

CHAPTER XII.

SALT AND ABKARI REVENUE.

Salt.

Pages 175 to 180.—For the existing chapter, substitute:—
There are no salt factories in South Kanara and all the salt required for consumption in the district is obtained from Bombay. The inhabitants prefer the Bombay salt to the Madras article because the former is both cheaper and lighter than the latter. Attempts were made to produce light salt in Madras without loss of chemical purity, so that Madras salt could get into favour in the district but the attempt proved unsuccessful. 316,478 maunds of salt were imported from Bombay in 1892-1893 and the quantities imported in the preceding three years were in 1891-92, 322,514, in 1890-91, 326,859 and in 1889-90, 331,155 maunds. The whole of the salt imported in these years was not, however, consumed in South Kanara itself. Mysore and Coorg received their supply from this district, though the exact quantity could not be ascertained. The average consumption per head in the West Coast was 13·06 lbs. and for the Presidency 16·39 lbs.

The quantity of salt imported in the three years 1931-32, 1932-33 and 1933-34 was respectively 334,146, 335,390 and 336,744 maunds. Salt for the provinces of Mysore and Coorg is now supplied direct from Bombay and from some of the factories in the Madras Presidency so that the consumption of salt per head of the population in South Kanara district was 20·04, 20·11 and 20·19 lbs. in the three years noted above, the Presidency average in these years being 18·57, 17·02 and 17·84 lbs. The average price of salt in the district during the year 1892-93 was 11·12 seers per rupee and the retail price in 1933-34 was Rs. 3-12-5 per maund or 10·6 seers per rupee.

Salt earth.

"Salt earth" has been declared "contraband salt" in the Kásaragód taluk, the Mangalore taluk except the Bantvál deputy tahsildar's division, and the Coondapoor, Udipi and Kárkal taluks with the exception of certain specified villages. Saline soils are common in the district and at many points along the sea-coast, salt forms spontaneously. The swamps are patrolled by special preventive parties during the hot season every year.

Salt for fish-curing.

The department supplies at cost price salt for curers of fish. There are at present 20 fish-curing yards in the district where salt is supplied free of duty for curing fish. Of these the most important is the yard at Malpe. The total quantity of fish cured in 1934-35 (July to June) was 384,132 maunds, and 69,366 maunds of salt were issued free of duty for curing.

Abkari.

The manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors and drugs are regulated by law and their consumption is restricted by the

imposition of a tax. The revenue derived from this source is called "Abkari" or Excise revenue.

VOL. II.
CHAP. XII.

Originally the mode of administration prevailing in the district as regards arrack or country spirit, was, the renting system. Under this system, the exclusive privilege of manufacture was disposed of by auction. The number of stills was limited as far as possible; also the strength at which liquor might be sold was restricted to 20°, 30° and 60° under proof, the minimum prices also being fixed. From 1st October 1891, a special scheme was introduced with a view to concentration of manufacture and the rural parts of the district were divided into manufacturing and non-manufacturing areas, the renters of the former having the privilege of manufacture and sale in respect of their own farms as well as the privilege of supplying spirits to the non-manufacturing areas at particular rates. The vend-area renters had the privilege of sale only in their own area and they made their own arrangements with shop-keepers to whom they were obliged to supply liquor at particular rates. From 1st October of the following year, the privileges of manufacture and sale were separated and the number of manufacturing areas was reduced and the vend-areas were abolished, the shops being sold separately. The renters of the manufacturing areas were then given the privilege of manufacture only, each of them supplying a certain number of independent shops at a fixed rate of Rs. 2 per gallon of 30° under proof. Eleven of the areas were allowed one sub-still each for the manufacture of weak liquor to be transported to the main still for re-distillation. Issues to shop-keepers from the sub-distilleries were forbidden and the liquor was allowed to be removed only in the presence of an Abkari officer. For the convenience of the shop-keepers certain distillers were required to keep depots to which liquor was consigned from the stills for issue to shops. There were in all twelve depots in the district. The privilege of manufacture in the tree-tax areas was subject to the payment of tree-tax upon the trees from which the toddy required for distillation was drawn while in the rest of the district part of the tax was collected in the form of a licence fee imposed on each toddy-drawer.

Present
systems.
Arrack.

The Mangalore town area was under the contract distillery supply system. Under this system the exclusive privilege of manufacture and supply of country spirits in the town was disposed of by tender while the shops were sold separately. The contractor was bound to obtain the toddy required for distillation from marked trees on which tree-tax was paid and was bound to supply shop-keepers at a fixed rate per gallon which was termed still-head-charge and the exclusive privilege

of manufacture and supply was granted to the approved tenderer who offered to Government the largest share of such still-head charge in the form of duty.

The contract distillery system is now in force throughout the district. The successful tenderer has the monopoly of supply of liquor of his own manufacture to retail vendors in the district. The arrack now supplied is distilled from molasses. The duty on arrack is Rs. 4-3-7 per gallon of 35° U.P., the prescribed strength at which it is to be sold. The retail shops are disposed of individually by auction every year. The number of such shops in 1935-36 was 303. The sale of molasses arrack in sealed bottles is also being tried as an experiment in Mangalore town. The arrack is issued in bottles of 4 drams capacity and kept for sale in shops along with the arrack to be sold on draught. The contract suppliers are allowed to charge an extra fee for bottle to cover the cost of labour of bottling, etc.

Foreign
liquor.

The privilege of the sale of foreign liquor and beer in taverns for consumption on the premises is sold by auction annually as in the case of arrack shops; other kinds of licences are issued on payment of fixed fees. The duty levied on foreign liquor imported by sea forms no part of the excise revenue, but is credited to customs revenue which is imperial. In the case of such liquors the excise revenue is realised in the form of vend fees only. In the case of Indian made foreign spirits however both the duty and vend fees form part of the provincial revenue. Coconut toddy arrack manufactured in the Government distillery at Chowghát in Malabar district though excised at a lower rate of duty than the tariff rate, viz., Rs. 21-14-0 per proof gallon is for all practical purposes considered as Indian made foreign spirit and its sale is permitted under the foreign liquor licences only. In addition to the fixed fees a fee is levied quarterly on the volume of sales of all liquor under the fixed fee retail licences. Spirituous medicinal preparations, spirit essences, perfumes, toilet preparations; etc., are manufactured in bond by a licensed firm at Udipi which gets the alcohol required from Nellikuppam distillery at a concessional rate of Rs. 5 per proof gallon.

Toddy.

The toddy revenue is raised on the tree-tax system, by which a tax is levied upon each tree tapped for fermented toddy and the right to open shops is sold annually by auction. Toddy is generally drawn from coconut, sago and palmyra trees. Licences to tap trees are issued half-yearly in the case of coconut and sagoes and yearly in the case of palmyras on the application of toddy shop-keepers or tappers when countersigned by renters for sale in licensed shops and of tree owners who require toddy for their own consumption but not for sale,

after payment of the prescribed tree-tax. The current rates of tree-tax on coconuts and sagos are Rs. 4-8-0 and Rs. 9-0-0 respectively per half-year and that on palmyras is Rs. 3 per annum. Tapping of trees for sweet toddy is not controlled in the district. Malpractices are very common. Toddy is often drawn in lime-coated pots, but is made to ferment for purposes of unlicensed sale or illicit distillation or mixed with licit toddy in shops to supplement stock.

VOL. II.
CHAP. XII.

The sale of opium and hemp drugs is controlled in the usual way, the right to open shops being sold annually by auction. The shops get their supplies of opium from the taluk cutcherries and hemp drugs from the ganja storehouse, Veta-pálem. There were 19 ganja shops and 6 opium shops in the district during 1935-36.

Opium and
hemp drugs.

The district is at present divided into three preventive circles, under charge of Inspectors with headquarters at Mangalore, Kásaragód and Udipi. Two assistant inspectors, 31 sub-inspectors, 9 clerks and 179 peons form the subordinate staff employed in the district. The average expenditure per annum on account of the preventive force is about Rs. 77,000.

Establish-
ment.

The total abkari revenue of the district in 1934-35 was about Rs. 11 lakhs of which Rs. 3.67 lakhs was derived from arrack, 6.53 lakhs from toddy, Rs. 4,816 from foreign liquor, Rs. 12,100 from opium and Rs. 38,400 from hemp drugs and the rest from miscellaneous sources.

Revenue.

Cashew arrack is a liquor peculiar to South Kanara. It is distilled from the fruit of the cashew tree which grows in wild profusion in Mangalore and Kásaragód taluks of South Kanara and also in other areas of the West Coast districts. It is the traditional drink of the Roman Catholic community in South Kanara and also of some other castes. The consumption is mainly in Mangalore, Kásaragód and Kárcal taluks and though the manufacture of cashew arrack has been prohibited for a very long time it cannot be claimed that any real success has attended the preventive activities of the Excise department. It was impossible to keep this class of offence in check and legalization of its manufacture was recommended in 1891. The question was, however, deferred until some advance had been made towards the introduction of excise, that is, until the obsolescent still-head system under which licences were granted for the manufacture and sale of arrack in particular areas was replaced by the contract distillery system and the matter was dropped. In 1915, the Collector of the district Mr. Couchman, I.C.S., strongly recommended that the distillation of cashew arrack should be legalized. He said: "I am in favour of the experiment being tried. A long succession of different authorities have given it as their opinion that the

Cashew
arrack.

manufacture of cashew arrack will never be suppressed. The attempt to suppress it merely gives rise to a great volume of abkari crime, with all its attendant friction and ill-feeling against Government. Its legalization would add considerably to the cultivation of the tree, and give a value to the fruit, which is at present a waste product and increase the production of the nut, already a valuable article of commerce. It would also remove a longstanding grievance". The Board was inclined to agree to the proposal but experimental distillation at the Government Chowghát distillery was found impossible owing to the difficulty of getting copper during war time.

The Roman Catholic community and some of the Hindu castes also are convinced that cashew arrack has peculiar medicinal properties. It is widely used for women before, at and after child-birth. For these and other reasons it had been for many decades, perhaps centuries, the habitual drink of these communities. The Catholic Association of South Kanara passed a resolution recommending to Government the early issue of a licence for the establishment of a distillery in South Kanara district which in their opinion would be the most effective measure for checking the illicit manufacture of arrack prevailing in the district and would add a new industry utilizing the cashew fruit mostly going to waste, promoting the cultivation of cashew trees on waste lands now yielding no income and providing employment to a large number of persons and thus affording some relief in these days of economic depression and would further provide a new source of revenue by diverting to Government the profits going to illicit distillers of arrack. The Association was against the establishment of the distillery outside South Kanara. In pursuance of these and other representations an experiment was sanctioned by Government under which it was arranged with Messrs. Parry & Co., the contract suppliers for the district, that they should distil as much cashew arrack as they could during the cashew season March to May 1935 in the Chowghat distillery and supply it through their warehouse at Mangalore for sale in the arrack shops of Mangalore town and taluk side by side with molasses arrack. The issue strength of the cashew arrack was prescribed as 30° u.p. and the duty was fixed as Rs. 4-8-10 per gallon of that strength. Under this arrangement a total quantity of 10,917 gallons of 30° u.p. was manufactured by the distillers and made available for sale. The demand for licit cashew arrack was heavy during the early part of April 1935 when it was more or less a novelty, but the demand decreased considerably after that and the extension of the arrangements for the sale of such arrack to certain other taluks of the district produced no appreciable effect on the disposal of the large quantity of cashew arrack in stock. The demand for molasses