CHAPTER VIII

IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY AND MARKETING OF RAW JUTE AND MESTA

8.1. During the course of our discussions with the various jute interests, certain measures for the improvement of quality, production and marketing of jute were suggested to us. Though these do not fall strictly within our terms of reference, we would like to take the opportunity of mentioning them here as they have some bearing on the availability of jute in the country.

8.2. Tamarind-water Treatment.—The Jute Agricultural Research Institute of the Indian Central Jute Committee have evolved a process of treating dark colour jute with tamarind-water which, it is said, improves the colour of the fibre significantly. We were shown two samples by the Director of Jute Agricultural Research Institute, Indian Central Jute Committee the original dark colour or shyamla jute produced in some areas ad the same after treatment with tamarind-water. The colour of the jute which had been treated by tamarind-water had significantly improved and practically all the representatives of the trade present at the meeting agreed that this would easily enjoy a premium of about Rs. 3 per maund over the original shyamla jute. It is estimated that the cost of treating jute with tamarind-water would be only about 10 annas per maund and as such there will be a net gain of more than Rs. 2/- per maund to the cultivator if he adopts the tamarind process. The process is a simple one. The cultivator would need three vats. In one of them a weak solution of tamarind is prepared while the other two contain fresh water. Immediately after the fibre is extracted from the plant it is dipped while still wet in the tamarind solution for about five minutes. It is then taken out and washed successively in the two fresh water vats. The whole process, therefore, does not take more than 10 to 15 minutes. It can be best done by the cultivator himself as the wet jute immediately after retting has to be dipped in the tamarind-water. Once the jute has been retted, dried and sold it is not practicable to treat it with the tamarind-water. A note on the subject supplied to us by the Director of the Jute Agricultural Research Institute is given in Appendix A V.

8.3. A few points were, however, raised in this connection. It was apprehended by some that if by this process the strength of the fibre is weakened, the advantage gained by the improvement of colour would be lost. We discussed this aspect with the Director, Jute Technological Research Laboratories, Indian Central Jute Committee, and the Director, Research Institute, Indian Jute Mills Association. Both of them were of the opinion that the fears about the weakness in strength, as a result of the tamarind-water treatment, are rather exaggerated. We have, however, requested them to conduct some research on this point and let the Government know about the strength of the tamarind-water treated fibre. We have also requested them to examine if some cheap chemical could be substituted for tamarind. If their results are favourable, it seems desirable to us to popularise the use of this process amongst the jute cultivators.

It will be useful if a small pamphlet is prepared by the Indian Central Jute Committee giving the details of the tamarind process and its advantages. This pamphlet may be distributed widely in those jute growing areas where the colour of the jute produced is dark or shyamla. There are some areas *e.g.* in Cuttack district in Orissa and Purnea district in Bihar, where the jute grown is of good quality but the colour is dark and if this jute is treated with tamarind-water, much of our shortage of white jute would be met. To begin with, however, the experiment may be confined to some of these areas and if it proves successful and worthwhile, the desirability of its wide adoption may be considered.

8.4. Import Duty on Bleached Jute Goods.—A representative of the Indian Jute mills Association expressed the fear that the tamarind-water treated jute might be classified by U.S.A. as bleached jute and the hessian prepared out of it might be subjected to a higher import duty. The advantage thus gained by treating the jute with tamarind-water would be lost by the mills in the payment of a higher duty. Our attention was drawn in this connection to paragraph 1008 of the U.S. Tariff Act, as amended, with respect to U.S. import duty, which specifies that, "woven fabrics wholly of jute, not specially provided for, not bleached, stenciled, painted, dyed, coloured, or rendered non-inflamable, ½ cent per pound; bleached, printed, stenciled, painted, dyed, coloured, or rendered non-inflamable, ½ cent per pound and 5 per cent. *ad valorem*." The Calcutta Jute Fabric Shippers' Association have also received a letter from the Textile Bag Manufactures Association and the Burlap and Jute Association, U.S.A., requesting them to advise their members in Calcutta that unless otherwise advised by cable, when an offer of acceptance is made, it is to be understood that any "bright" burlap offered or accepted as such will not be bleached, dyed or coloured and if U.S. Customs assess duty at 5 per cent. *ad valorem* in addition to the specific duty of 1/2 cent per pound on any burlap described as 'bright', the buyer will have a valid claim for the 5 per cent. *ad valorem* duty. We do not know the reasons why the chemically treated jute goods have been assessed at a higher rate by the U.S. Customs. It seems to us to be an unfair discrimination aimed in effect against Indian products *vis-a-vis* Pakistan products. We would suggest that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry should examine the matter carefully and take it up with the U.S. authorities, if necessary. In any case, tamarind-water treatment should not be regarded as a chemical treatment of fabric. It is really part of an improved method of retting and is necessary to remove the tannin in jute plants and iron in retting water which darken the colour of the fibre.

8.5. Extensive Cultivation.—We have noted in a previous chapter that the supply of raw jute and mesta in the country falls short of the requirement and in the interest of the country it would be preferable if the deficiency is met by increasing the internal production as early as possible. This can be done either by increasing the area under jute and/or mesta or by intensive cultivation and increasing the yield per acre. We have already referred to the limited possibility of bringing in more areas under jute and/or mesta. There are, no doubt, some possibilities in this respect in Assam, U.P. and Orissa. To the extent it is possible without affecting the production of paddy, it would be desirable to bring in additional areas under jute and mesta. In some cases double cropping can also be resorted to. But, the main increase in the production would have to be achieved largely by intensive cultivation of the existing jute/mesta lands.

8.6. Our yield per acre of jute is only about 2.5 bales as compared to 3.5 bales in Pakistan and about 5 bales in China. There is thus great scope and need for increasing our yield per acre. One advantage of intensive cultivation is that it will enable increase in production of jute in areas where good retting water especially slow flowing canal or river water, is already available. We recommend that special attempts should be made to intensify the cultivation of jute in the neighbourhood of slow flowing canals and rivers.

8.7. Intensive Cultivation : Top Dressing.—Intensive cultivation implies better manuring, improved seeds, improved cultural practices, control of pests and diseases, etc. Experiments have shown that top-dressing of jute with chemical fertilisers (when the crop is about 1 to 1½ months old) at 100 lbs. per acre gives an additional yield of 2 to 6 maunds of fibre per acre. The application of fertilisers, especially of nitrogenous fertilisers, can thus play a very important role in our drive for increased production of jute. The programme for top-dressing of jute is being taken up by the State Governments from the current season *i.e.* 1957-58, and it is proposed to apply fertilisers to about 6 lakh acres, *i.e.* about 50 per cent. of the existing area under jute, by the end of the Second Plan period. This, it is estimated, would result in the additional production of about 6 lakh bales. We feel that it is essential that this programme, which offers the best potentialities for the increase in production, should be taken up in right earnest by the State Governments and the use of fertilisers by the cultivators should be popularised as much as possible. What is needed is to make the fertilisers available to cultivators in every village at the right time and to educate them about the advantages of top dressing.

8.8. The representatives of the trade associations and the Indian Jute Mills Association with whom we had discussions extended their full support to the Government in distributing fertilisers. The Chairman of the Indian Jute Mills Association was good enough to offer to print and distribute pamphlets on the use of fertilisers through their agencies and at their own cost. Some trade associations also offered the help of their local agencies in popularising and distributing fertilisers. The State Governments might like to take advantage of such a cooperative spirit of the trade in making the fertiliser drive a success. Some trade associations also felt that during the period fertilisers are to be used, the State officials should undertake extensive tours and inspect the actual distribution and the use of fertilisers.

8.9. Improved Seeds and Cultural Practices.—We can hardly over-emphasise the need for making available to the cultivators improved seeds in adequate quantities and at reasonable terms. Though some steps have already been taken by the Government in this direction, it is desirable that these should be stepped up quickly. The adoption of improved cultural practices is also no less important. It is estimated that line-sowing by seed drill and subsequent inter-culture by wheel-hoes, besides increasing the yield of fibre, reduces the cost of cultivation by about 20 per cent. The extra yield obtained in line-sown jute averages 10 to 20 per cent., while a substantial reduction in weeding cost which covers nearly 25 to 40 per cent. of the entire cost of cultivation, is also effected. Attempts, should, therefore, be made to procure adequate number of seed drills and wheel-hoes and to distribute them to the cultivators as widely as possible.

8.10. Plant Protection.—Jute plants are susceptible to various diseases and pests. The annual loss due to the attack of diseases and pests is

roughly estimated to vary between 2 to 10 per cent. affecting about 15 per cent. of the total jute area every year. The adoption of appropriate plant protection measures will thus save a considerable quantity of jute. We have already referred, in a previous chapter, to the urgent need for conducting some research for protecting *Hibiscus Cannabinus* variety of Mesta from the diseases to which it is susceptible. We would like to emphasise the importance of undertaking adequate and quick plant protection measures so as to save as much jute crop as possible from loss.

8.11. Interim Recommendations.—The Chairman of the Sub-Committee emphasised these points at the meeting of the State representatives held at Calcutta on 18th April, 1957 and stressed the urgency of supply of fertilisers for the current year's crop. A list of trade associations which offered their cooperation in this respect was also supplied to the State representatives present at the meeting. The progress made by the State Governments so far, in the matter of supply of fertilisers, does not seem to be very encouraging. We hope that in future more earnest attention will be paid in this respect. The achievement of the additional target of production of jute depends almost entirely on intensive efforts for the supply of better seeds, fertilisers, and adoption of improved cultural practices by the cultivators and if these are not given the importance and urgency they deserve, we are afraid the deficiency in our supply may be much greater than what has been estimated by us.

8.12. Pressing and Baling of Jute.—Some of the trade representatives also pointed out to us the need for setting up small pressing and baling machines at the producing centres so that jute or mesta is pressed in bales at the producing centres. This, it was pointed out, would cut down the cost of transport and storage incurred at present by the jute dealers and mills. The loose fibre is at present transported in drums from the producing centres and stored by the mills as such, which besides raising the cost of transport is highly inflamable and requires a higher insurance premium. If the raw jute is pressed and baled at the producing centres, the traders and millers will be able to economise in the cost of transport and insurance charges and a large proportion of this gain would be passed on to the cultivator. The example of cotton pressing and baling was cited by some people who felt that there is no reason why jute baling and pressing cannot be done in rural areas. The suggestion indeed deserves full consideration and it would be worth-while to explore the possibilities of establishing cooperative presses in producing centres. The cost of a small press is said to be about Rs. 4,000 to 5,000/- and it is within the capacity of cooperative societies to establish such presses for the benefit of the cultivators. The reports from the State Governments indicate that transport has been one of the major bottlenecks in some of the States, particularly in Bihar and U.P. Wagon shortage for the transport of jute is said to be more acute in Bihar between August and December, while in U.P. it is said to be a chronic problem. While these transport bottlenecks call for varied action on the part of transport authorities, we feel that the transport of jute in pressed bales would help in reducing the burden on rail and road traffic and would thus contribute, in a measure, to the reduction of the intensity of transport difficulties and bottlenecks.

8.13. Grading of Jute.—Grading and standardisation of raw jute has unfortunately not so far received the attention it deserves. In the absence of proper standardisation of the various types of raw jute produced in

different areas it not only becomes difficult to collect and classify the data for crop planning and import policy purposes, but also exposes the cultivators to exploitation by the dealers and millers. Instances are not wanting where a better grade of jute is classified arbitrarily as inferior or X-bottom grade by the buyers on one pretext or the other, and an unfair price is paid to the grower. This state of affairs should indeed not be allowed to continue for long and we would strongly recommend that urgent steps be taken to standardise the various grades of jute and mesta on uniform and scientific lines.

8.14. Displaced Persons & Quality of Jute.—We have already referred to the desirability of setting some families of skilled displaced persons in important jute growing areas. The quality of the fibre very much depends on the skill used by the cultivator in retting and extracting it from the plant. People from East Bengal have long experience of growing better quality jute and we were told that wherever displaced persons from East Pakistan have settled in West Bengal or Bihar, the quality of jute has increased considerably. We are conscious of the fact that the settlement of displaced persons involves several considerations; but if this point is also kept in view by the authorities, who ultimately arrange for the re-settlement of these persons, it would serve the cause of the country better.

8.15. Premium for Good Quality Jute.—At present, the premium being paid for good quality jute is so low as to work more as a disincentive than as an incentive to the grower. We were informed that the average cultivator feels that it is not worthwhile to take extra care for improvement of the quality of fibre as the price differential between the superior and the inferior grades of jute is not worth the extra effort required for improving the quality. This state of affairs is due partly to the absence of proper standardization and grading of raw jute and needs to be looked into.

8.16. Cooperative Marketing Societies.—We have already referred to the monopsonistic exploitation of the growers of raw-jute by the buyers because of the low bargaining position of the farmer. We feel that the establishment of co-operative marketing societies should go a long way in securing to the growers a fair price for their produce. The establishment of such Societies will also cure a number of other draw-backs from which the growers of raw jute suffer in marketing their produce.

8.17. Retting Water Facilities.—The quality of the fibre is again dependent to a large extent on the retting water facilities. Nothing is better for retting than the natural clean and slow moving water and one of the reasons why East Pakistan is growing good quality jute is because of the presence of abundant natural water facilities there. Flowing water, especially of the Brahmputra, is clean and is ideal for the production of good quality jute. On the other hand tank water soon gets muddy and sometimes contains a high degree of salts which spoil the colour and quality of the fibre. We have already pointed out earlier the need for ascertaining the areas where natural clean and slow moving water is available so that efforts may be concentrated in such areas. In this context the possibility of using the waters of the canals of Damodar Valley, Mayurakshi, Hirakud and such other projects for retting jute may be explored. We understand that some of these canals are not used for irrigation purposes during the period when jute is usually retted. We appreciate, however, that our suggestion can be carried out only if jute or mesta is grown in the neighbourhood of these canals. In other areas where the fibre grown is strong and

of good quality, provision of retting tanks is individually the most important factor which would improve the colour and quality of the fibre. The need for conducting some research for improving the quality of the tank water is also great in this context. Though we have referred to these problems in earlier chapters, they are so crucial that we would like to emphasise their importance and urgency once again.