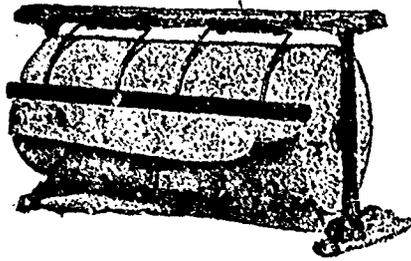


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### The Part Taken by India in Feeding the World

Anything about India is interesting at present. C. Wood Davis has the following paper in the Minneapolis Northwestern Miller:

Prior to 1870, exports of wheat from India had been of small volume, not so much, however, because of meagre production, or the rates of exchange, as from the distance of the producing districts from the great seaports and the incidence of taxation. While in no year prior to 1873 had the exports exceeded 2,000,000 bushels, yet, with the abrogation of the export duty in that year, the synchronous extension of railways into the producing districts, and the completion and utilization of the Suez route, the "ryot" was able to command a better price for his grain, and thus secure the money required to pay the "land-rent tax," exacted by India's one landlord—the British-Indian government. Though the exportation of wheat was stimulated and gradually increased by the causes named, probably one of the most potent factors in developing Indian exportation of the bread-making grain, was the completion of the Suez canal. This greatly reduced the time required to reach the consuming populations, thereby diminishing both interest and insurance accounts, and enabling the merchants to turn over to the grower a far greater proportion of the European price. It is possible, and even probable, that the continuous fall in the exchange value of the rupee had an appreciable effect in stimulating exports, by giving the Indian merchant the safe margin following from a constant tendency of exchange in the one direction, but, after all, the increase of India exports is more largely due to the ryot's necessity for money with which to meet the increasing imports, than to all other causes combined. For 3,000 years, the Indian peasant has found these imports increasingly burdensome, and the difficulty of securing the funds with which to meet them, greater and greater.

While wheat exportation increased in a practically continuous manner (up to 1891) since the first line of rails was laid to the wheat-growing districts, there is no evidence that wheat production has increased, in any degree whatever, since 1870. In fact, while official data regarding the production prior to 1881 are lacking, there is abundant evidence that neither the acreage under wheat, nor the volume of production, has shown any in 30 years, and there is much reason to believe that the acres now employed, number no more than those of half a century since, and probably no more than in 1797. It is clear that acre yields have not increased, in 300 years, if we can rely upon the revenue returns. Always and everywhere, in India,

the government for the time being, has been the ultimate and universal landlord, no matter how many intermediaries there may have been, and the "land-rent tax" has, until the latter half of the British period, been uniformly paid in kind. That is, the government has taken as such "land-rent tax" a given proportion—usually a very large proportion—of the product. More recently, the British have substituted a money payment, but such payments are still based, in their amount—that is the rental of each particular tract—on what the revenue officials of the district determine to be the average productive power of the tract. These assessments are made with extraordinary care—that the greatest revenue possible shall be obtained—by special revenue officials, and with those of many hundreds of past years, are accessible in the village records.

Records of the time of Akbar—India's great statistician and historian. Sir W. W. Hunter tells us—show that land which then gave yields of wheat averaging 19 bushels an acre, now gives yields of no more than 14 bushels. Akbar has generally been credited with being the most enlightened and liberal of India's rulers, and it is possible that he may have been too liberal in estimating the revenue-bearing capacity of these tracts. The character of this great and liberal administrator would lead us to believe that such might have been the case, as we find him decreeing that there shall be left for every man who cultivated his land as much as he requires for his own support till the next crop can be reached, and that of his family, and for seed. "This much shall be left him. What remains is land-tax, and shall go to the public treasury."

This is a much clearer exposition of the single-tax theory—and a practical one—than has ever emanated from its more modern exponents, and we are safe in assuming that Akbar and his ministers charged "all that the traffic would bear." The British have refined upon Akbar's processes by taking as much in money when the crop is a failure as he did in the most prolific years. At the same time, there is reason to believe that acre yields in India are gradually declining, outside the irrigated districts, as fertilization, if ever practised, has become a lost art. Indian cultivators know neither the pig nor the horse—there is not a cart horse in all India, except such as are employed in military operations—and the droppings of cattle are used as fuel, instead of being returned to the land. Even the towns and cities depend largely upon this source for fuel. Therefore, it is safe to conclude, from known conditions, that there has been no increase of acre yields in the last 300 years. I hold this belief, though I have long been convinced that lands of fair fertility do not deteriorate, even when constantly cropped without fertilization, with anything like the rapidity

generally believed. India, itself, affords, with Egypt, probably the best possible evidence that deterioration is always slow upon lands of fair depth and average fertility. In some Indian districts, lands are known to have been cropped for more than 2,000 years, yet appear to give as good crops of cotton as before the Mohammedan invasion. This is notably true of the chocolate-colored cotton lands of the central plateau, where neither fertilization nor irrigation has been resorted to. These facts are interesting in themselves, and doubly so when their bearing upon American agriculture is considered.

The data in relation to Indian wheat production and exportation, used in connection herewith, have all been derived from official sources, and Indian agricultural statistics are exceptionally reliable, being derived almost wholly—outside of Bengal and the native states—from village revenue records. These, with data in relation to population from decennial censuses, show that, while the population of India has, in recent periods, increased at a rate exceeding 1 per cent. per annum, the cultivated acreage increases by less than ½ per cent. per annum, the result being that population presses upon the means of subsistence, with ever-increasing weight. Among peoples of European lineage the belief is general that rice is the staple food of all the Indian populations; but nothing could be further from the mark. The Sorghums, both saccharine and non-saccharine, millets, and various pulses form the staple foods of India, and that great population may be called a millet-eating one, as the sorghums are usually known as millets. Half a century ago, Elphinstone, in his "India," stated: "The principal food of the people of northern Hindostan is wheat, and in the Deccan, jowar and bajra. Rice, as a general article of subsistence, is confined to Bengal and a part of Bihar, with the low country along the sea all around the coast of the peninsula. In most parts of India, it is only used as a luxury."

There is little reason to believe that there has been a material change in Indian dietaries since this governor of the greatest of Indian presidencies told us: "Barley is little eaten, and oats, till lately, were unknown; but there are several smaller sorts of grain, such as millet. Maize (5,442,000 acres were grown in India in 1893) is a good deal grown. \* \* \* There are many kinds of pulse, of which there is great consumption.

Since the days of Elphinstone, great populations have been brought under British-Indian dominion, and the proportion consuming "jowar" (sorghum vulgare) and bajra, and other millets, has doubtless increased, and it is possible that the proportion of wheat eaters, as well as of rice eaters, has some-