

## SUGAR TANGLE

BY RAO SAHIB V. MUTHUSWAMI AYYAR

Amongst the more important crops grown in India sugarcane occupies an honoured place. But no adequate attention had been paid to this crop until the sugarcane section was organised in Madras in 1911. Other countries like West Indies, Cuba, Mauritius, Java, Formosa and Hawaii which introduced sugarcanes later managed to forge ahead so much so that Java was able to export large quantities of sugar to India for several years. Java's position in 1930 could be summed up in the statement: acreage 484,984; tons of cane harvested 25,292,273; tons of sugar exported to India alone 351,735 (metric), in 1929-30 the area under cane in India was 2,677,000 acres. In this," says Sir Bryce Burt "was produced 21150 tons of sugar refined from gur, 89,768 tons of sugar produced direct from canes by modern factories, and some 200,000 tons of sugar manufactured by the indigenous open pan or Khandsari process, so that allowing for setts for planting and cane for chewing, 1,837,000 tons of gur were produced for consumption as such."

Although Coimbatore seedlings had established their name throughout the sugar world, there was still a gap—a wide gap between production and consumption in India itself. In 1929-30 these varieties were grown on an area of 549,025 acres. The imports into the country were enormous. India was not self-sufficient. She was at the mercy of Java. Public feeling asserted itself and government reciprocated with commendable alacrity. The question of fiscal protection was referred to the Tariff Board in 1930. Protection was decided upon in 1931.

There was in consequence phenomenal increase in sugar production in India. The area under improved varieties alone in 1934-35 exceeded 2,400,000 acres, while the total area under cane was over 3½ million acres.

Java to her utter discomfiture has had to reduce her area and production. Her area which was 489,984 acres and her tonnage of cane which was 25,292,273 in 1930 dwindled down to 93,613 acres and 5,152,122 tons respectively in 1934, and no tangible improvement has been recorded during the last two years. Other countries have adopted different measures of adjusting their production and sugar prices. Cuba decided to burn her surplus sugar. West Indies entered into a reciprocal understanding with Canada. Formosan sugar was largely absorbed by Japan.

Still the evolution of new types at the Coimbatore Imperial Cane Breeding Station from year to year covering a wide range of suitability and usefulness, the results of trials of promising Coimbatore canes in several provinces under varied conditions of soil, climate,



cultural and manurial treatment serve only to stimulate further increase. This is reinforced by the passing of the Indian Sugar Excise Act of 1935 and by the conviction that protective duties will be in operation for another eight years which gives sufficient time for consolidation of the industry and for making it stand on its own legs. That tendencies point in this direction is shown in the latest official sugarcane forecast for 1936—37. The figures are, area sown 4,431,000 acres, raw sugar (gur or jaggery) 6,717,000 tons." Imports into India have almost ceased.

For a population of 380 millions in 1937 the annual consumption at 18 lb. in terms of refined sugar per head is more than met by production in the country itself even assuming that 2 tons of raw sugar are needed to produce 1 ton of refined sugar. At the present rate of increase in area, a time will soon come when India will have to think of stimulating local consumption or of entering world markets and putting in large quantities of sugar in competition with other countries. Neither of these two methods would seem to offer satisfactory solution, under the present state of economic dependence of India on other countries.

With increased production and no outlet for surplus sugar, the alarmingly low economic condition of the people to which Sir H. P. Mody drew pointed attention in his speech on the Finance bill in the Indian Legislature in March 1936 and in support of which he quoted the following figures would become worsened.

Countries.	National income.	Industrial production.	Bank deposits.	Savings deposits.
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
U. S. A.	2000	720	...	...
Canada	1300	470	...	...
United Kingdom	1100	410	700	270
Japan	270	158	250	90
India	100	20	7	2

In these circumstances therefore the institution next April of a Tariff Board for enquiry into the problems of sugar which bristle with peculiar difficulties will be welcomed by all. The taxpayer looks forward however with hope that the terms of reference to this Board will be wide yet precise, that their enquiries will cover a wide field yet be exhaustive, and that their recommendations will come upto the expectations of the country which now feels that considerable improvement is desirable and possible without restriction of area or curtailment of activities of the scientific departments, but with due regard to adjustment and readjustment of cropping and regulation of tariffs. With increased and more effective voting strength vouchsafed under the Government of India Act of 1935 which comes into operation in April and which has introduced a tremendous revolution in his outlook, the villager would rest satisfied only when he feels his interests have not been made to suffer even to a small degree.