

Some pressing problems the Coimbatore ryot has to solve.

The term 'Unchanging East' has become classical and it is trotted out at every turn whenever no better reason can be given for the failure of a new idea. It has been said that the ryot in the village is the most irresponsible to a new idea and he lives the same life and adopts the same methods his forefathers lived and adopted generations back. In my humble opinion the statements are not true and they are misleading. It may be the ryot is not a very speculative being. The ryot of South India is not a very rich man who can afford to lose in speculations. Like all practical men with scanty purses he is slow to run the risk of losing the little he has. But within his means and occasionally even beyond these he does speculate. Take for instance the case of ryots who have recently gone in for the cultivation of indigo or turmeric. When the ryot is convinced that there is a tolerably good chance of improving his position by cultivating a new crop or adopting a new method he goes in for it. He will no doubt be slow to suit the enthusiasm of the idealist.

Time was, not very long ago, when every village was almost self-contained with regard to the agricultural produce that was required for local consumption. There was very little interchange of products. The roads were not good and were in addition pestered with thieves. The local magnates were in several cases the culprits and engaged the services of retainers whose duty it was to rob all the passengers in the roads including traders and bring all the spoils to their employers and receive a small portion of the same for their labours. Even when these conditions changed the villagers knew nothing about the demands of other places and went on cultivating the crops they used to cultivate. Slowly other crops were introduced and other methods of cultivation. The changes introduced have become so many

that now the least change in the market in America sends its vibration to a village in the remote corners of an agricultural district like Coimbatore. In the old days it was quite common to find one part of the presidency steeped in unprecedented famine when another part did not know how to dispose of its superabundance, while now such a thing is an impossibility.

Only 25 years back the agricultural system of the country was somewhat like this. Every ryot had his *thottam* and his *kadu*. The former was irrigated from wells by picottahs. The *kadu* was partly used as a *Korai* or grazing ground and partly to raise the cereals or kumbu as a dry crop. The *korai* was a necessary adjunct of every *thottam*. In the *thottam* the lands were cultivated in portions, one portion was always left fallow. The cattle and sheep were penned in the portion left fallow and the excreta of these animals were in some cases all the manure these *thottams* had. The cattle and the sheep, grazed in the *korai* during the day and were penned in the night as stated above. The cattle were given for the night the cholam stalks grown in the garden and kept stored for the purpose. Every ryot had a large number of cattle and sheep. There was practically no market for the cholam and ragi stalks and cholam and ragi were the chief crops grown. So the ryots used to keep as many cattle as their fodder would maintain. Thus the ryot was in every case a cattle-breeder also. He kept the cattle necessary for ploughing and water-lifting and sold some of the rest every year. The only manure he used to get for his land was the sweepings of houses etc. and the tank silt where available. I remember the price of a cart load of sweepings in Tiruppur was about 6 annas when I was a boy. That would show, the demand for the sweepings was not very large. There were only two crops in garden lands and as the land was always left fallow for a season, the land recuperated itself and there was generally a good crop. The cattle were available in large numbers and the prices

were comparatively very low. The ryot stored his grains in his own *cholakuli* and depended on it to pull him through lean years. This was roughly the condition of our district some 25 years ago. The only problems he had to solve were, how to meet the vagaries of the rain—god who was neither regular nor considerate, how to provide for his growing family with the right of partition and other troublesome rights of the joint—family system which led to the division into ever diminishing quantities, of the lands under his control and how to meet any extraordinary expenditure in the shape of marriages and such like. Conditions of life in villages have changed very much and the life of the ryot is something different from what it was before. The problems he has now to solve are very different from what they were before.

In wet lands, paddy was the chief crop, grown. There was raised only one crop in the year and in some places two. Sugarcane and plantains were raised in some places in very small patches. Now sugarcane and plantains are raised wherever they can be raised. Two crops of paddy is the rule wherever water is available and in some places like Erode even three crops are raised. The result of all these is, that land is never given rest and the manure that is necessary is something enormous. I have seen Erode ryots going to the Dharmapuri taluk of the Salem district for green leaves for manure. The cost of manure alone for each acre of wet land in Erode comes to about 25 or 30 Rs. per year. The ryots also find great difficulty in getting the manure they want. In garden lands, the cholam and the ragi are very rarely raised. Wherever possible, the sugarcane, the tobacco and the betel are raised. Cambodia cotton is fast becoming an irrigated crop in the District. No portion of the garden is left fallow. One crop is cultivated on the land after another. In one land tobacco grown first, then follows ragi and then cotton. These three crops account for 2 years, of which the land is vacant for only two

months. When cotton or sugarcane is cultivated the land can have very little rest. So the ryot has to manure the land very heavily. He naturally looks for the sweepings of houses etc. which he used to get in the old days. These are not available in the quantity required. As the land is almost always under cultivation, he cannot utilise the cattle and sheep manure which he used to depend on. Further as he does not raise the cholam and ragi as before he is not in a position to maintain the cattle. For even the cattle he is absolutely in need of, for purposes of water lifting and ploughing, he has to get the fodder elsewhere. I have seen ryots of Kangayam going to Bolampatty a distance of over 50 miles for cholam stalks. The result of this is, the ryots are no longer cattle breeders. They have to depend on the professional cattle breeders who are not many and consequently the prices of cattle have gone up very high. As the ryot resorts to intensive cultivation his need for labour also increases. The price of cattle has increased and the cost of maintenance of cattle on account of the want of fodder has grown to a very high item in the budget of the ryot. The cattle have now to be better-fed as the work required of them now has increased very largely while the number of cattle possessed by the ryot has decreased. If the present line of progress should continue he will have very seriously to consider whether some labour-saving appliances at less cost cannot be utilised. For this there is one great objection at present. The holdings are very small and under the Hindu Law they are apt to become smaller. So no individual ryot, except the big ones who are very few in the district, can afford to go in for these labour-saving appliances. It is necessary for me to say here that those who pay large kists to Government are not generally cultivators of their own lands and even when they are cultivators, they cultivate only a portion of their lands and lease out the rest to cultivating ryots. So either a capitalist will have to step in and hire out labour-saving appliances to the ryots or the ryots themselves

should combine and purchase what they want. Here is room for the officers of the *co-operative department* to step in and do something. But it should be stated that the labour saving appliances so far suggested for adoption by the ryots are not many. There is the oil engine recommended for water-lifting. This will be of use only in places where wells capable of supplying water in quantities requisite, are available. Hitherto only individual ryots who have got big estates, have gone in for the oil engines for this purpose. In some cases the purchase of oil engine was with a view to get the right of taking water from a river or channel, which the land had not before. I have heard that in some places there is not sufficient water for oil engine and the ryots want to sell their engines. Then there are sugarcane crushers and sugar makers. The Government has started recently a sugarcane crushing station near Singanallur and I am very glad to hear that ryots are resorting to the station in large numbers. A co-operative society may be formed of the ryots of the locality to purchase the plant and work it for the common benefit of the ryots. This would relieve the Government to start a similar station in some other place.

In dry lands groundnuts and cotton have begun to have the monopoly. Cotton is gaining ground in the last two years. The output of cotton this year has been unprecedented and it bids fair to increase. Kumbu and cereals have suffered in consequence. The *korai* has practically disappeared. Every available inch of ground is being brought under cultivation. There are now 8 ginning factories at Tirupur alone and arrangements are being matured for the opening of two more. Cotton and groundnut are exported to other countries for manufacture while we get back enormous quantities of finished products. Whether we should not arrange for the manufacture of these raw products in our own country instead of sending them out, is a question for serious consideration but does not arise for discussion here. But

one point may be stated viz., that in sending groundnut outside we lose the cake which can be used as manure or as food for the cattle. The Coimbatore ryot now depends for his food supply on other districts. Erode and Tirupur get in the season 10 to 20 waggons of paddy every day. A taluk like Palladam which used to send out cholam gets cholam from the Telugu Districts.

The ordinary ryot is a man of various needs and he has to sell his crops as soon as they are harvested. The harvest season is also the kist season. The money market is very tight and the poor ryot suffers in consequence. In a few months the prices rise and all the benefit goes to the middleman who has purchased the goods in season and waited. Taking the case of only one crop, the horse gram, its price in the harvest season is about Rs. 5 per bag of 24 vallams while the price is Rs. 7 at the end of July or in August. The ryot also suffers in some cases because he is not in touch with the market. Cotton dealers generally go to villages to purchase the kappas and they being professional men get the upper hand in dealing with the villagers and score high when the poor ryot is in need. It has been suggested that co-operative selling, with a fund for advancing to the needy might meet the difficulties. But there are other objections to this proposal. The ryots want to sell the goods at different times. One does not want to speculate and wait, while another wants to wait and take the chance of a rise in price. Secondly the crops raised are not all of the same quality and joint selling is difficult.

These are some of the problems that are pressing and need to be tackled by people who want to be of use to the ryot. In many cases he suffers because he does not know. Education and credit are two of the essentials he requires and if these are supplied the ryot will be in a position to see for himself and take advantage of all that is sought to be done for him. In the absence of these he cannot appreciate what is done by others for him,

nor can he take advantage of those improvements necessitated by the change in the agricultural conditions of the time. The ordinary ryot is a very shrewd individual. He has adopted himself to the obliteration of the old order of things and the introduction of the new and he may be depended on to change still further wherever it is to his interest to do so. The change to the new order of things requires in him a wider outlook and understanding of the world conditions, while the old order of things required only an understanding of the conditions of his village. So the ryot has to be equipped to take full advantage of the changed conditions and to this intent he has to be educated properly and treated with sympathy.

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Discussion :—

Mr. S. Subrahmanya Ayyar led the discussion by pointing out the great benefits that are conferred on the Public at large by the Department of Agriculture and deplored the conservatism of the ryot which he had frequently noticed in his work as Farm Manager. He mentioned that very few of the members of the District Agricultural Association at Coimbatore ever visited the Central Farm in spite of its proximity and the assured benefit of such visits. Mr. S. Sundaramayyar said that his experience about the ryot was different and in the conduct of the spraying operations on the Palmyra and the Arecanut he found the ryot eager to take up an improvement when once he is fully convinced of its utility. It looked as if the discussion was likely to get prolonged and the President brought it to a close by remarking that there are likely to be differences of opinion in the matter according to the class of ryots with which the officers happen to come into contact. He pithily remarked that according to Mr. S. Subrahmanya Ayyar "The country expected every ryot to consult the Agricultural Department just as England expects every man to do his duty."
