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# THE SAGA OF CASHEW

## From A Soil Conservation Tree To A Prominent Commercial Crop Of India

Cashew is a tropical tree crop belonging to the Anacardiaceae family. Cashew is native to Central and South America, notably

north-eastern Brazil. The name Cashew is derived from the Portuguese word Caju meaning fruit, which in turn is derived from Acajú, a name given by

Tupi Indians indigenous to Brazil. Thevet, a French naturalist who visited Marahano region of Brazil in 1558, described the cashew tree for the first time. The spread

of cashew to different parts of the world started in the medieval period when the Spanish sailors introduced cashew to Panama and Central America and in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese colonials introduced cashew first to Mozambique and India (De Castro, 1994). In India, cashew was first introduced to the Malabar Coast from where it spread to other coastal areas, southern part and the Andaman Islands of the country. Later it was spread to the Indian subcontinent and some parts of South Asia, and today it is grown over more than 30 countries.

#### Soil conservation tree crop

Soil erosion is a dangerous geomorphic process and a hazard that results in the loss of fertile topsoil. Soil erosion can be controlled by checking the flow of water by maintaining a cover of vegetation and litter on the ground known as the cover approach, which reduces the impact of raindrops. The roots which stabilize the soil and bind the soil layers together prevent the soil displacement due to wind or water. Conservation trees are an integral part of agriculture and wasteland management as they preserve topsoil from erosion. Cashew is evergreen and broad-leaved tree with a deep taproot system and an extensive network of lateral roots. These features make cashew an ideal soil conservation tree which was realized before its spread from its centre of origin to other parts of the world. The Portuguese colonials introduced cashew into their colonies in India and Africa mainly to check the soil erosion and to improve the wastelands and not for its nuts, which are the main purpose of cashew

cultivation at present.

#### Commercial cultivation and trading of cashew

The value of cashew as an edible crop or its economic utility was realized much later after its spread to different parts of the world. It is known that the people of Goa started consuming cashew nuts by the middle of the 18th century. It has been recorded that the processing of cashew nut on a commercial scale was first started by Roch Victoria in Kollam, Kerala during the 1920s. India was the first country to establish a commercial cashew processing industry with a skilled labour force. In 1905, small quantities of kernels were imported from India by the USA and in the 1920s, world cashew trade started with the visit of representatives of the General Food Corporation to India. Gradually, Indian cashew export expanded to several European countries. By 1941, the cashew kernels export by India had reached to about 20,000 tons. Since the beginning, India dominated cashew production and trade. In the last few decades, the number of cashew producing countries across the world has increased resulting in the expansion of the world cashew area and trade.

The world cashew nuts production is about 3.97 million tons and Vietnam (25% of world India and Cote d'Ivoire are the major contributors sharing 22%, 19% and 18% of the total production respectively (FAOSTAT 2017). In the area under cashew cultivation, Cote d'Ivoire with 1.56 m ha (26% of total) and India with 1.06 m ha (18% of total) are leading countries. In India, cashew is

grown in 17 states producing 8.2 million MT of raw cashew nut. Of this, 94% of the cashew produce comes from the seven states viz. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. In terms of production and productivity, Maharashtra state stands out contributing 33 % of production and it has the highest productivity of 1378 kg/ha, which is more than double of other major cashew producing states like AP and KA (DCCD, 2019).

The cashew nut processing capacity is about 16.50 m MT per year in India. However, domestic production is about half the processing capacity and the remaining quantity of raw cashew nut is imported mainly from African countries. In last year, a total of 14.7 m MT (8.2 m MT produced and 6.5 m MT imported nuts) were processed in the country. In India, each metric ton of raw cashew nut processed, yields about 230 kg (23%) of exportable grade kernels. About 0.84 lakhs MT of processed kernel was exported which earned India a foreign exchange worth Rs. 5870 crores. It makes Cashew one of the most important horticulture crops earning huge foreign exchange. Moreover, cashew provides sustainable employment in both processing and agriculture sectors to about 1.5 million people and the majority of them are rural women (DCCD, 2018).

#### Increasing demand for cashew and prospects of cashew production

In the last decade, the global per capita consumption of cashew kernel has increased from 72 grams/year to 106

grams/year which is about 47% increase. During the same period, the per capita cashew consumption in India has increased by about 5.5 times i.e. from 41 grams/year to 228 grams/year (INC 2017). The current value of the global cashew market is about US\$ 9.9 million, which is estimated to rise to US\$ 12.7 million by 2024 (Reports and Data, 2019). Further, it is estimated that about 40-50 lakh tons of raw cashew nuts are needed to meet the demand for cashew in India by 2050. Therefore, there is a need for increasing the cashew

production and productivity to meet the future demand and to reduce the exchequer spent on import of raw cashew nuts. Thus, cashew makes the choice of crop for the future, which has great potential to improve both economic status and nutritional security of India.

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