

Introduction

Spices and condiments constitute an important group of Horticultural commodities, which, since antiquity, have been considered indispensable in the culinary arts for flavouring foods. Some are used in pharmaceutical, perfumery, cosmetics and several other industries, and others possess colourant, preservative, antioxidant, antiseptic and antibiotic properties. Besides, they also play quite a significant role in the national economy of India and also in those of various other spice-producing, exporting and importing countries of the world.

Definition of Spices and Condiments:

According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) report, there are about 109 spices grown in different parts of the world. India grows more than 60 spices. The term 'Spices and Condiments' are natural plant products or mixtures used in whole or ground form as food adjuncts, mainly for imparting flavour, aroma and pungency to foods. It is also used for seasoning of foods and flavouring of beverages.

Spices are natural plant products used to improve the flavour, aroma, taste and colour of food products; they are also used in beverages, liquors, and pharmaceutical, cosmetic and perfumery products. From time immemorial, India has been known as the 'Land of Spices'. No other country in the world has such a diverse variety of spice crops as India. Indian spices are renowned for their excellent aroma, flavour and pungency, not easily matched by any other country. Even in minute quantities, spices are a real delight to the senses, making food more palatable, tasty and easily digestible. While, their usage is common in one form or the other in every household, their demand in the food processing industry is increasing at a rapid pace across the world. Thus, the demand for spices in recent years has been continuously growing.

Brief history of Spices:

The utilization of spices known since the beginning of human civilization. In medieval times, the word 'India' conjured up a vision in the minds of foreigners as a land of maharajas, diamonds, fine textiles, ivory and, of course, spices. The world still looks upon India as the real 'Home of Spices'. The reason is not far to seek, as the quality of spices produced and exported from India has been and continues to be undisputedly the best. In ancient times, spices ranked with precious stones in the inventory of royal possessions and were monopolized by the few. They (spices) determined the wealth and policies of nations

and also played an important role in ancient medicines. Besides, they also provided an incentive for the discovery of new waterways and new continents!

Centuries before the birth of Greece and Rome, sailing ships carried Indian perfumes, spices and textiles to Mesopotamia, Arabia and Egypt. It was the lure of these commodities that brought many sailors to the shores of India.

Long before the Christian era, the Greek merchants thronged the markets of south India, buying spices among other precious things. Epicurean Rome was spending a fortune on Indian spices, silks, brocades and cloth of gold. The Parthian wars are believed to have been fought by Rome largely to keep open the trade route to India. It is also said that there might have been no crusades and no expeditions to the East without the lure of Indian spices and her other famed products.

Today, when spices cost so little, it seems unbelievable that they were once a royal luxury and that men were willing to risk their lives in quest of them. It was in 1492 that Christopher Columbus discovered the New World. Five years later, 4 tiny ships sailed southward from the port of Lisbon, Portugal, under the guidance of Captain Vasco da Gama. Like Columbus, Vasco da Gama too was searching for a new route to the spice lands of Asia (Fig.1.1). While Columbus failed to achieve that goal, da Gama succeeded and reached Calicut at the Malabar Coast of India. In a 2-year 38,623-km trip, he took his ships around the continent of Africa to India and back to Lisbon. Only 2 of the 4 ships could reach their home-port, bringing back a cargo of spices and other products worth 60 times the cost of the said voyage!

The spices of the East were valuable in da Gama's time, as they had been for centuries, because they could be used to stretch Europe's inadequate supply of food. During the Middle Ages, a pound of ginger was worth a sheep, and a pound of mace worth 3 sheep or half a cow! Pepper, the most valuable of all spices, was counted out in individual peppercorns and a sack of pepper was said to be worth a man's life! Vasco da Gama's successful voyage intensified on international power struggle for control over the spice trade. For 3 centuries, the nations of western Europe, i.e., Portugal, Spain, France, Holland and Great Britain fought bloody sea-wars over the spice-producing colonies.

In a nutshell, the fascinating history of spices, is a story of adventure, exploration, conquest and fierce naval rivalry.

The people of olden times used spices, as we do today, to accentuate or modify the flavours of their foods. Spices were also flavour disguisers, masking the taste of the tainted food that was still nutritious, but if unspiced would have been discarded. Some spices were

also used for preserving foods like meat for a year or more without refrigeration! In the sixteenth century, cloves, for instance, were among the spices used to preserve food without refrigeration. Cloves contain a chemical called eugenol that inhibits the growth of bacteria. It is still used to preserve some modern foods like Virginia ham. Likewise, later mustard and ground mustard were also found to have preservative qualities. When spices were not available, people went hungry because they could not preserve their foods to carry them over to the winter. Thus, the economic importance of spices was known by the ancient civilization and their discovery of prime places was mentioned in the history.

Scope and Importance:

India, considered as the –Land of Spices is one of the major spice producing and exporting country of the world, contributing about 20-25% of the world trade in spices. Besides, large quantities of spices are also considered within the country for seasoning and flavouring of foods and other products. Out of 109 spices recognised by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) world more than 52-60 spice crops are grown in India. India blessed with varied agro-climatic conditions, tropical, sub-tropical and temperate spices can be grown and having good scope for cultivation of majority of the spices. There is a good export demand for Indian spices because of high quality with the maximum content of essential oil, oleoresin and active principles. In the present scenario, the food style or habit of people is changed to a greater extent, they are moving for ‘spicy food’ because of good taste and aroma and love for fast food. Spices and condiments finds unique place in fast food preparations especially bakery products and confectionaries. Spices and condiments are high value and low volume crops, getting high income per unit area (pepper, cardamom, saffron, vanilla etc.). These crops are having the characteristic of wider adoptability in different cropping systems. They can be cultivated as sole crop, inter crop, mixed crop and multi-storeyed cropping systems. These crops are both annual and perennial in nature; the products of these crops are the good source of raw material for ancillary industries. Thus, the industry provides more employment opportunities.

Among the spices, tree spices (cinnamon, clove, nutmeg and allspice) production is very limited (5000 mt) compared to the requirement of domestic demand (7000-8000 mt). There is a wide scope for enhancing area and production of these spices. Similarly the consumption and export of demand of seed spices are also increasing day by day both internal and outside the country. Therefore, there is a good scope for increasing area an

production of these spices. Availability of high yielding varieties and advanced scientific package practices helps to the growers to realise higher income by cultivation of spices.

Karnataka is also endowed with favourable agro climatic conditions having coastal, hilly and transitional and maidan regions, cultivating more than 17 spices and also having wider scope for cultivation of variety of spices.

Spices and its products are used as whole and powder form. Essential oils and oleoresins are widely used in seasoning of foods and imparting aroma, flavour and taste to the food products. These products are also finds unique place in cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries. Besides using spices, it is also used as colourant or dye in cotton textiles, tobacco industries, bakery products, condiments, meat and fish products. Even now, it's usages in the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines is unbelievable. Value added products are great demand in food industries.