



COCOA PLANTATIONS IN INDIA — PROSPECTS AND RETROSPECTS

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Cocoa botanically known as *Theobroma cacao* is one of the important crops in the beverage family to which the most popular and ancient drinks of coffee and tea belong. World production of cocoa during 1974-75 was 14.8 lakhs tonnes and the major cocoa growing countries are Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil, Ivory Coast and Cameroon. Cocoa beans are very nutritious. In the western countries cocoa is a common ingredient in confectionary and bakery delicacy and in beverages. Amongst its main products, cocoa powder and chocolates are the most popular.

Cocoa cultivation in India is of recent origin and the present production from the country is only 100 tonnes. Nearly 1000 tonnes of cocoa beans valued at Rs. 50 to 60 lakhs are being imported every year. Eventhough this quantity may not be sufficient for internal consumption, a part of it is exported as finished products to earn foreign exchange.

The demand for cocoa products in India is on the increase. According to the National Commission on Agriculture our requirement of cocoa beans in 1980 will be in the order of 2,400 tonnes, out of which fifty per cent is for internal consumption and the rest for exporting as processed items. But the present trend is that internal consumption itself is likely to go up. Considering that one-fourth of our population consumes one ounce of cocoa products every month, the requirement would be 46,000 tonnes per annum. In spite of its high nutritive value, good taste and flavour cocoa still remains as an inaccessible commodity to the common man because of its prohibitive cost. If the internal production is raised and the prices are brought down to a reasonable level there is no doubt that the consumption may increase considerably.

Export potentiality of the commodity is also very bright. Studies conducted by Food and Agriculture Organisation show that world demand for cocoa products increases by 4% every year. Another interesting fact to be mentioned in this connection is that there is growing demand for cocoa products in the middle east countries. Moreover, the cocoa processing units installed in the country now have a capa-

city to process 4,500 tonnes of cocoa on single shift basis and 20,000 tonnes on three shift basis per annum. But due to limited internal production of cocoa beans as well as of their restricted import the processing units are not made use of fully at present. Taking the above facts into consideration it can be stated with confidence that there is great scope for increasing cocoa production in the country.

Cocoa was introduced into India about two hundred years back. But scientific cultivation was first started at Kallar and Burliar Fruit Research Stations in Tamil Nadu from 1935 onwards only. Though the trials conducted were quite encouraging no development measures were undertaken at that time for large scale cultivation.

The systematic cocoa cultivation was initiated during the Third Five Year Plan. A scheme to bring in 2,000 acres under cocoa was prepared by the State Department of Agriculture, Kerala. Kallar and Burliar Fruit Research Stations and Thengermarhadada Co-operative Farming Society were selected as centres for seed collection. The policy then was to popularise Criollo variety in Kerala and Tamil Nadu States and Forestero in Karnataka and other States. But due to non-availability of sufficient quality seeds, lack of confidence among the farmers to take up cultivation and the poor adaptability of Criollo in Kerala, only 696 acres could be brought under cocoa by the end of 1971. In Karnataka State, a progeny orchard was started in 1966 in the Charmudy Kanapady Reserve Forest in an area of 300 acres.

Lately, Forestero type of cocoa which is robust, comparatively resistant to pests and diseases and high yielding was recommended for further cultivation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Since the seeds of this type was not available in the country, they were imported from Malaysia till 1972-73. During the period, a quantity of 7,300 kg of Forestero seeds were obtained from that country through the assistance of M/s. Cadbury-Fry (India) Private Ltd. But now Forestero plantations which were raised earlier especially in Karnataka have come to full bearing. Mother trees have been identified in these planta-

tions and seeds are available in the country to meet the immediate requirements.

During the last three years intensive efforts were made to develop cocoa cultivation systematically. The area brought under cocoa till 1974 in the different States is as follows:

Area of plantations (in hectares)

	Mixed	Pure	Total
Kerala	1850	100	1950
Karnataka	350	1000	1350
Tamil Nadu	150	100	250
Maharashtra	50	—	50
TOTAL	2400	1200	3600

The development measures are taken up by the State Governments and they produce and distribute cocoa seedlings to the farmers at reasonable rate. Besides, the farmers are supplied with technical know-how on the cultivation, plant protection, processing etc. In Kerala State the development work on cocoa is being looked after by Cocoa Development Officer with his headquarters at Malampuzha, Palghat District. In Karnataka, the Horticultural Department attends to the cocoa development work. Some private agencies like M/s. Cadbury-Fry (India) Private Ltd. also help the cocoa development programme by distributing quality seedlings to the farmers and rendering necessary assistance to them.

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod and its regional and sub-stations under Indian Council of Agricultural Research handle the research problems of this crop. The trials conducted by the Institute have shown that cocoa can be grown successfully as an inter-crop in arecanut and coconut gardens. Cocoa grows vigorously under the shade of these palms. Since they are having a root system different from that of cocoa there is no competition for nutrients when the latter is grown in these gardens. An interesting observation made in this connection is that when cocoa is grown as an inter-crop in coconut and arecanut gardens the yield obtained is more than that of growing them alone. Therefore it is an attractive venture for the farmers to grow cocoa as an intercrop in arecanut and coconut gardens to bring extra income.

Recently a Committee consisting of senior officers of the State and Central Governments and representatives of cocoa processing industries was constituted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research to review the data currently available in the country on the performance of cocoa and to suggest future programmes for research and development. The Committee met at Bangalore in May, 1975 and took the following important decisions:—

1. Foresters alone need be planted in the country in future. The existing Criollo plants may be either uprooted or topworked with Foresters for which technical guidance may be given by the concerned State Department.
2. First priority should be given for mixed planting of cocoa in existing arecanut plantations. On account of over production the arecanut cultivation is no longer as profitable as it was and experiments have shown that such a mixed plantation of arecanut and cocoa is feasible.
3. Additionally an area of 7700 hectares (15400 hectares if mixed plantations) may be brought under cocoa immediately.
4. Research work on breeding for high yield and drought tolerance, control of pests and diseases, standardisation of management practices etc. may be taken up.
5. Training programme for the benefit of the farmers and development staff may be organised at Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod.

The above decisions are being implemented by the different organisations connected with research and development on a priority basis.

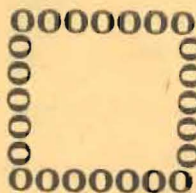
Visualising the development prospects of this crop, Government of Kerala has launched a programme to bring 10,000 acres under cocoa within a span of five years from 1972. The Government has also drawn up a scheme to inter-plant nearly 5000 hectares of coconut and arecanut gardens with cocoa utilizing financial assistance from the World Bank. Similarly the Karnataka Government has programmed to raise and distribute the seedlings to cover an additional area of 400 acres and they are proposing a scheme for the consideration of the Agricultural Refinance Corporation to provide credit facilities to the growers.

For the production and distribution of quality seedlings, the Agriculture Ministry, Government of

India is planning to establish two Central Nurseries in both Kerala and Karnataka States. The progeny orchards for these nurseries will have an area of 8 hectares each and will be planted with high yielding Forestero. The Directorate of Arecanut and Spices Development co-ordinates and looks after the development activities of cocoa in the country.

It is encouraging to note that there is a general awareness among the growers as regards the benefits of taking up cocoa cultivation especially as an inter-crop in arecanut and coconut gardens. At present there are three agencies namely (1) M/s. Cad-

bury-Fry (India) Private Ltd. (2) M/s. Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers Union Ltd. and (3) M/s. Sathe Biscuit and Chocolate Co. Ltd. to purchase cocoa beans produced in the country. The prevailing price of cocoa beans is attractive. A sound beginning has already been made to cultivate cocoa and the progress made in the recent years is noteworthy. It is hoped that with the concerted efforts of the research and development agencies and processing industries cocoa will be a popular commercial crop in India within a decade and it will be possible to export sizable quantities.



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