

Contributions of Various Consumption Crops to Revenue of Travancore in 19th cy.

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Introduction

Travancore was situated in the extreme South west portion of the Indian Peninsula.¹ It had a total area of 1725 square miles.² The land Travancore had rich natural resources and panoramic views. Its fertility backed by abundance of water resources made for its rich flora and fauna³. The hills and valleys of the state offered plenty of scope to cultivate paddy, coconut, cardamom, pepper, coffee, tea and rubber etc., The spices of the state attracted the people all over the world which ultimately resulted in the colonization of Kerala.⁴ The topography of the land of Travancore, the fertility of the soil and the climatic conditions of the state were favourable for the raising of a large variety of crops in the state. These products could be divided into two broad categories, namely, consumption crops and plantation crops. Among consumption crops, paddy and coconut are the most important. Paddy provides the staple food of the people and it is cultivated throughout the State both on the hills and on the plains. Coconut and palms overcrowding the low lands and the slopes of the high lands from southern tip of the state to the northern border are a perennial crop. The yield of which earns cash income to the planters and contributes the bulk of the state revenue.

Paddy

Paddy, the staple food of Travancore, cultivated mostly in all over the state. There was a time when Travancore produced rice more than what she wanted and exported the surplus. In 1745, Gollonnesse, a Dutch commander reported that the country produces as much rice as required to food for her inhabitants. Nanchilnad produces so much of this grain that the king levied tolls every year amounting to 3, 00,000 galleons on the rice in the husk exported

to paddy country.⁵ This situation had been reversed during the third quarter of the 19th century. It was declared that Travancore achieved self sufficiency in food production.⁶ The increase in population and the corresponding decrease in the area of cultivation of food crops, particularly paddy, had been the main reason for the state becoming an importer of food grains in place of an exporter. With the passage of time the area of land under food crops remained stagnant or sometimes decreased while population steadily increased. But shortage of local production did not create any food crisis because of the availability of cheap imported rice. In 1891, an Agricultural Loans Act was enacted to provide loans to the needy cultivators. The agricultural ryots were in the habit of using primitive tools and following primitive methods of cultivation. To educate them on the advantages of adopting improved means of cultivation, Government thought of organizing demonstration farms, and as such an agricultural farm was established on the eastern side of the Karamana river at Trivandrum in 1893⁷. Its aim was to exhibit advanced methods of agricultural production for the benefit of the cultivators. In 1895-96 (1071ME) it was declared to be a permanent institution. Mention has been made earlier that Travancore was an importer of rice and paddy from the beginning of the 19th century and that the volume of import had been increasing. And so more and more money were spent from the state exchequer for the purpose of importing rice from foreign countries. Import of rice and paddy indicated the insufficiency of local production, and increasing import proved that local production was on decline.⁸

Coconut

Coconut is said to be the next important crop to paddy and it is considered as the money crop in the state.⁹ So long as paddy production is insufficient to meet consumption needs, it cannot and does not earn money from the part of view of the state as a whole. On the other hand, coconut production is more than sufficient to meet the consumption requirements of the state and the surplus processed in diverse forms and exported. It earns money. Hence as far as the state of Travancore or even the state of Kerala is concerned coconut is the chief

money crop. Coconut was a money earning Product. It has been exported from very early times. Coconut was exported to other countries from the early period as nut or the meat is converted into copra, and copra is milled into oil and both copra and oil were exported. But it was with the commercialization of agriculture that the export of coconut in the form of copra or oil gained momentum. The Travancore coconut oil was in great demand in foreign markets because of its better quality. In the beginning of 20th century coir mats and matting spun out of the yarn from the soaked coconut husks found increasing markets in foreign countries.

Tapioca

As a home produce and as a farm produce, Tapioca forms the third among the widely cultivated agricultural product in the state. Vishakam Tirunal, Maharaja (1880-85) first introduced its cultivation in Travancore¹⁰. It either boiled or cooked, has become the main diet of the poor people. The latter fact is significant as far as the cultivation of tapioca is concerned. If the price of rice is very cheap tapioca loses the favour and patronage of both consumers and producers. When Burmese rice was sold very cheaply in Travancore during the first quarter of the twentieth century, the cultivation of tapioca was almost neglected. The mid land region between hill tracts and coastal area is the major centre of tapioca cultivation. It does not require hard labour. Planting pieces of ripe stem on loose soil and watering them if the season is hot would be enough for them to germinate and grow. Tapioca is an exhausting crop and requires heavy manuring. Wood ash, condung and organic and organic manure are the most important types of manure applied than chemical fertilizers current today. But the general tendency among most of the cultivators was to leave them unmanured. The result was low productivity. Tapioca plant grows along with crops and can be grown in rotation with pulses, and cereals. Researches have shown that it grows best on land where banana and yarn are cultivated.¹¹ Tapioca is produced largely for local consumption and not for export. Very little is exported. Though looked down by the elite as the poor man's food, the place of tapioca among the edible crops cultivated in the state cannot be under estimated. On the other

hand all efforts on the part of the Government, have been taken to bring it, popularize it and to increase its production.

Cardamom

Cardamom was another important spice of Travancore. It was known in ancient times as 'grains of paradise'. It is perennial crop indigenous to the south western coast of India. There were two varieties of cardamom produced in Travancore forest areas. Compared to tea and coffee planting, cardamom was not remunerative in Travancore, while coffee yielded to the ryot a profit of more than three four or five rupees.¹² However, this too, in turn added considerably to the revenue of the state. In 1865, the then maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal (1860-1880) took important steps for the better conservancy of the cardamom hills. The plantations were a solid asset in the north east of Travancore and required an officer able to devote his undivided energies to the development of its resources. It has to be grown extensively the cardamom Hill reserves in Devikulam comprise 48,000 acres. The tract called Elamala and the neighbouring hills 'produce very good stuff and Travancore supplies the world demand in large measures.¹³ Accordingly, the *Sirkar* appointed J.D. Munro as the superintendent and magistrate to look after the cardamom hills. His principal duties were to collect the cardamom grown, to promote payment of dues, to conserve the forest in his charge and to act as a magistrate for the summary disposal of cases when they arose.¹⁴ The superintendent and magistrate of Oodompunchola requested the *Sirkar* to make available a certain amount of money for the opening of a small experimental cardamom garden and to assess the profit from them. The estimate of profits enabled the *Sirkar* to try various experiments to improve cultivation. The receipts, disbursements and the profits as the cardamom garden from 1860 to 1872 were Rs.11944107, Rs.4500828 and Rs.7143279 respectively.¹⁵ Until 1896 (1071M.E) cardamom was a State monopoly. With the abolition of the monopoly, a tax was imposed on

the land. Three years later the cardamom rules were revised in such a way as to facilitate the extension of the cultivated area. In 1910, after a conference of cultivators convened by the Dewan, who full proprietary rights were conferred upon the holders of land provided. They paid the prescribed value of the land had to be paid in ten annual instalments. The assessment tax on land was also fixed as Rs. 2/- per acre.¹⁶

Pepper

The state of Travancore had a monopoly on pepper. Pepper, one among the spices is cultivated in about 3.5 percent of the total cultivable area of the land. Nick named as 'Black Gold' trade in dried pepper berries carried the name and fame of Travancore and Kerala beyond the seas to the middle. Compared with other parts of Kerala, Travancore did not enjoy monopoly in pepper production.¹⁷ But the increased demand for it was an incentive to cultivators to increase production. So year after year more and more lands were brought under pepper cultivation. The pepper trade had specific routes. It could be taken out of the country by sea from the ports of Alleppey and Quilon or taken by land through the *chowkey* at Valiamuttam, Peruvanthanum, Achancoil, Ariyankavu, Kuzhathupuzha, Aramboly, Aricooty, Bagavathikotta and Veerapoly.¹⁸ As per the pepper monopoly system, pepper was grown in large tracts as stipulated by the government. And it was profitable for both the cultivator and the government. But as pepper yield was scanty in alternative years, the tax on it was duly reduced. This brought down the profits of the government. Further, the system had many inherent evils. Coercion from the government brought in its wake interference by the government officials. Reduced taxes and laxity on the part of the growers made the government review the pepper monopoly system¹⁹. Therefore on 31st December 1860, the government abolished the pepper monopoly. Hence, a better system of taxing came into existence. A duty of fifteen rupees per *candy* of 500 pounds was charged on all pepper exported from Travancore whether by land or sea. However, after 16th August 1867 a reduction of six rupees was made from the duty of fifteen rupees levied on every *candy* of

pepper exported from Travancore. In consequence, the cultivators extended the cultivation of the spice. Smuggling was also checked by the regulated duty. The customs revenue realized was a little than five lakhs of rupees. In 1867 the receipts and disbursements of pepper were Rs. 4,13,000 respectively²⁰.

Conclusion:

The consumption crops, and investing their own capital in the cultivation of those crops, which flow of funds resulted in increasing state revenues, diversifying trade relations and providing new employment opportunities. In fact, the growth and development of plantation industries under the example and enterprising leadership of the Europeans gave a new dimension to the economy of the state. The introduction of large scale cultivation of plantation crops brought the state economy at the cross-roads to choose whether increased production of consumption crops or of cash crops accelerated the rapid economic development of the country. Increased production and sale of cash crops filled the coffers of the state with the necessary wealth to bridge with imports the deficiencies in the production of consumption crops. Thus the above products, natural or imported products cultivated in Travancore enhanced the financial condition of the state Travancore not only during the period of 19th century but the centuries to come.

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