

The Present Food Position

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The Madras State has always been deficit in food production. In prewar years this deficit amounted to 5 lakhs of tons. It was made good by imports from other countries, particularly from Burma. The war and its aftermath created conditions making it difficult for the usual imports to flow into the country. Further, the population has been growing all these years at a rapid rate and Nature too has been very unkind during the past five years in succession. All these factors have accentuated the very difficult food position in this State. Thus controls in regard to food, viz., procurement and rationing which were originally adopted as war time measures have unfortunately come to stay with us for a longer period than was originally expected. We began these controls in a few districts in 1942-43 and later on extended them, as our situation grew worse, with the result that by 1946-47, the entire State was completely under control in the matter of procurement and rationing.

Owing to a change in policy advocated by the Central Government, there was an interlude of decontrol in 1947-48; but this experiment having proved quite unsatisfactory, the Government of India directed reversion to full controls in all States. Intensive procurement and rationing throughout the State (except rationing in a few surplus districts) were thus functioning again till 31st December 1950. Owing however to repeated complaints from the ryots, especially in the deficit districts, that procurement resulted in unnecessary harassment, the Government decided upon a partial change of policy from the beginning of the calendar year 1951. The main lines of the revised policy are, intensive procurement in six surplus districts, levy procurement in five more or less self-sufficient districts, inter-district ban on movement of foodgrains, statutory rationing in municipal towns except in surplus districts, and informal rationing in the rural parts of Malabar and Nilgiris and the Hosdrug sub-taluk of South Kanara district and distribution of foodgrains both locally procured and imported through fair price shops in the derationed areas and in the deficit parts of surplus districts.

The main advantage of this revised policy is that it frees producers from the unwelcome attentions of the procurement officers and in a way gives a fillip to better production. On the other hand, the producers in derationed areas are bound to sell their surplus at exorbitant prices, making it impossible for the poor consumers to purchase their requirements in the open market. On the whole however, the new policy can be

considered to have worked satisfactorily within the limitations inherent under any system of decontrol at the present time of shortages.

Provisions in the Plan

The Planning Commission have expressed themselves strongly against decontrol. They have observed that the adverse repercussions of decontrol in 1947-48 warrant caution in the adoption of measures of partial or complete decontrol in future. They have also expressed themselves strongly against allowing free movement of foodgrains, for which, they consider the present conditions were not favourable. The danger of decontrol was that traders may buy up large quantities of grain and charge exorbitant prices from the middle classes. They also point out that past experience shows that where controls are efficiently managed, the prices in the rationed and non-rationed areas remain fairly reasonable while on the other hand, where there has been decontrol, the prices rose to levels higher than in deficit districts, where the control systems were efficient.

They therefore state that any step in the direction of decontrol is under present conditions certain to raise prices and likely to jeopardize the entire system of food controls, which have been built up in the country with considerable effort. They sum up saying that adequate procurement supplemented by necessary imports and efficient arrangements for distribution of the available supplies at reasonable prices are the essential cornerstones of food policy under the present conditions. With regard to rationing, the Commission is of the view that all towns of a size to be prescribed by the Central Government should be rationed and that a form of rural rationing on a system of fair-price shops should be adopted in deficit areas.

Importance of Public Co-operation

Controls are irksome but are necessary when as at present, there is disequilibrium between supply and demand. Controls over food by their very nature, interfere with the day-to-day life of the entire population, whether in their capacity as producers or consumers. It creates a set of new offences. Unless the public enter into the spirit of controls and co-operate with the Government to make them successful, there must inevitably be some friction and controls will fail in their purpose. Public co-operation on the following main lines is essential to make the Government's policy a success:—

- (1) Surrendering the entire surplus to the Government or their agents;
- (2) selling the surplus produce to consumers in the derationed areas at controlled prices;
- (3) preventing smuggling;

- (4) checking blackmarket by desisting from resorting to it; and
- (5) economizing consumption by observing the rationing and austerivty restrictions.

Critical Appreciation

As stated earlier, though there is one school of opinion that holds that the partial decontrol policy adopted in this State is a success, there is another school which differs from this view. There can however, be no two opinions that so long as shortages in foodgrains continue and so long as adequate imports to meet this shortage can be arranged, a policy of full and complete control with intensive procurement and all-out rationing will be desirable. But we have to appreciate the point of view of the people who have been in the grip of controls for nearly a decade and are impatient to get out of it.

Though the Planning Commission has expressed itself even against a policy of partial decontrol and though its observations that free market prices will tend to rise high, making it impossible for Government to bring them down, have been found true, yet in view of the partial success that has attended the derationing experiment adopted this year in the State, it is considered desirable to continue the same experiment for another year. [Reprinted from the Special Planning Number, Madras Information, October, 1951]

A note on the Phyllotaxy in *Thevetia nereifolia*, Juss

Generally phyllotaxy is kept up in a species, in a genus and even in a family (Rubiaceae-opposite; Malvaceae-alternate). The family *Apocynaceae* is characterised by opposite phyllotaxy, but a whorled arrangement is also not uncommon. Only a few plants are mentioned to possess alternate arrangement of leaves in this family and *Thevetia nereifolia*, Juss., is one. Among the South Indian species described by Gamble (1923) there are 35 species in the family out of which 28 are with opposite arrangement, 7 are whorled and 3 are described as alternate.

Thevetia nereifolia, Juss., a tropical American plant belonging to *Apocynaceae* though at a glance appears to possess alternate arrangement, on extended observation is seen to have three or four kinds of phyllotaxy in the same plant or branch and in certain cases the arrangement does not conform to the Fibonacci series, by which the rule of phyllotaxy is