

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cashew (*Anacardium occidentale* L.) belongs to the family Anacardiaceae which includes many economically important tropical and sub-tropical trees and shrubs. In most tropical countries it is found growing in the coastal areas. However, commercial production is mainly confined to India, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya and Brazil. Today the major cashew producing states in India are Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra, Orissa, and West Bengal.

The cultivated cashew is a low spreading ever green tree of the tropics. It is presumed that cashew was originally introduced into India mainly for checking soil erosion. But gradually it gained commercial importance and now it is one of the ten top foreign exchange earners. In the earlier years of cashew production in India, the apple was considered valuable and it was only in the beginning of the twentieth century that the cashew kernel, the cashewnut of commerce, found favour among the consumers. Small quantities of cashew kernels were exported from India to USA even before the First World War.

History and origin

Cashew is believed to be native of South Eastern Brazil, from where it was introduced to India in the sixteenth century. It appears probable that it reached East African countries also by about the same time. No serious efforts appear to have been made to collect historical evidence nor any archaeological survey has been attempted to study the history of the cashew cultivation.

The French, Portuguese and Dutch seafarers described cashew from Brazil in the sixteenth century and the first illustrative description of cashew was given by a French naturalist Thevet in 1558 A. D. The fact that cashew is not mentioned in Spanish chronicles covering the exploration of the Caribbean Islands, probably shows that it was introduced after the arrival of the Spaniards (Johnson, 1973). Cashew was introduced to the Malabar Coast of India in the sixteenth century by the Spaniards, and probably served as a locus of dispersal to other centres in India and South East Asia (de Costa, 1578). The Spaniards who were aware of the use of cashew in medicine, foods and beverages, probably visualised the potential importance of this crop to India. From India it was carried eastward to Amboina in Indonesia (Rumphius, 1962); dispersal of the species to South East Asia appears to have been carried out by birds, bats, monkeys and human agents (Burkill, 1935; Johnson, 1973). It appears from the published accounts that *A. occidentale* is the only species which has been introduced outside the New World. Within Central and South America as many as 20 species of *Ar.acardium* are known to exist (Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1. **Species of *Anacardium* Linn.***

Botanical name	Country
<i>Anacardium brasiliense</i> Barb. Rodr.	Brazil
<i>A. curatellaefolium</i> St. Hil (= <i>A. subcordatum</i> Presl.)	Brazil
<i>A. encardium</i> Noronha	Malaya
<i>A. giganteum</i> Hancock ex Engl.	Brazil
<i>A. humile</i> St. Hil (= <i>A. subterraneum</i> Liais)	Brazil
<i>A. mediterraneum</i> Vell. Fl. Flum	Brazil
<i>A. nanum</i> St. Hil (= <i>A. humile</i> Engl., <i>A. pumilum</i> Walp)	Brazil
<i>A. occidentale</i> Linn. (Cashewnut)	Brazil
<i>A. rhinocarpus</i> D. C. Prod.	Brazil
<i>A. spruceanum</i> Benth Ex. Engl.	Brazil
<i>A. microsepalum</i> Loes	Amazon region
<i>A. corymbosum</i> Barb. Rodr.	Brazil
<i>A. excelsum</i> Skeels (= <i>Rhinocarpus excelsa</i>)	Brazil
<i>A. parvifolium</i> Ducke	Amazon region
<i>A. amilcarianum</i> Machado	Brazil
<i>A. kuhlmannianum</i> Machado	Brazil
<i>A. negrense</i> Pires & Fro'es	Brazil
<i>A. rondonianum</i> Machado	Brazil
<i>A. tenuifolium</i> Ducke	Brazil
<i>A. microcarpum</i> Ducke	Amazon region

*Source : Index Kewensis

The earliest record of cashew growing in South East Asia is that of de Loureiro (1790), although Johnson (1973) surmised that it was introduced to that continent by the Portuguese much earlier.

"Acaju" is the name given to cashew by the native Tapi Indians of Brazil and the French name "Acajou" is the nearest equivalent of the original. The Portuguese dropped the letter 'A', and "Acaju" became "Caju" in Portuguese. The Kashmiri, Punjabi, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarathi lexicons in India also refer to the cashew as "Caju." It is probable that the use of the kernel spread from Goa to Maharashtra, thence to Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and Kashmir and other Hindi speaking areas. In Kerala it is called "Parangi Andi" meaning foreign or "Portuguese nut". It is also known as "Kasu Andi", "Kasu" meaning money and "Andi" the nut. In Tamil it is known as "Mundiri" indicating the position and shape of the nut. In Oriya it is known as "Lanka Beeja" indicating that cashew reached Orissa by sea from Sri Lanka. The Bengalis know cashew as "Hijli badam" and Assamese refer to the nut as "Caju Badam." Thus, most of the names used in India are derived from the Portuguese "Caju" for cashew. This serves as a piece of evidence that the cashew originated in Brazil.

Cashew is found to tolerate wide range of ecological factors and it has become naturalised in extensive areas in tropical countries. Systematic cultivation of cashew, however, received attention only very recently and the available statistics on area and production etc. are conflicting and are of doubtful reliability. Even today most of the cashew collected and processed for world market are picked from self sown wild growth of cashew trees. World Bank has estimated that only about 2-3% of the annual world production is from systematically planted plantations and the bulk of the crop originates from wild growth in small peasant holdings.

Research in India

Research on cashew can be considered to have commenced with the sanctioning of a few *ad hoc* schemes by ICAR from 1951-52 onwards in the three centres of erst-while states of Travancore, Madras and Bombay and later extended to Andhra Pradesh and Assam also. A co-ordinated effort to intensify the research was initiated with the sanctioning of the All India Co-ordinated Spices and Cashewnut Improvement Project in 1971. Introduction and evaluation of the germplasm collections to select high yielding types, hybridization and selection to evolve high yielding hybrids, agronomic trials to determine the agronomic requirements of the crop under different agro-ecological conditions were initiated and intensified under the Project. The plant protection measures to control the pests like tea mosquito, stem borer and thrips were standardised for large scale adoption in the field.

Cashew situation in India today

An analysis of production figures in India (see chapter 2) shows that the increase in production has not been proportionate to the increase in area. Cashew plantations are raised on marginal lands and even now receive very little attention from the growers. The area under cashew was increased from 1,03,581 ha in 1950-51 to 4,23,196 ha in 1976-77. During the same period the production increased from 58,968 tonnes to 1,79,305 tonnes. The reason for the low production can be attributed to a large proportion of the plantations consisting of self-sown seedlings or raised from unselected seedlings. Moreover, cashew is grown in marginal lands under poor management. Conceivably the production potential of these plantations is very low. A few years earlier small growers were not motivated in taking up cashew cultivation because of poor economic returns compared to other cash crops like pepper and cardamom. The situation has changed now. The price of cashew kernel has shot up steeply and adequate agro-technology is available to increase cashew production. Thus cashew cultivation and production have reached a 'take off' stage entering a new phase in India and these two aspects of cashew industry may catch up with processing and export pace in the near future.