PREFACE
Coir industry is the most important traditional industry in the south-western coastal belt of India, i.e. Kerala. The industry has developed in Kerala as a labour-oriented cottage industry and provides employment to around three to four lakhs of workers in the coastal belt of the state. The economic importance of the industry is significant in terms of income, employment and foreign exchange. The two distinguishing aspects of the industry are primarily the low volume of required investment at various stages of production and secondarily, the labour-intensive nature of the industry.

Coir industry is broadly divided into two sectors, the coir yarn spinning sector which is unorganised and the coir goods weaving sector which is organised. The two sectors are related by the fact that the coir yarn is the main raw material used for weaving coconut husk which is produced in abundance forms the main raw material of the industry. Alleppey is the main centre of concentration of the coir industry and production is located in the countryside adjoining Alleppey. In the unorganised sector, 80 per cent of the work force is women whereas it is only 25 per cent in the organised sector. Our earlier explorative study in the
unorganised sector raised a number of issues like the dependency of industry on exploitation of cheap labour due to the dual role the workers play, by enforcing piece-rate systems based on Minimum Wage Act, together with the insecurity they face due to the absence of labour laws. This, in combination with unhygienic and over-crowded working conditions, affect the health and well-being of the worker in the industry.

There is evidence that wide disparity exists between the two sectors of the industry in terms of wages, working environment and benefits associated with work. Thus, the central concern of the thesis is to formulate a comparative analysis of health and well-being of the coir worker in the context of differences among the two sectors, i.e. 'whether better socio-economic condition will lead to better living standards which, in turn, will lead to better health and well-being'.

A worker, be it male or female, contributes to the development process of the society by carrying the burden of the growth of the society. A glance at the existing literature in coir industry revealed that most of the studies are focussed on marketing, trade and export potential of the industry. The health
and well-being of a coir worker has, by and large, been ignored. Studies which highlight the interlinkages between socio-economic conditions, working conditions and well-being of a coir worker are more or less absent. In this thesis, through empirical data, we have tried to assess the workers' perceptions about their work-related health problems and their health behaviour. Our focus is on the various dimensions of the workers' lives that contributes to their health or ill-health such as social conditions, economic positions, working conditions, which include nature of work, procedure of work and benefits available to the workers in the form of medical facilities which will enable them to attain a better well-being.

At the very outset, we present in Chapter I, a brief assessment on women work and health. The chapter also includes the conceptualisation of the problem based on the review of studies and the methodology that evolved which tries to understand the factors which influence the health and well-being of a worker in the Coir Industry.

In chapter II, we present an overview of the Coir Industry in India regarding the historical examination, organisation and
structure of the industry, levels of management in the industry and the production and consumption of coir and coir products in both the domestic and in the export market. The chapter also includes the conditions of labour and related issues in the industry. A description about the unionisation and its impact in the industry and the present status of the coir industry is also included. The organisational and administrative structure together with a brief history aims and export details of the three different factories namely Kerala State Coir Corporation, Aspinwall & Company Ltd., and Kerala Coir Mats and Mattings Co-operative Society Ltd. is given in Chapter III.

Chapter IV describes the socio-economic and working conditions of coir workers in the unorganised sector. This chapter also includes data on various health problems of the workers and the availability, accessibility and health behaviour of the worker.

Chapter V provides an in-depth discussion on the living and working conditions and its influence on the health and well being of coir workers in the three different factories, viz. KSCC, Aspinwall & Co. and KCMMS in Alleppey. Gender disparities
with regard to wages, health and the benefits available as per the Factories Act are also included in this chapter.

The final chapter furnishes a detailed summary and discussion which establishes the link between living conditions, working conditions and health of a worker in the coir industry.