

Role of the Portuguese in Introducing Plants to Sri Lanka

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With their expansion of colonial activities since the 15th century, the Portuguese and other colonial powers played a part in the dispersal of plants and animals primarily among countries they interacted with and secondarily other countries associated with those. This is a part of the biological component in the concept known to historians as the 'Columbian Exchange'. The Portuguese are responsible for the introduction of a significant number of plants to countries like Sri Lanka, while at the same time being responsible for introducing plants native to us to other countries. Eventually these introductions caused a considerable change of the agriculture and economy of the recipient countries and altered the plants associated with the lives of natives.

This study is focused on the plants which were introduced by the Portuguese during their occupation of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka. These plants had an economical and agricultural importance or a food value as vegetables or fruits. This paper categorizes the introduced plants scientifically mainly based on their origin or secondary origin and linguistic evidence.

The changes caused in agriculture, economy and lives of people of Sri Lanka due to these introductions after the last five hundred year period is also briefly analyzed.

Key Words: Colonial activities; Biological component; Portuguese; Agriculture; Economy