



## Mango as a special fruit of India with historical perspective

Dr. Durgesh Kumar Singh

Department of History, Swatantra Girls Degree College, Lucknow University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

### Abstract

From ancient times, Mangoes have been granted a special position in India. The fruit is heavenly in taste and is termed as "Food of the Gods". Indian Mango or *Mangifera Indica* is native to Southern Asia, particularly India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Buddhist monks are believed to have introduced the fruit to Southern East Asia countries like Malaysia and China around 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Persian traders took Mango into the Middle East and Africa, from there to Portuguese brought into the Brazil and West Indies. Mango cultivars arrived in Florida in the 1830's and in the California 1880's. Over the years Mango groves have a spread to many parts of a tropical and sub-tropical world where the climate allows the mango to grow best. There are over 1000 different mango varieties grown throughout the world. Down the ages several qualities got attached to the mango. The Knowledge of vegetative propagation gained in the 16<sup>th</sup> century made it possible to produce a large number of cultivars which were far superior to the wild farms. Today India has the richest collection of Mango Cultivars. India ranks first among world's Mango producing countries accounting for about 50% of the world's Mango production other Mango producing countries include China, Thailand, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Nigeria and Egypt. Though the Mango become a house hold fruit it's wild cousins can still be found in the North Eastern part of India and Myanmar.

**Keywords:** mango, distribution, variety, origin

### Introduction

Mango (*Mangifera Indica* L.) is a member of the plant family. Anacardiaceae (Cashews family or poison ivy family) order Sapindales, Class Mangoliopsida and division Tracheophyta (vascular plants). The species name of the Mango is *Mangifera Indica* which means "An Indian plants bearing Mangoes" The cultivated Mango is probably natural high breed between *Magnifera Indica* and *Magnifera Sylvatica*. There are two classes of cultivars- Indo China and West Indian. The over 1000 known mango cultivars are derived from 2 strains of Mango Seeds – Monoembryonic (Single embryo) and Poly embryonic (Multiple embryo). Monoembryonic hails from the Indian (original) strain of Mango, Polyembryonic from the Indo-Chinese.

### The Origin, history and spread of Mangoes around the world

The history of Mango began thousands of years ago on the Indian sub-continent. The Mango is the national fruit of India, Pakistan and the Philippines. It is also the national tree of Bangladesh. Not only it is one of the most highly prized fruits of South Asia, It is also intimately connected with folklore and legends across many religions. There is consensus among the historians and horticulturists that the cultivated mango has originated in India. Vavilov (1926) has suggested India –Burma region as the centre of origin of mango based on the observed level of genetic diversities. Mukherjee (1951) [13] considered origin of Genus *Mangifera* probably in the South-East Asia. But the origin of cultivated mango in the Assam-Burma region. Scientists of the Birbal Shani Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow, have traced the origin of genus *Mangifera* from 60 million years old fossil compressions of carbonized mango leaves in the Palaeocene sediments near Damalgiri, West Garo Hills, and Meghalaya and named it *Eomangiferop-hyllum damalgiriensis* (Mehrotra *et al.*, 1998). Extensive comparison of the

anatomy and morphology of several modern day species of the genus *Mangifera* with the fossil samples reinforced the view that North-East India is the Centre of origin of mango genus, from where it has spread into neighboring areas of South-East Asia and then slowly to the whole world.

Mangoes have been cultivated in South Asia for thousands of years and reached South East Asia between the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The earliest mention of Mango, *Mangifera Indica*, that means "the great fruit bearer," is in the Hindu scripture dating back to 4000 B.C. The wild mango originated in the foot hills of the Himalayas of India and Burma and about 40 to 60 of these tree still grow in India and South East Asia. Over the years Mango groves have spread too many parts of the tropical and sub-tropical world. As the Mango became cultivated, as early as 2000 B.C., its flavour, size and texture developed. The explores who tasted the mango were enhanced with its qualities and ambrosial flavour and introduced the fruit to other tropical countries. As the mango adapted to new locales, new varieties, evolved and many names were bestowed upon it such as "Apple of the tropics," "King of fruit" and "Fruit of the Gods".

After its domestication in India more than 4000 years ago, traders, travelers and rulers have taken mango for plantation in different subtropical regions of the world over the last 25,000 years. During 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. the Buddhist monks took mango to Malaya Peninsula and East Asia. Mango was first introduced in China from India during middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the Persians carried it to East Africa (Purseglove, 1969) [3]. The 14<sup>th</sup> Century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta reported it at Mogadishu. The Cultivation of mango began slowly moving west ward with the spice trade. The Portuguese who landed in Kolkata 1498, were the first to establish a mango trade. English word Mango originated from Malayalam (Manga) and Tamil (Mangai), the Portuguese introduced grafting on mango

trees to produce extraordinary varieties like – Alphonso. Alphonso is named after De-Albuquerque, a noble man and military expert who helped to establish the Portuguese colony in India. Mangoes continued to curry favour everywhere they were cultivated on their journey westward. The 7<sup>th</sup> century Caliphs of Baghdad enjoyed their mangoes in the form of a complex brew. The travelling mango then hitched a camel ride from Persia and Caravanned to the African continent about the year 1000. The Mangoes were first recorded in Europe by Friar Jordanus in 1328 but Europeans did not fall in love with them as did countries with tropical climates. Although mangoes are the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest food crop today. They still remain women obscure in Europe.

Spanish explorers brought mango to South America and Mexico in the 1600's. The first attempt to introduce the mango into the U.S. came in 1833 to Florida. The Mango had tumultuous history in Florida due primarily to whether minimizing the commercial production of the fruit in the early 1990's. A very small percentage of fresh mangoes available commercially in the U.S. are grown in South Florida and Southern California. During 16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. the Portuguese have taken it to the West Africa and Brazil. After becoming established in Brazil, the mango was carried to the West Indies being first planted in Barbados about 1742 and later in Dominican Republic. It reached Jamaica about 1782 and early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it reached Mexico from Philippines and the West Indies (Morton, 1987) <sup>[4]</sup>. Mango reached Miami in 1862 or 1863 from the West Indies and it is believed seeding was polyembryonic and from "No. 11" parent (Litz, 2009) <sup>[2]</sup>. In same decade, about 40 varieties of Mangoes from India were initially planted in 1875 in North Queensland Australia after post European colonization (Morton, 1987) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### History of Mangoes in India

The Mango has been known to Indian since very early times. Scientific fossil evidence indicates that the Mango made its first appearance even 25 earlier to 30 million years ago in North-East India, Myanmar and Bangladesh from where it travelled down to Southern India. History yields some very interesting facts about this celebrated fruit. Although, Mango has been planted in India since time immemorial, earliest written records are present in ancient Sanskrit Literature of pre-Buddhist era Valmiki, Ramayan, regarded as the earliest epic poetry after the Vedas, which after a long oral tradition was written down around 500 B.C. has several references to Mango plantations.

Similarly Varah Puran (172.39) says that- "One who plants one person, one Banyan, Two Rasala and Sahakara and is written about in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and the Puranas which condemn the felling of Mango. The classical Sanskrit poet Kalidasa sang the praises of Mangoes. On reaching South India, the name translated to Aam-Kaay in Tamil, which gradually become Maamkaay due to differences in pronunciation. The Malayali people further changed this to Maanga. The Portuguese were fascinated by the first on their arrival in Kerala and introduced it to the world as 'Mango'. The words first recorded attestation in a European language was a text by Ludovico di Varthema in Italian in 1510, as 'Mango'. Mango is also mentioned by Hendrik Van Rheede, the Dutch commander of Malabar (Northern Kerala) in his book Hortus Malabaricus, a compendium of the plants of economic and medical value in

the Malabar, published in 1678.

In ancient India, the ruling class used names of Mango varieties to bestow titles on eminent people, like the honour given to the famous courtesan of Vaishali, Amrapali. The Mango tree was also associated with the God of Love "Manmatha" and its blossoms were considered to be the god's arrows by the Hindu Nanda Kings. It was during the Nanda rule that Alexander arrived in India and fought the famous battle with king Porus. When it was time for him to return to Greece, he took with him several varieties of the delicious fruit.

With the rise of Buddhism, Mangoes came to represent faith and prosperity among the religious followers, as there were several legends about the Buddha and Mango trees. Buddhist monks cultivated the fruit and in fact, the Mango is considered to be sacred fruit in the region because it is said that Buddha himself meditated under a Mango tree. And it is also said that the Buddha created a White Mango tree which was later worshiped by his followers. Among Buddhist ruler, Mangoes were exchange as gift and became an important tool of diplomacy. During this period, Buddhist monks took Mangoes with them where ever they went, popularizing the fruit. Mango tree has religious importance among Jainism because the Jain goddess Ambika is traditionally represented as sitting under a Mango tree.

Hsiun – Tsang, one of the early traveler to India (632-645) was the first person to bring Mango to the notice of people outside India. Megasthenes and Hsiun-Tsang the earliest writer-travelers of Ancient India wrote about how the ancient Indian Kings, notably the Mauryas, planted Mango trees along roadsides and highways as a symbol of prosperity. In fact, for a good part of the Mauryan's rule and later when Buddhism thrived, Mango trees were considered as the beacon of knowledge and peace and planting them a necessary act of faith. In fact, apart from the monks, who found Mangoes to be naturally ready food, the Munda tribe and the Dattaray sect by Swami Chakradhar were instrumental in taking this fruit to the masses. This perhaps explains the far reach of Mango tree in India because wherever Buddhism went, mangoes went along. It is said that among the few things that the Alexander took away from king Purus court was Mangoes. In the medieval period, Alauddin Khilji was the first patron of the mango and his feast in Sivama Fort was a real extravaganza with nothing but Mangoes in different forms on the lavish menu. Next came the Mughal Emperors, whose fondness for the Mango is Legendary. The obsessive love for mango was in fact, the only legacy that flowed untouched from one generation to another in the Mughal dynasty. We all know about how Babur, after the victory of battle of Panipat became disillusioned with Indian food and established a courier system that could connect him to Samarkand. And in doing so gave India its vibrant fruit basket.

The first Mughal, Babur was reluctant to face the feared warrior Rana Sanga of Mewar, despite Daulat Khan, Lodhies promises of a good part of his empire and war booty. It is said that Lodhi then introduced Babur to Mango a fruit, he became so fond of that it convinced him not only to face Rana Sanga but to also lay the foundation of his empire in India.

It is said that Babar becomes so fond of this fruit that the Melon Neophile actually decided not only to be a part of the war, but also lay the foundation of the Mughal Empire here.

What of course no one told Babar then Mangoes was a summer fruit and seasonal. Not given to whims (as his successors turned to be), Babar decided to nevertheless stay, cleverly dividing his time among his territory, till never ways of getting his other favourite fruits could be devised. Folklore is that Humayun which on the run from India to Kabul and ahead ensured that Mangoes was in good supply, which thank to Babar's courier system worked, albeit with a few lapses. Incidentally it was not the first time that Mango-which Persian poet Amir Khusro called it 'Naghza Train Mewa Hindustan' (the fairest fruit of Hindustan), would be at the centre of a new kingdom or an alliance. A Few decades later his grandson Aurangzeb had offered Mangoes to Shah Abbas of Persia to support him to his fight for the throne. Later on the King of Balkan too had offered Aurangzeb 200 camel's load of dry fruits and Mangoes as a peace treaty.

Akbar the great [1556-1605] built the vast Lakhi Bagh near Darbanga growing over a hundred thousand (100,000) Mangoes trees. This was one of the earliest example trees. This was one of the earliest example of grafting of Mangoes including 'The Totapuri', 'The Rataul' and the expensive Kesar. Shah Jahan fondness for Mangoes was so deep that he had his own son Aurangzeb, then Wazir of Deccan, punished and house arrested because he had dared to have all the Mangoes himself. It was also Mangoes that Aurangzeb send to Shah Abbas of Persia to support him to his fight for the throne.

In fact, many believe that one of the reason that Shah Jahan liked Tara Sikoh and choose him as his heir. Apparent was because Dara was a seasoned horticulturist and had curreted the 'Nuskha Dar Fanni Falahat', which not only detailed the manner in which all the varieties of Mangoes is the orchard and other places where grafted but also ensured that the gift of Mangoes continued for his generation. The Book is today one of the finest piece of work on the traditional art of grafting. Abul-Fazal's Ain-I-Akbari and Tuzuk-E-Jahangiri are the only other two books that not only had detailed account of the varieties of Mangoes, each segregated but quality, smell, shape aromas but also how each of the Emperor's loved them. After all each Emperor built his own orchard just to ensure he had enough of the fruit and in varieties. Second orchard of grafted Mangoes was grown by emperor Jahangir in Lahore (Pakistan) and the third had the 'Jharna Kutub' village (now known as Samsi Talab Mehrauli) was commissioned by Shah Jahan who considered Mango the vitality fruit.

Mughal patronage to horticulture laid to thousands of Mangoes varieties that were grafted including the famous Totapuri, which was of the first variety to be exported to Persia and other kingdoms. This list should also include the Rataul, grafted by Karee muddin in 1874 and the most expensive of all, Kesar which was first cultivated by nawab of Jhunarhar in 1931. Other came as odes to victories like Chausa that Sher Shah Suri introduced on the eve of his victory in Chausa (Now in Bihar) against Humayun. In fact, the Juiciest Dussehri owes its birth to the Rohilla Chieftains. The Mughal's relished their favorite addiction with Jahangir and Shah jahan awarding their Khans amahs for their unique creations like Aam Panna, Aam ka Lauz and Aam ka meetha pulao, a delicate Mango dessert sold although in the summer Shah Jahanabad. Even Noorjahan the empress was rather fond of Mango drink and used to mix of Mangoes and roses to create her legendary wines.

Jahanara was so fond of the later seasonal dessert that it was in the must list not only in the palace but also the numerous get together that were hosted by the princess at Chandni Chok. Mangoes were also the peace-maker between Jahanara and Aurangzeb. It is said that the otherwise astute Aurangzeb was only malleable which he was having a mango and in the year to come Jahanara often used the sweet summer fruit to convince him for various Alliances and to be lenient to his sons. In fact, Aurangzeb who had given most of the Mughal lavishness his father and grandfather were known for would spend Rs. 1000 (One Thousand) on food, if mangoes were in season. In fact, it was his Aphrodisise when he could not find the comfort of Udaipuri Mahal. The Peshawa of the Maratha's Raghunath Peshwa planted 10 million Mangoes trees as a sign of Maratha supremacy. Folklore has that it was a fruit from these trees that eventually turned into the famous Alphonso, 'The King of Mangoes'.

Mango retained much of its superiority even during Bahdur Shah Zafar's time. He was said to be fond of the fruit that featured prominently in paintings, crockeries, festivals and even in Iftar parties. Bereft of much of grandeur of his ancestors, the last Mughal is said to have found solace among poets and his favourite mangoes. A famous story retained by Galib's memorist Altaf Hussain Hali goes thus- One day Bahadur Shah accompanied by Ghalib and a number of other courtiers, were walking in the Hayat Bakhsh or the Mahtab Garden, a garden that was reserved exclusively for the king and his queens and members of the royal family Ghalib looked at the mangoes repeatedly and with great concentration. When asked, the mango Neophile Wittily replied, 'My Lord and Guide, some ancient poet has written: upon the top of every fruit is written clear and legibly.' 'This is the property of A, the son of B, the son of C'. I am looking to see whether any of these bear my name and those of my father and grandfather.' Zafar smiled and the same day had a big basket of the finest mangoes sent to him thus starting friendship that lasted well into his last days in the palace.

The advent of Europeans eventually affected the Mango, which fell from its position of empire builder to simply a fruit-the British had no use for it in matters of diplomacy. Though it retained its superiority of taste, many varieties disappeared from the scene while several new ones emerged.

Over the ages, the Mango become a household fruit and odes were sung in its praise. Rabindranath Tagore was extremely fond of Mango and has written several poems about the fragrant flowers of Mangoes, including the very famous 'Aamer Majori' Legendary Urdu poet Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib was a Mango aficionado too; he despised people who did not share his addiction for the fruit. Today curvaceous shape of Mangoes, which has long held the fascination of weavers and designers has become an iconic Indian Motif. The Mango is seen as a symbol of good luck and prosperity and in many parts of India. Mango leaves are strong up over the front doors of homes as 'Toran'. It is a belief that the Mango tree has the power to make wishes come true. In Hinduism the perfectly ripe mango is often held by lord Ganesha as a symbol of attainment, regarding the devotee's potential perfection. Mango blossoms are also used to worship of the Goddess Saraswati. No Telgu/Canada New Year's Day called Ugadi passes without heating Ugadi Pachadi made with mango

pieces as one of the ingredients. With mango festival being celebrated in Ahmadabad, Lucknow, Allahabad, Delhi, Goa, Mangoes in India have become a symbol of summer and are no less than a cultural legacy. Noted Mango cultivator Haji Kalimullah has even named a new variety across – breed of Kolkata's Husn-E-Ara and Lucknow's Dussehri, as the "Modi Mango". It is no wonder then that the Mango is rightfully called the "King of Fruits".

### Analysis and Future Strategy

Mango is well adopted to tropical and Sub-Tropical climates. It thrives well in almost all the regions of the country but cannot be grown commercially in areas above 600m. Mango is cultivated in almost all the states of India. In India, about 1500 varieties of Mango are grown including 1000 commercial varieties. Each of the main variety of mango has a unique taste and flavour.

Mango has an established export market and poses bright opportunities for export in the international market whether in fresh or processed form. Similarly the Mango industry has provided livelihood opportunities to its grower's and those involved in its marketing channel. Creation of essential infrastructure for preservation, cold-storage, refrigerated transportation, rapid transit, grading, processing, packaging and quality control are the important aspects which needs more attention. There is need for developing processing industries in Southern region of the country where post-harvest losses in handling and marketing are higher. There is scope to establish Mango preservation factories in cooperative sector. Considerable amount of waste material example- Mango stones, peels, remain unutilized which can be used properly by the processors to earn more profit. This will add to their income through processing and create additional employment and opportunities for the rural people.

### Acknowledgement

The completion of this research paper could not have been possible without the participation and assistant of so many people whose names may not all be enumerated, their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. I am also thankful to my loving family, friends and others who is one way or another shared their support, either morally or financially. Above all thanks to the great almighty the author of knowledge and wisdom for his countless love.

### Conclusion

Mango occupies 22% of the total under fruits comprising of 1.2million hectares, with a total production of 11 million tons. Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, Telangana are having the largest area under Mango each with around 25% of the total area followed by Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Fresh Mangoes and mango pulp are the important items of agri-export from India. India's main export destination for mango are U.S.A and other Middle East countries with a limited quantity being shipped to European Market. Although India is the largest mango producing countries, accounting about 50%-60% of world production, the Export of fresh fruits is limited to Alphonso and Dashari varieties. Indian's share in world mango market is about 15%. Mango accounts 40% of the total fruit exports from the country. There is good scope for increasing the area and productivity of Mango in the country.

### References

1. Article titled 'Origin, diversity and Genome sequence of mango (*Mangifera India* L), published in Indian journal of history of science, 12 Feb 2016.'
2. Litz RE. The Mango: Botany, production and uses, CABI, U.S.A, 2009, 10.
3. Purseglobe JW. some aspects of Mango culture in the western tropics. Prose – Inter. Symp. on Mango and Mango culture, I.A.R.I New Delhi, 1969.
4. Mortan J. Mango In. Fruits of warm climates, Julia F. Morton, Miami, 1987.
5. Hooker JD. The Flora of British India, state for India and council, L Reeve, London, 1876.
6. Karihaloo JL, Dwivedi YK, Archak S, Baldev GaiKWad A. Analysis of Indian Mango cultivars using RAPD markers, The Journal of Horticultural Science and Biotechnology, 2003, 78.
7. Kostermans AJGH, Bompard JM. The Mangoes : Their Botany, Nomenclature, Horticulture and Utilization, Academic Press, London, U.K, 1993.
8. Mukharjee SK. The Mango – its botany, cultivation, used and future improvement, especially as observed in India, Economic Botany, 1953, 7.
9. Mukherjee SK. Origin of Mango (*Mangifera India*), Economic Botany, 1972, 26.
10. Renugadevi R. Environmental ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India, African Journal of History and culture, 2012, 4.
11. Reiger M. Distance Education versus classroom Instruction in Horticulture-An Introduction to Fruit crops-case study, course of Horticulture University of Georgia, 2001.
12. Woodrow GM, The Mango: Its culture and varieties, Paisley; Alexander Gardner, Kolkata, 1904.
13. Mukherjee SK. Origin of Mango, Indian Journal of Genetics and Plant Breeding, 1951, 11.
14. Vavilov NI. Centres of origin of cultivated plants, Bulletin of Applied Botany of Genetics and Plant-Breeding. 1926; 16:1-248.
15. Sanchari Pal. Food for Thought: Unpeeling the Mango's Interesting History in India [www.thebetterindia.com](http://www.thebetterindia.com)
16. History and origin of Mango, 2009. Mango – trees. [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com)
17. Donhue Tony. Mango, 2009. History, [www.themango.com](http://www.themango.com)
18. Padmnabham Chitr. King of Fruits – History of Mango, [www.pitara.com](http://www.pitara.com)
19. Mango History and Production-National Mango Board, [www.mango.org](http://www.mango.org).
20. Samson, JA. Tropical Fruits, Longman, Scientific and Technical, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1986.
21. Gangolly SR *et al.* The Mango, 1957, India council of Agriculture Research, New Delhi.
22. Naik KC, Gangolly SR. Monograph of classification and Nomenclature of South Indian Mangoes, Supt. of Government Press, 1950.
23. Mango – National Horticulture Board, [nhb.gov.in](http://nhb.gov.in)
24. Australian Mangoes, [mangoes.net.gov.au](http://mangoes.net.gov.au)
25. Dash Madhulika. A Complete History of Mango – From the times of Mauryas to Mughals, 2016. <https://swarajyamag.com>