper supply chain for bamboo, scarcity of working capital and credit for artisans, NGOs and MSMEs, limited entrepreneurship opportunities, insufficient skill development initiatives, outdated designs and products, lack of technology and awareness, inadequate standardization and packaging facilities, and insufficient marketing support for forward and backward linkages (Govt. of Kerala, 2023).

The development of a sustainable framework model is imperative for empowering the traditional job sector. Policy-level initiatives, livelihood strategies, and outcomes must be viewed as long-term processes required for the sector's empowerment. Consequently, enhancing resilience and sustainability while reducing vulnerability remain key focuses for achieving empowerment.

## 6. Conclusion

Several factors come into play in bolstering or undermining the traditional job sector. Some professions remain relevant and popular in contemporary times, such as Ayurvedic practices. Socioeconomic factors play a critical role in the livelihood and sustainable practices of this sector, making economic and developmental aspects a crucial focus. The contextual analysis concludes that the developmental sector should prioritize the following areas: addressing present challenges, adapting to evolving circumstances, restructuring sustainable processes, and considering socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors.

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## 8. Conflict of Interest

None.

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