Process Improvement using Drying technique in Coir Pith Industry

Dr Balaji M ME, MBA, PhD
Associate Professor,
Mechanical Engineering
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore,Tamilnadu

Surendar L
UG, Mechanical Engineering Scholar
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

Naveen G G
UG, Mechanical Engineering Scholar
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

Sanjeeth M
UG, Mechanical Engineering Scholar
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

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***Abstract*—** Coir pith is a byproduct of coconut processing, usually not utilized. But of late, it has also gained significance in agriculture as it possesses high water retaining ability, hence of great value for farming in arid areas. Coir pith is used extensively in producing blocks for use in agriculture and horticulture, but it is only dried pith that can be processed. Conventional drying processes, including sun-drying, are time-consuming, weather-dependent, and need extensive open spaces, which render production slow and not efficient.

To address these issues, we have created a machine that accelerates drying through the circulation of hot air. The system includes fans and an induction coil that warms the air, which flows through a rotating drum by a fan. This arrangement facilitates quicker and more consistent drying of the coir pith. It can be designed according to production needs, and hence it is appropriate for small-scale as well as large-scale industries. Through enhanced drying, this solution provides a consistent supply of high-quality dried coir pith, enabling its broader application in agriculture and allied industries. This development enhances productivity while fostering the adoption of sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in the processing of coir pith. It also decreases labor dependency and minimizes weather disruptions. The system is made to be easy to operate, with constant output and minimal supervision.

Keywords — Coir Pith, Coco Peat Drying, Hot Air Circulation, Uniform Drying

I. INTRODUCTION

Coir pith or coco peat is a porous, fibrous waste product acquired in the process of extracting coir fiber from coconut husk. Previously thought of as crop waste, coir pith has emerged as a very precious material in horticulture and agriculture because it has better water-holding capacity, aeration properties, and is biodegradable. Being highly capable of holding water makes it particularly valuable in arid and drought regions, where every drop of water needs to be conserved. With growing awareness regarding sustainable agriculture and organic cultivation, the need for coir pith blocks as a natural soil conditioner and propagation medium has increased tremendously globally.

The manufacture of coir pith blocks comprises several important stages. The raw pith is initially pumped into the system, where it is subjected to sieving to eliminate fine dust particles and attain a consistent texture. It is then treated with a destoner, which removes stones and other heavy impurities that may hinder block formation. Some processes also incorporate a buster or second level sieving to further fine-tune the material. In most units, the coir pith is washed to decrease the electrical conductivity (EC) by stripping away salt content, followed by a drying process. Drying is necessary to reduce the moisture content to a preferred level for block construction. After proper drying, the pith is moved to the compression unit, where it is compressed into standardized blocks through a hydraulic or mechanical press. The finished product is then packed and prepared for shipment or consumption.

Among the steps, drying is one of the most demanding and time-consuming stages, particularly when employing traditional sun-drying techniques. They are not only weather-dependent but also demand vast open areas and long drying time, which influence production timetables and quality uniformity. Moreover, runoff water from washed pith could cause environmental concerns like soil and water pollution. To counter these drawbacks, this study presents a hot air-drying system that includes induction heating coils and fan-based air flow inside a rotating drum design. The setup facilitates even and speeded drying irrespective of weather conditions, lowering the drying time, energy consumption, and occupied area. It is a scale-up design that is energy-friendly and appropriate for both small-scale and large-scale industries. By incorporating such technology, the process of manufacturing coir pith blocks can be made more predictable, efficient, and sustainable, keeping up with increasing market demands without harming the environment.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The coir pith block industry contributes immensely to sustainable agriculture by transforming waste from coconut processing into a valuable growing medium. One of the most serious challenges confronting the industry is the ineffective drying of the air pith prior to block compression. Conventional drying processes, mostly sun drying, are extremely weather dependent, occupy large areas of land, and take too much time. These constraints not only slow down production cycles but also cause uneven moisture levels, resulting in substandard block quality, equipment jamming, and higher operating costs.

Additionally, coir pith washing to further decrease salt (EC) content adds complexity to drying, in many cases, resulting in land and water contamination because of run-off that goes unchecked. Erratic drying negatively influences the material compressibility, resulting in unequal block density and lowered customer satisfaction. The absence of a regulated, weather-free system of drying results in an insurmountable bottleneck during manufacturing and precludes scalability.

There is a critical need for a controlled, efficient, and dependable drying technology capable of repetitively drying coir pith to the optimum moisture level for block making. This research is intended to solve this problem through the conceptualization of a hot air-based drying system with induction coils and fan-aided airflow incorporated in a rotating drum setup. The system will save drying time, decrease environmental footprints, and enhance the overall efficiency and quality of coir pith block production.

III. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to develop a reliable, efficient, and weather-independent drying system for coir pith that overcomes the limitations of traditional sun drying techniques. Traditional drying methods are time-consuming, inconsistent, highly dependent on climatic conditions, and require large land areas, making them unsuitable for meeting growing industrial demands. This study aims to design and implement a hot air-based drying system using induction coils and a fan-assisted rotating drum mechanism that ensures uniform airflow and consistent temperature distribution throughout the drying chamber. The objective is to achieve faster moisture reduction, leading to uniformly dried coir pith that is ideal for block formation without causing clogging or pressure buildup in the compressing machines. Furthermore, the research seeks to enhance the quality and durability of the coir pith blocks, reduce processing delays, and minimize energy and material wastage.

Fig 1: Traditional Drying Method

The system is designed to be flexible and scalable for adoption in both small-scale and large-scale coir pith processing units. By addressing key issues such as excess moisture, environmental pollution from runoff, and inefficient use of space and time, the proposed solution contributes toward a more sustainable, productive, and eco-friendly manufacturing process. The study also aims to set a benchmark for standardized, controlled drying processes in the coir industry, promoting better resource utilization and increased profitability.

IV. PROCESS OF MAKING COIR PITH BLOCK

Coir pith, a residue of coconut fibre extraction, is now well known for its environmentally friendly uses, especially in horticulture and agriculture. Due to its superior water-holding capacity, it is suitable as a growing medium and for soil conditioning. To satisfy industry and export requirements, however, coir pith goes through several processes of treatment, each of which is vital to making the product clean, consistent, and safe for plant use.

1. EC (Electrical Conductivity) Washing

The raw coir pith will generally have a high level of soluble salts and is not so safe for direct use in agriculture. For making it safe for agricultural usage. The pith is washed effectively with freshwater in tanks or open beds. It brings the EC levels down. Several washing cycles can be needed depending on the initial salt level. Care is exercised in controlling run-off water to prevent environmental and soil contamination.

2. *Draining and Dewatering*

After EC washing, coir pith has a large amount of moisture content and is required to be dewatered: Washed pith may be allowed to drain naturally or by sloped platforms. There are instances when mechanical dewatering units have been installed for the efficient elimination of excess water. This process is important to condition the material for drying and prevent clogging in downstream equipment.

3. *Primary Sieving*

The dewatered pith usually has unprocessed fibers, clumps, and foreign matter. It is sieved through a coarse sieving system to. Eliminate larger particles, twigs, and unground material. Provide uniformity in particle size prior to drying.

4. *Secondary Sieving and Destoning*

The material is finer sieved to remove any remaining large particles or clumps. A destoner unit eliminates small stones, sand, and mineral impurities. This ensures only fine, clean coir pith moves on to the compression stage.

5. *Compression into Blocks*

The clean and dry coir pith is fed into a block-making machine: It is compressed into standardized blocks (often 5 kg or 650 g formats). Compression is often hydraulic, creating compact, export-quality blocks. This saves space, facilitating easier and cheaper transportation and storage.

6. Quality Control

Each batch or block is checked for moisture content, EC levels, and physical uniformity. Blocks that fail to pass export-grade requirements are reprocessed or rejected.

7. Packaging and Storage

Wrapped in plastic packaging or shrink covers to preserve dryness. Packaged and stored in a ventilated warehouse. Readied for distribution within the domestic and foreign markets.

This optimized process—from EC washing to final packaging—transforms raw coir pith into a valuable agricultural input. By replacing conventional drying with a hot air system, manufacturers ensure quality control, sustainability, and consistency, while reducing space, time, and labor requirements. This technological integration makes coir pith block production more reliable, scalable, and environmentally responsible.

V. CONCEPTUALIZED DESIGN

The proposed system is intended to overcome the inefficiencies of the conventional coir pith drying through the application of a closed, weather-independent hot air circulation process. The system consists of a rotating cylindrical drum for the uniform movement and turning of coir pith to get an even heating exposure. Heated air is produced with the aid of an induction coil and circulated across the drum through high-capacity blowers or fans to provide uniform temperature and airflow. The whole system is installed on a frame with insulated walls to reduce heat loss and maximize energy efficiency. The speed of rotation of the drum, airflow rate, and temperature can be controlled based on moisture content and drying needs, providing flexibility for small or large-scale operations. Moreover, filters and vents are incorporated to control dust and moisture release, providing a cleaner and more efficient drying process. This design cut drying time radically, enhances consistency of blocks, and facilitates continuous processing—upgrading quality as well as productivity in the production of coir pith blocks.

The suggested drying system aims to counter the disadvantages of conventional sun drying by using a controlled hot air circulation process. The main goal is to decrease drying time, provide even moisture distribution, and enhance the coir pith drying process overall efficiency. The system is weather-independent, compact, and appropriate for small- and large-scale producers.

A. Feeder and Drum Structure

The central part of the design is a cylindrical drum that rotates and contains the wet coir pith. The drum is made of mild steel and is perforated at intervals to provide uniform passage of hot air through the material. The rotating mechanism provides constant movement and turning of the pith, allowing even exposure to hot air, thus preventing moisture buildup in one spot.

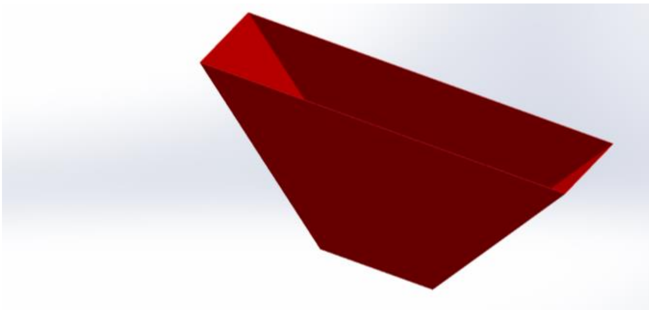

Fig 2: Hooper and feeder of the machine

B. Hot Air Circulation System

The system applies to a mix of induction coils and blowers of high speed for producing and distributing hot air. The induction coil quickly heats up air to the desired temperature, and blowers direct the hot air through ducts into the drum. It provides uniform drying conditions irrespective of outside weather conditions. The air temperature and airflow rate can be controlled by using control systems such that optimal drying is achieved without compromising the quality of the material.

C. Frame and Support System

The whole assembly rests on a structural steel frame that is rigid in nature. This frame supports the rotating drum assembly, blower assembly, coil housing assembly, and control panel assembly. Vibration-absorbing mounts are provided to facilitate smooth rotation of the drum and reduce mechanical wear and tear.

D. Power and Control Unit

A specialized control panel is incorporated in the design to control the induction coil, fan speed, drum rotation, and temperature. Users can personalize drying parameters based on the moisture content and volume of coir pith being treated. Automation features are planned for future development, including moisture sensors and timer-controlled shutoff capabilities.

E. Ventilation (Integrated Vent Design)

The drying mechanism features an internal ventilation system capable of handling moist air and dust particles emitted while drying. Well-placed vent ports along the rotating drum compartment ensure constant removal of humid air, avoiding condensation and ensuring maximum drying effectiveness. The design of the vent also assists in ensuring even internal pressure, increasing the passage of hot air around the drum. For environmental protection and air quality, mesh-type pre-filters are fitted at the vent outlets to capture fine coir particles and limit dust emissions. This obviates the requirement for external ducting and ensures lower cleaning and maintenance activities. Integrated design of the venting solution provides a streamlined system configuration and helps in overall operational sustainability by managing airflow, temperature, and air quality in a closed loop.

VI. WORKING

The Hot Air Circulation Dryer is a mechanical system specifically designed to address the inefficiencies of traditional sun drying methods used in coir pith processing. This dryer system ensures uniform drying, reduces processing time, and is independent of weather conditions, making it ideal for regions with high humidity or inconsistent sunshine. The setup comprises a rotating drum, an induction coil-based heating system, and a high-speed blower that circulates hot air through the system in a closed and controlled manner.

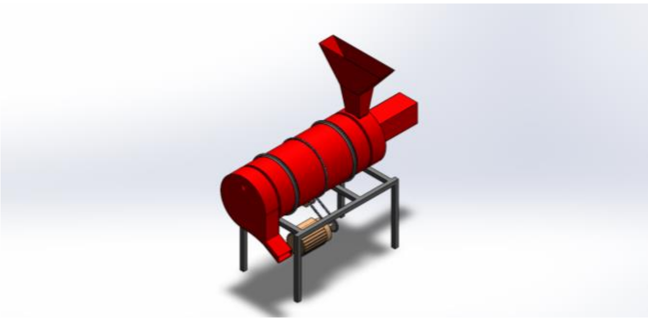

Fig 3: Fully Assembled Drying machine

A. Feeding of Coir Pith

The process begins with the feeding of moist coir pith into the drum. The pith used is typically washed to reduce the electrical conductivity (EC) level by removing salts and other impurities. This washing results in high moisture content (around 65–70%), making drying necessary before the material can be compressed into blocks. The feeding can be manual or automated through a hopper or conveyor system.

B. Rotating Drum Mechanism

The drum is mounted horizontally and rotates on rollers or gear support at a slow, controlled speed. The interior of the drum that scoop and drop the coir pith as the drum rotates. This tumbling action ensures that the pith is continuously aerated and exposed to the hot air uniformly from all sides, preventing clumps and enabling efficient drying.

Fig 4: Drum roller of the machine

C. Induction Coil Heating System

The dryer incorporates induction coils to generate heat safely and efficiently. These coils heat the surrounding air indirectly, avoiding direct flames and thus reducing fire risk and preserving the physical integrity of the coir fibers.

Fig 5: Induction Coil

The induction coil is placed in an insulated chamber in one side of the drum through which the incoming air from the blower passes. The air gets heated to the desired temperature (usually 80–120°C depending on moisture content and drying speed requirements).

D. Hot Air Circulation via Blower

A **high-speed fans** used to draw in ambient air and push it through the heated zone containing the induction coil. The hot air produced is then directed through insulated ducts into the rotating drum. The blower ensures consistent airflow throughout the drum length, helping maintain a stable drying environment. This hot air interacts with the moist coir pith, evaporating the moisture content effectively. The circulation is continuous, allowing real-time heat transfer and minimal heat loss.

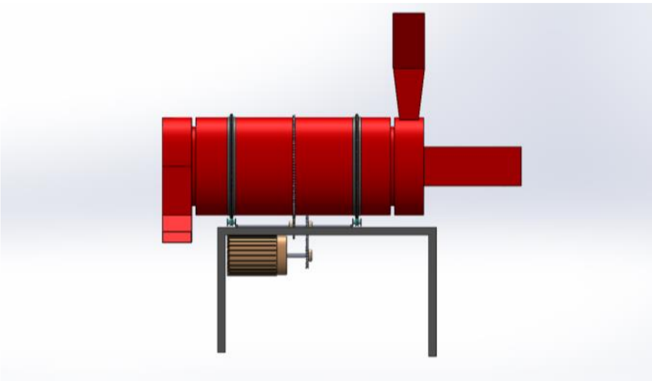

Fig 6: Assembled view of Drying Machine

E. Moisture Venting System

The system is designed with **strategically placed vents** for effective release of moisture-laden air. As hot air evaporates the water from the coir pith, the generated steam and humid air are expelled through these vents. Proper venting prevents condensation, maintains optimal drying conditions inside the drum, and avoids pressure buildup that might affect the drying process.

Once the coir pith dries to the required moisture level it comes out from the end of the rotating drum. From there, it is collected in a tray or moved using a conveyor. The dried pith is now ready to be sent to the block-making machine, where it will be compressed into coir pith blocks that are suitable for export and use in farming and gardening.

VII. CONCLUSION

The development of a rotating drum-based induction dryer presents a significant advancement in the drying process of coir pith by introducing a weather-independent, energy-efficient, and structurally compact system. The design integrates mechanical and thermal components effectively, ensuring uniform moisture removal and enhanced operational control. Critical components like the mild steel base for structural integrity, the thermally conductive but lightweight sheet metal drum, and the induction coil for effective heating all play a part in making the system work.

In future, the use of sensor-based automation such as temperature and moisture sensors coupled with a microcontroller allows real-time feedback and closed-loop control over the dry parameters. This allows for accurate control of the temperature and optimal removal of moisture, which are essential for the quality and consistency of the coir pith blocks. The mechanism of gear reduction between the drum and DC motor provides smooth as well as regulated rotation, besides enhancing mechanical stability and energy efficacy. As opposed to conventional sun-drying systems, this technology lowers weather dependency drastically, accelerates drying time, and saves human labor, making way for a more industrialized and scalable option. Furthermore, the modularity provides flexibility to integrate it in the future with automated feeders and collectors, thus ensuring applicability at larger coir pith processing plants.

In summary, the suggested drying system presents a viable option for small to medium-scale coir manufacturers looking to upgrade their production lines. Not only does it enhance productivity but also guarantees uniform product quality, energy saving, and operational efficiency—meeting primary lean manufacturing goals. Subsequent versions can incorporate IoT-based monitoring and additional heat recovery improvements to enhance sustainability and data-driven decision-making.

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