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THE JOURNAL  
OF  
The Madras Agricultural Students'  
Union.

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Vol. XIII.]

FEBRUARY 1925.

[No. 2.

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**Jottings of a tour in the Laccadives.**

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*The Laccadives* are a small group of islands that lie in the Arabian sea and are under the Madras Administration. Some are inhabited, while several are uninhabited. The nearest is Androth which is 124 miles S. W. W. of Calicut, and the farthest is Minicoy which is 260 miles distant in the South Westerly direction. Of the 10 inhabited islands Amini, Kadamath, Kiltan, Chetlat with a few neighbouring uninhabited islands, are within the jurisdiction of the Collector of South Kanara and form the Northern portion of the group, while the rest belong to Malabar.

The representative of the Collector in the South Kanara islands is styled the "Monegar" who has his headquarters at Amini. The Malabar islands have a Revenue Officer known as the "Amin" and there is an Amin for each island. All these Officers exercise revenue and magisterial functions in the islands under them. A sub-assistant Surgeon is also located at Amini to serve the South Kanara

islands while there is no such functionary in the Malabar portion. Whenever the Collector visits these islands a Medical officer follows him and attends also to the vaccination of children and adults locally and scrutinises vital statistics besides rendering medical and sanitary help.

These islands are of diminutive size, the biggest is Minicoy which is about six miles long and half-a mile wide at the broadest portion. The islands are each surrounded by a belt of lagoon and are characterised by the sandy soil, 3 to 5 feet deep. The South-west monsoon rains are severe in June and July while the North-east rains are either scarce or are gentle. Unprotected on all sides these islands are fully subject to the extreme severity of heavy gales which blow for about six months in the year. Sweet water is available in all islands at shallow depths. Houses are all built in the interior of the island and are unlike those in the mainland.

*Animals.* There are no wild animals. Goats are common; cows are found in several islands; fowls are in plenty. Neither are there cats, dogs, pigs nor rabbits. A few crows visit houses in Minicoy, Kalpini and Androth and a few cranes are seen in the last two islands. The inhabitants catch fish of several kinds, turtles and tortoises and regale themselves. The notable representative of the fish kind is the "Mas" fish or Benneto fish which enjoys worldwide reputation and is reported a delicacy. This is found only in the Minicoy sea. This has given rise locally to a flourishing industry.

*People.* The total population does not exceed 3,000. The inhabitants are all mussalmans and have great affinities with the Moplabs of Malabar. They are strong and sturdy and kindly take to the sea. The Minicoy men are good sailors. The women-folk are hard working and manage the household when their husbands are out in the sea either fishing or serving in ships as lascars. Preparation of coir fibre, the curing of the coconut kernel and making of jaggery from its juice called "mera" are items of work in which the women engage themselves. There is an elementary school in each island where Malayalam is taught.

*Crops.* Coconut is the staple crop in all the islands on which the islanders depend for their existence. The tree gives all the materials for building,—posts, rafters, reapers, leaves. It gives the islander nuts which he needs. And the husk furnishes the fibre which is sold to Government in exchange for rice, the prime necessity of life. The kernel however is sold in the mainland during the fair whether with the proceeds of which other necessaries as clothes, tobacco, salt,

arecanuts and chillies are bought. Thus the coconut has come to be the mainstay of the islander's life and the prosperity of the island depends solely on the well being of this important tropical plant. In 1920, an Agricultural demonstrator from Calicut had visited these islands and reported on the existence of a few insect pests and diseases attacking coconuts. My trip was undertaken this year with a view to study the latter and attention was concentrated on the origin and prevalence of the disease, its extent and virulence at present. In the inhabited islands the number of coconut trees may run into several lacs. Overcrowding is the chief defect. This impedes clean cultivation, checks fair fruiting or hastens the spread of the disease. The method of cultivation adopted is crude except in Kalpini and Androth. Coconut nurseries are raised in all islands except two. Seedlings from the mainland seem to have been first brought into Androth and Kalpini in 1847 when heavy gales laid the plantations low, largely through the efforts of Sir W. Robinson the then Collector of Malabar. But what was expedient in 1847 became a normal procedure in course of time, the islanders gave up raising seedlings and have been importing from Calicut, Tellichery and other ports which they visit to dispose of the island produce. This introduced Bud-rot disease into these two islands. In the other islands Bud-rot is absent, the Makkathayam law which is followed here leads to rapid sub-division of property and coconut plantations year after year are being parcelled out into fragments and the plots are secured in such a way that intermediate lines of coconut are planted to mark off boundary limits. Thus in a period of 30 years two adjacent plantations started with 100 trees get filled with lines and crosslines and studded with trees in an infinite variety of ways. No light or sun's rays ever fall on the trunk or reach the ground. Moisture-laden winds and heavy showers bring on a thick growth of weeds and grasses which choke up young seedlings and rob off all moisture and what plant food there is in the poor soil and sub-soil to the great detriment of older trees. Absence of manuring and cultural operations hasten this process. The islanders have not yet learnt the usefulness of applying manure. They do not know there are other uses than eating to which they can put their fish to. Mountains of refuse husk and coconut ashes lie about the premises in all directions to be carried away by strong winds whenever they blow. Calotropis, Indigofera, Kalingi and Crotolaria are growing but are not used. No hoeing is given to the plantation. The mammuty or kothu is seen only for digging pits for planting seedlings. It is surprising even in Kalpini and Androth where mammuty is freely used in the Thottam cultivation of sweet potatoes, ragi, samai, paddy, plantains, etc in the flats in all stages of growth it is not once used in the coconut plantation. Coconut seedlings are planted in the

midst of a luxuriant growth of weeds as *Stachytarphyta*, *Wedelia*, *Ipomea*, and *Spinifex* and other jungle plants like *Chonum* and *Kanni*. Consequently they are choked up either by them or attacked by the vegetable parasite *Cassyth filiformis* called "Verillatali". This is particularly noticeable in Kavararathi.

Another reason for the failure of the young plantations is thick planting especially in newly taken up "Cowle" lands. Confined to the eight islands out of the ten are the Bleeding disease and *Pestalozzia*. The Bleeding disease is fairly common but is not serious in all plantations where sufficient distance has been allowed. This is so in Kadamath and Kiltan.

Owing to the above causes the produce of nuts has declined in these islands. The carelessness in the selection of seednuts is also another factor in bringing down the yield.

Beetle attack is very severe chiefly in Agathi and Amini. Locust attack is slight. By far the most troublesome element is the goat. No island is free from goats which eat away all the young leaves and damage seedlings.

*Damage by rats* is sometimes serious. Three devices has been tried. 1. Rat hunt organised by the "Karanies" (village headmen) by climbing the trees and destroying the nests. Rats drop to the ground, when they are killed. 2. Special hoods made of leaves with their sharpened midribs pointing downwards are tied round trees which prick rats when they climb up. 3. Kerosine tins are tied on tops of trees and beaten to make loud sounds.

An interesting feature in Kiltan is the existence of a small garden owned by a mainlander in which a few arecanuts, lime trees, cotton cholum, maize, red-gram and *phaseolus* are grown. The ryot is pleased that he made half a moda of grain from his cholum plot last year. This shows the possibility of raising food grains.

In Karathi coconuts are distantly planted on Pandaram lands. The plantations are found on large mounds which it is reported were originally made out of the earth dug out to form depressions for raising crops of rice. The mounds have remained, the rice cultivation is however gone. On the mounds a few pulse crops are grown, interspersed with a few papayas, limes, breadfruits, moringa and betelvine. Government or pandaram lands not reclaimed occupy a very large area. They are overgrown with weeds, which are parasitised by the wiry parasite *Cassyth filiformis*. In the new plantations

raised without clearing, the seedlings have died out because of this parasite attack. Minicoy is peculiar in many ways. The Minicoyans speak a different tongue. They are very good seamen. The island is notorious for mosquitoes. No house is without a mosquito curtain which is merely a closely woven cloth. The island boasts of a lighthouse built 40 years ago; it is 160 feet high. There is a leper colony as well as a small-pox isolation colony located in a corner of the island. Catching and curing "Mas" fish is an important industry. Coconuts are thickly planted, the plots are overgrown with rank vegetation. A few nice arecanut and betelvine gardens are seen. Surfeited on mas fish, the islanders pay little attention to coconuts. The islanders dread to approach and remove screw pines for fear of disturbing devils for which they are supposed to be haunts.

*Kalpini.* The whole island presents a wavy surface with tortuous high ridges and inseparable low flats. In these flats sweet potato, paddy, ragi, samai, plantains, chembu, (colocasia) with a few arecanuts and betel vine are grown. Plantains and sweet potatoes are standing crops, Breadfruit and moringa, are also common.

Androth is a rich island. In pandaram lands trees are planted far apart but bear less owing to want of care. "Tottam" cultivation is perfect-Tapioca, Colocasia, (chembu) paddy, ragi, payaru are seen in the fringes of high ridges and the hollows are thick with ferns.

The poor nature of the soil, the existence of the Makkathayam law of inheritance and little care bestowed on coconut cultivation, unrestricted importation of seedlings from the mainland (Malabar and S. Canara) account for the presence to a large extent of the Bleeding disease and Bud-rot, locusts, and other pests and parasites.

*Flora of the Laccadives.* Along the coast we have Spinifex Squarrosus, Cyperus, Launaea asplenifolia, Pandanus odoratissimus (Screw pine), Ipomea biloba, Suriana maritima, (Chonum) Scaevola Koenigii ("Kanni"), Pemphis acidula (Cherudalam), Guettarda speciosa, Cordia sebastiana, "Amara", "Kayam", Erythrina.

*Inland:-* Ficus bengalensis (Banian), Thespesia populnea, Famarindus indica, Hibiscus tiliaceus, (Parthi), Terminalia catappa, Zizphus, Calophyllum, Casuarina, Fig, "Phatti", "Kandal", Poinciana alata, Colubrina asiatica ("Baga".)

*Shrubs and weeds :-* Dodonoaea viscosa, Lantana, Vitex negundo, Stachyterpheta indica, Wedelia biflora Padilanthus tithymaloides, Ocimum gratissimum, Peristrophe bicalyculata, Aloes, and Agave,

*Physalis*, *Leucas aspers*, *Lippia nodiflora*, *Acalyphas*, *Sida humilis*, *Phyllanthus niruri*, *Polygonum*, *Ammannia*, *Herpestis in tottams*, *Polygala*, *Ageratum*, *Oldenlandia*, *Rungia*, *Aerua*, *Evolvulus*.

*Green manure* *Tephrosia* (Kolinji), *Indigofera*, *Crotalaria* and *Calotropis gigantea* (Erukkan).

*Ferns* On the edges of flats and in hollows in Androth.

*Vegetables.* *Moringa*, *Artocarpus incisa* (breadfruit). Betel and Areca gardens. Plantains, Papayas, Limes, Pomegraaates, Gourds, Melons, Pulses (Payaru), Colocasia. In "*Tottams*" in *Kalpini* and *Androth*. *Impomea batatas* (sweet pototoes), *Colocasia* (chembu). Plantain, Tapioca, Paddy, Ragi, Samai, Cholum, (maize). Pulses, (payaru), Mango, *Casuarina*, *Neem*, *Eriodendron* (silk cotton tree), *Ficus religiosa* and a date palm—found only one or two as specimens introduced by the islanders from the mainland.

*Cassytha filiformis*, a vegetable parasite on coconut seedlings "Kanni", "Chonum", "Terminalia, *Lantana*, *Stachytarpheta judica*, *Wedelia biflora*, *Ipomea biloba*, *Spinifex squarrosus*, *Peristrophe bicalycalta*.

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### Development Minister on Land Mortgage Banks.

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*Gentlemen.*—I thank you most heartily for this unique privilege you have offered me of opening the first Land Mortgage Bank of the presidency in this most historic and sacred city. The subject of organising Land Mortgage Banks has been receiving the serious attention of the Government for some time past and their importance has been discussed over and over again on the public platform and in the press, and has been reiterated once again only the other day by Mr. Sivarama Menon while presiding at the North Arcot District Co-operative Conference held at Cheyyar. While I was at Ambur last I had occasion to explain to the members of the supervising unions the conclusions arrived at by the Government on the matter of organising Land Mortgage Banks. It will not be out of place here, I think, to say a few words on the features of the new organisation, though at the risk of repeating myself.