

AGRICULTURAL AND MARKETING PRACTICES DURING BRITISH PERIOD IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

By

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Abstract

At the period of the acquisition of the Madras Presidency by the British, the country was teeming with villages. The village had a definite geographical area and comprised some hundreds of acres of arable and wasteland. These villages formed distinct societies by themselves, self-sufficing in the matter of most of the fundamental necessities and even of several of the comforts of life. The distinctive feature of the early nineteenth century was the universal existence of fortifications, reflecting the extreme insecurity of the times. The soils and climate of the Presidency favoured the production of a great variety of crops. Contemporary accounts of the various districts teem with references to the country's manifold potentialities in respect of agriculture. The several districts manuals compiled twenty and thirty years later present much the same picture of methods of cultivation. The implements of agriculture were few and simple the most noteworthy feature was that the quantity of manure was deficient and the method of applying it unsatisfactory. The vast majority of the agriculturists were so poor that they were obliged to borrow money and exorbitant rates to cultivate the coarsest of grains and even for very subsistence. Many of the ryots's deficiencies could be removed by the spread of knowledge and the establishment of government agencies that would introduce and popularise advanced methods of agriculture but the chief desideratum was an improvement in his economic position.

Keywords: *agriculture, crop production, irrigation, cultivation.*

Introduction

Agriculture has held a dominant position in the Indian countries economy. Most of the village depends on agrarian economy which is based upon the possession of land. The geographical features of the Madras province played a significant role in the economic prosperity.

Indian agriculture was mostly in the nature of 'subsistence farming'. The farmer sold only a small part of his produce to pay off rents, debts and meet his other

requirements. Such sale was usually done immediately after harvesting of crops since there were no storing facilities. The poor and illiterate farmer took his small produce to the markets where he was confronted with powerful and organized traders who exploited and cheated him in a variety of ways. Thus the agricultural marketing system was highly unsatisfactory and exploitative. The development of the cotton textiles and jute industries in the latter half of the nineteenth century and sugar industry in the beginning of the twentieth century gave new impetus to cash crops and

development of marketing for cotton, jute and sugarcane.

The rapid increase of population in cities also increased the importance of marketing of food grains. The advent of planning and change in land relations have creates a new class of rich, capitalist farmers who cultivate land with the profit motive in view. This class is dissatisfied with old system of marketing and desires changes in it. In brief commercialization of agriculture has been accompanied by improvements in the marketing system.

Undoubtedly proper marketing of agricultural produce is favourable to the farmer because it ensures fair prices for his produce. This encourages him to produce more for the market. The wants of the urban sector are better satisfied and the process of industrialization gets a boost. As a result, the income of the farmer increases raising his demand for industrial products. Therefore improvements in the agriculture marketing system help the process of development.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research paper are following.

1. To know the agriculture condition of British period.
2. To analyze the agriculture practice in British period.
3. To trace the agricultural methods in British period.
4. To list out the Marketing system.

Importance of the study

It is a study of the Agriculture and Marketing practice during British period in the Madras Presidency. The period is no doubt one of great strain and stress, involving a difficult process of adjustment to the changing economic and political conditions. So the study analyzes agriculture methods, crop producing, irrigation system, marketing system.

Methods of the study

This study is based on historical method.

Agriculture practice during British Period

During the Colonial period, staple food for the rich people was rice while Ragi, Cambrum, and cholam for the poor classes. The working class that is Agriculture labour consumed boiled grains and drank the water in which the grain was boiled. Drinking of toddy was also prevalent. Coconut and Gingelly oil were used for cooking. Betel and Tobacco were prevalent and these commodities contributed large revenue to the Government. The socio and economic life of village was the heart of the South Indian Economy. The economy was maintained in spite of the devastating effects of war, famine, and other bad administration methods. The village had a definite geographical area which comprised of arable along with waste lands.

The peasants had absolute faith in astrology and they commenced their agricultural operations only on the auspicious day and fix duly approved by the astrologers.

Sometimes agricultural operations were delayed want of capital and seed grain. As money and seed grain were used to provide by the Government they were forced to wait. The agricultural instruments were commonly used for ploughing and crowbars. The dry lands were entirely depended on monsoon and were ploughed several times in transverse directions. On the country, the wet land was irrigated by the support of tank water or from the canals. Rotation of crops was not accepted by the farmers rather mixed cropping was widely prevalent. The peasant could not produce may fodder for their animals during dry season and taken to the hills for grazing.

Irrigation

Different systems of irrigation are complimentary and supplementary rather than competitive, as has been rightly observed by the Famine Enquiry Commission. "The problem of water supply will not be solved by mere extended application of one particular method of irrigation but by the use of all methods." Irrigation comprises of their different aspects, viz, engineering, agricultural, and economic and social. Under engineering aspects are included the designing and construction of structures required for storage, diversion, conveyance, delivery and distribution through channels and distributaries, determination of water yields of rivers and water supplies for irrigated lands. The agricultural aspect refers to the use of irrigation water and various agricultural practices and cropping patterns methods of application and the quantity of

water for single irrigation. The socio-economic aspect refers to the satisfaction of social needs and desires which is essential for any community enterprise.

The agricultural methods were extremely defective. It was based largely on customs and superstition. The plough was a crooked stick which only scratched the surface of the soil and cattle were miserably weak and they could hardly draw the plough. The implements of cultivation were crude and inefficient. They did not have an adequate knowledge about the rotation of crops and it was imperfectly practiced. Selections of the seeds were seldom practiced (Sraadraju 58).

The ryots used every kind of manure available. The application of manure was defective and irrigation was insufficient. Cow dung, ashes, green and dry leaves were used as manure. Such states of affairs were largely due to the carelessness, backwardness, ignorance, and superstition of the ryots.

The implements of agriculture were few and simple, By far the most important and in some parts practically the only one worth the name was the plough. Its construction was much the same in all the districts. It was generally a crooked tree or branch or a piece of wood with a pointed end, to which a pair of bullocks was yoked by means of a simple wooden pole and yoke. Much has been said of the shortcomings of this primitive plough, its clumsy construction, and inefficiency. But the justification of the ryot was that under the circumstances, it was the best that could be utilized. One great advantage of the

wooden plough was its cheapness both with regard to cost and repair. The ryots had only to pay for the iron required. Yet another advantage was its lightness, for the cattle of most of the districts were not very strong and the ryots besides was accustomed to carry the plough on his shoulders from field to field. Further rice and other cereals required only light ploughing. Indeed deeper ploughing would be positively harmful (Raghava Lyengar 36).

The most noteworthy feature was that the quantity was deficient and the method of applying it unsatisfactory. There was adage that given a sufficiency of water and manure, the ryot could raise a crop even from stones. As it was, even good soils failed to yield any considerable return. Defective manuring was not due to want of knowledge. On the other hand, the ryots, we are repeatedly informed, were perfectly sensible of the efficacy of manure and the value of the different substances that could be utilised, and several proverbs on the subject, current in the various districts, seem to prove it. But in spite of all the proverbs, manuring was not approached from a scientific view point and both quantities left much to be desired. The uses of cattle dung as fuel deprive the land of much of its most valuable requirements. (Commission Reports 1056).

Irrigated land forms about 15 percent. It is watered exclusively from rivers, river channels and tanks and in most of the instances the water flows upon the land by gravitation. They are of land irrigated by channels taken directly from river-channels connected with dams or other regulating

works. The reason of this is that the beds of most of the plains are so frequently changed or are situated in such deep valley that is difficult to get the water fence to the cultivated land. Hence the practice of putting dams or anicuts across rivers, dams are constructed where there is space for the storage of water and water can be raised to a height sufficient for the suitable area of arable land. These channels are being kept so high that the water will flow by gravitation through sluices into the minor distributing channels.

Crops

The principle of rotation of crops seems to have been generally recognized and followed to some extent. Certain crops were known as recuperative. Later were seldom sown on the same field continuously. Thus tobacco was usually followed by dry grains or gram and cotton was hardly ever raised on the same land consecutively. Sugarcane, which was also very exhaustive, was alternated with some other crop. Mixed cropping was really a variation of the principle and it was a practice which further secured the ryot against possible loss due to inclemency of season, for even if one crop was lost the other would remain. Rotation, where it was practised, depended on the district, soil, crop, and season.

In Nellore, much of the land was cultivated with jonna or millet, with a crop of castor oil or varagu intervening now and then. In certain part of the district a more regular system was in evidence. The chief rotation appears to have been between varagu and

jonna and occasionally hosegram, korra, indigo or ragi. In vizagapatnam, though the methods of cultivation were in other respects comparatively advanced, there was little attempt at rotation except in the case of sugarcane and cotton. The ryots of kurnool regularly alternated exhaustive crops with recuperative one while mixed cropping was also common.

Following was general practised in many of the districts, though the extent to which its utility was understood and availed of varied. The fields of Tanjore were left fallow every alternative year or once in three or four years according to necessity. In Nellore the poorer lands were frequently left fallow every alternate year or once in three or four years according to necessity. In Nellore the poorer lands were frequently left fallow immediately after they showed signs of exhaustion. The better soils of Kurnool were continuously cropped, but the poorer ones, after being cultivated for three years were left fallow for three or four years. In Coimbatore fallowing was a general feature, the field being often tilled, and left uncultivated for a season. In Canara, there was neither rotation nor fallowing but in certain parts there was a system of cultivation known as "Kumeri" where a crop was grown only once in a series of years and not again until the field became a jungle when it would be burnt and another crop sown (Hume 148).

During the course of the half-century that followed the establishment of the Company's regime, the possibilities envisaged in the foregoing statements were not realised to

any great extent. True there was some increase in agricultural production, particularly in regard to a few crops. Rice cultivation showed considerable progress in nearly all the districts and especially in Tanjore at the beginning and the Kistna and Godavari districts towards the end of the period. Cotton, which till the close of the eighteenth century had been insufficient even for the home demand, received a great impetus in the nineteenth century, thanks to the interest which the Company had in supplying the nascent industry of Lancashire with the raw material and it soon became one of the staple exports of the Presidency, the area under the crop being nearly a million acres in 1852. The production of indigo rose rapidly, especially in Cuddapah, Salem and South Arcot, and about the middle of the nineteenth century, the exports alone amounted to 7,000 chests annually. While sugarcane cultivation made considerable strides in the 'forties'. Coffee and tea were introduced towards the close of the half-century and the former in particular was successfully cultivated on the hills. Other crops in regard to which an extension of cultivation was perceptible were pepper and ginger in Malabar.

The crops produced in South India are generally divided into three classes: wet a nunjah dry or punjah and garden. Among wet crops, the most important were rice and sugar-cane. The garden productions which required heavy irrigation were betelnut and leaf, tobacco, plantain, chillies and onions. Among the dry crops were cotton, indigo, the various pulses, ragi, cholam and kambu. The

above classification holds good only in general. Not infrequently 'dry grains' were cultivated with the aid of artificial irrigation, while wet crops depended solely on rainfall (Rajayyan 68).

In many instances the irrigation water cannot be secured at a sufficient height and the water is then raised from the channel by a picottah or similar means. Tanks are always placed in situations where the surface drainage of a more or less considerable area of country naturally flows or collects. Sometimes they are natural and form shallow lakes but as a rule they are artificial and occupy a situation on land having slight slope. In selecting the position for the tank the object is to secure for the upper slope at a large collecting area and to command on the lower slope to a sufficient area of arable land for watering by gravitation. Artificial tanks are always more co-efficacious than natural tanks equally supplied with water, because the land irrigated for the artificial task is from its positions generally well drained, while that irrigated from the natural tank is frequently altogether without drainage, but a portion of the bed of some original lake (Subramanian 71).

Eighty percent of the food-producing area of the presidency consists of dry land. A very large area of this tract is covered by soils of the lowest value. However, considerable areas of lands are really good soil. The dry lands are in the hands of poorer cultivators than the wet lands and it is probable that their cultivation is more susceptible of improvement than that of the wet lands. The

black soils are usually cropped with the cotton and cholam. The red soils are variously cropped, in some districts they constitute the chief cotton-producing areas, but when it is good they are cropped with the different cereals. The grey soil is capable of producing varagoo and inferior cumboo and cholam. Sometimes two or more crops are sown simultaneously on the same ground, so that if one fails the other may succeed; choice being made for the crops that do not all bear at one time. The crops grown on the unirrigated land are sown in lines but the former is more usual. The tillage consists usually of ploughing in various directions; the native plough stairs but does not turn over the soil and seldom penetrates to a greater depth than three inches. The actual operation of sowing is either performed by broadcasting the seed over the land by the hand or by the aid of a drill described below during the growth of the crop but little is done after-cultivation or hoeing. The crops are all harvested by the hand; the workers are paid by the crops they have harvested.

Methods of cultivation

In several parts of the country, it was usual to obtain two or more harvest a year from the same field, for the tropical climate of the Presidency allowed "an almost indefinite succession of crops" Limited only by the availability of water. The advantages of multiple crops, however, were partly counteracted by the low yield which was a marked feature of Indian agriculture. The average cereal crop yield all over the Presidency was estimated to be about 11

bushels per acre while in England it was more than 30 (Lohana 125).

Methods of cultivation were broadly the same all over the Presidency, but in several parts there were slight local variations, arising generally from the adequacy or otherwise of the water supply and quality of the soil. Throughout the Presidency, three modes of raising plants were distinguishable, the dry seed, the sprouted and the transplanted. In the first, the seed was sown in the paddy fields straight away, the expenses were low and the produce correspondingly. For "sprouted" cultivation, the seeds were steeped in water till they germinated and then transferred to the field. According to the last method, the seed were first sown in well-prepared nursery beds and after the seedlings were several days old, they were transplanted in the paddy fields. This method was more laborious and expensive in the first instance, but worthwhile in view of the heavier yield. Sometimes there were two transplanting, first from one nursery bed to another and finally to the field, and here the outturn was even more considerable.

The principal dry grains were ragi, cholam, cambu and varagu. They constituted the chief ingredients in the food of the poorer classes in several of the districts and were grown everywhere in abundance. The cultivation was comparatively easy and inexpensive for they occupied the ground for only a few months and the monsoon rains were sufficient to bring them to maturity (Nilamani Mukherjee 156).

Ragi was most widely cultivated, being one of the chief cereal crops in every district. In Ganjam it was practically the only dry grain cultivated and in Madura and Chinglepet it was one of the staple crops. It was also largely grown in Salem, Coimbatore, Vizagapatam, Tinnevely, and other districts. Ragi was generally sown in August or September and reaped in December or January. It was sometimes raised as a second crop after paddy was harvested and often as a mixed crop with cotton, etc., the latter remaining on the ground after ragi was harvested. The field was ploughed slightly before the application of manure, then ploughed up again and the seed sown, usually broadcast, but sometimes by means of a drill, particularly in the Telugu districts. The crop was ready for cutting in about four months, when it was removed to the threshing floor and thence to the granaries.

Cholam or Jonna was the staple crop in the Telugu districts particularly in the tablelands of Bellary and Kurnool, in Nellore and in Guntoor. It was also cultivated to a considerable extent in Madura, Chingleput, Coimbatore and North and South Arcot. Jonna was a five months crop and was grown at different seasons throughout the year in the various districts, but the major crop was sown in October and November and reaped in March. It was sometimes raised as a second crop on dry land after the castor plant or varagu, but elsewhere there was no change and paira (late) jonna followed paira jonna with a monotonous regularity. The plant did not require much ploughing and hence fields which had been well ploughed

the previous year were selected and after a slight preparation the seed was sown. The largest and best developed ears were selected from the preceding year's crop, beaten with sticks, and laced in pots with margosa and other leaves and dried once a month till the period of sowing. Jonna was generally grown as a mixed crop with other grains, pulses, and sometimes cotton or indigo. The different seeds were either drilled into the soil in separate rows or mixed indiscriminately. The subsequent care was confined to occasional loosening of the soil round the roots, weeding and driving away birds, till the plant was ready the cutting. The seasonal rains were entirely sufficient for its cultivation, for it required but little water and indeed an excess of moisture was injurious to the plant (Dharma Kumar 152).

Marketing system

The spread of markets to rural area was restricted because most Indian rulers accorded limited attention to physical infrastructure for long distance trade. Merchant had to move in convoys because of dangers of theft and violence. This was further complicated by political fragmentation of the region for large parts of its history which meant that there would be several provincial rulers and local chieftains who could extract taxes and duties for goods passing through their territories. In the absence of political integration and market fragmentation, prices of goods varied widely. Colonialism had significant impact on living conditions and consumption patterns of

Indian consumers of the time. Existing networks of production were changed, and consumption habits altered either due to the introduction of new products or due to changes in economic circumstance. With the spread of trade by the 18th century local markets started becoming increasingly complicated and specialized. There were three types of markets that engaged in local trade. These haats, bazaars and gunges, and they differed in terms of the days of operation, types of trade and traders, and the commodities sold.

Sale of produce to moneylenders and village traders

A considerable part of the total produce is sold by the farmers to the village traders and moneylenders. Most of the farmers are under heavy burden of debts and the moneylenders compel them to sell their produce to them (the moneylenders) often at prices considerably lower than the market prices. Often the money lenders act as a commission agent of the whole sale trader.

Hats and Shundies

Hats are village markets often held once or twice a week while shundies are also village markets held at longer intervals or on special occasions. Agricultural workers and other persons of the rural areas purchase their requirements from these markets. The farmers often sell a part of produce in these markets.

The agents of wholesale merchants operating in different mandies also visit these markets and purchase agricultural

produce. Such markets are spread over the entire country. Each hat serves a small village or a cluster of small villages. The area covered by a hat usually varies from 5 to 10 miles. Most of the village market are very poorly equipped are uncovered and lack storage, drainage, and other facilities. The quality of roads linking them to towns is very poor. Some markets lack roads completely. It is important to observe that only small and marginal farmers sell their produce in such markets. The big farmers with large surplus go to large wholesale markets.

Mandies or wholesale markets

One wholesale market often serves a number of villages and is generally located in a city. In such mandies business is carried on by arhatiyas. The farmers sell their produce to these arhatiyas with the help of brokers, who are generally the agents of arhatiyas. Because of the malpractices of these middlemen problems of transporting the produce from villages to mandies and small amount of agricultural surplus, the small and marginal farmers are hesitant of coming to these mandies. They generally dispose of their produce in the village markets. It is generally the medium and large farmers who come to mandies. With the change of times and the establishment of regulated markets the farmers are now vigilant and the exploitative practices of the middlemen have declined considerably.

There were about 1700 mandies spread all over the country. These mandies serve as important link between the produce and the

ultimate consumers. In fact, they are the 'stone houses' of marketable surplus of agricultural produce. The arhatiyas of those mandies sell off to the mills for processing. The marketing system for sugarcane was different. The farmers sell their produce directly to sugar mills. Because of the absence of intermediaries the farmers are generally able to get a better price for their sugarcane. Now the state announces the price for sugarcane every year and the mills are required to purchase it at the declared price.

Cooperative marketing

To improve the efficiency of agricultural marketing and to save farmers from the exploitation and malpractices of middlemen, emphasis has been laid on the development of cooperative marketing societies such societies are formed to take advantage of collective bargaining. A marketing society collects surplus from its members and sells it in the market collectively. This improves the bargaining power of the members and they are able to obtain a better price for the produce. In addition to the sale of produce, these societies also serve the members in a number of other ways.

Defects in the Agricultural marketing system

Indian system of agricultural marketing suffers from a number of defects. As a consequence, the Indian farmer is deprived of a fair price for his produce. The main defects of the agricultural marketing system are discussed below.

Inadequate warehouses

There is absence of proper ware housing facilities in the villages. As a consequence, the farmer is compelled to store his products in pits. Mud-vessels, kutcha storehouse etc., these unscientific methods of storing lead to considerable wastage. Approximately 1.5 percent of the produce gets rotten and becomes unfit for human consumption or is eaten away by rats and pests. Sometimes, as much as one third of farmers produce is lost in this way. Because of these dangers, farmers are generally not willing to store produce and by to dispose it of as early as possible, supply in the village market increases substantially and the farmers are not able to get a fair price for their produce. Even the mandies do not often have adequate storing facilities. The setting up of central ware Housing Corporation and state warehousing corporation has improved the situation somewhat.

Lack of grading and standardization

Different varieties of agricultural produce are not gradual properly. The practice usually prevalent in the one known as dare sales where in leaps of all qualities of produce are sold in one common lot in the former case and 34 percent in the latter. The share of middlemen in the case of vegetables was 29.6 percent and in the case of fruits was 46.5 percent. Some of the intermediaries in the agricultural marketing system are village traders, kutcha, arhatiyas, pucca, arhatiyar, brokers, wholesalers,

retailers, moneylenders, etc (Kathleen Gough 180).

Malpractices in unregulated markets

Even now the number of unregulated markets in the country is substantially large Arhatiyas and borkers, taking advantage of the ignorance and illiteracy, of the farmers use unfair means to cheat them. The farmers are required to pay arhat to the artatiyas, tulaii for weighing the produce, palledari to unload the bullock-carts, and for doing other miscellenecious types of allied works, garda for impurities in the produce, and a number of other undefined and unspecified charges. These changes often vary from person to person. Another malpractice in the mandies relates to the use of wrong weights and measures in the regulated markets wrong weights continue to be used in from unregulated markets with the object of cheating the farmers (Zacharias 147).

Inadequate market information

It is often not possible for the farmers to obtain information on exact market prices in different markets. Most of the farmers have virtually no contained will the manidies. As a consequence, they accept whatever price the trader offers to them. With a view to tackle this problem, the government is using the radio and television media to broadcast the market prices regularly. The newspapers also keep the formers posted with the latest changes in prices. However, the price quotations are sometimes not reliable and sometimes have a great time lag. The trader

generally offers less than the prices quoted by the government news media.

Inadequate credit facilities

The Indian farmer is poor and lacks staying power. He tries to sell off the produce immediately after the crop is harvested though prices at that time are very low.

To safeguard the farmer for such 'force sales' it is necessary to provide him credit so that he can wait for better time and better prices. Since such credit facilities are not available the farmers are forced to take loans from money lenders while agreeing to hand over their produce to them at less than market prices. The co-operative marketing societies have generally catered to the needs of the

large farmers and the small farmers are left at the mercy of the money lenders.

Conclusion

These aspects of agriculture and Marketing practice where improvement is perceptible to a greater extent. We have the break-up of the village community, the weakening of village solidarity and co-operative, and above all the decline of the handicrafts which is the most significant feature of this period. There was intense distress in the industrial areas. The workers who were thrown out of employment fell back upon the land and increased the pressure on it, while the loss of the export trade in textiles and the consequent diminution in the supply of money brought about a severe agricultural depression.

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