



Journey of Spices in India

For Prelims: Journey of Spices in India, [Indus Valley Civilization](#), [British East India Company](#), [International Organization for Standardization \(ISO\)](#).

For Mains: Raisina Dialogue, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Source: TDG

Why in News?

The history of spices in India reflects a fascinating journey of cultural exchange, economic prosperity, and the integration of Indian flavours into the global culinary landscape.



What is the History of Indian Spices?

▪ Ancient Origins:

- The use of spices in India can be traced back to ancient times, with evidence dating as far back as the [Indus Valley Civilization](#).
- Spices were used for culinary and medicinal purposes even in these early civilizations.

▪ Trade Routes:

- India's strategic location on ancient trade routes, including the [Silk Road](#), facilitated the exchange of spices with other civilizations.
- Spices like black pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon were highly **sought after, contributing to India's economic prosperity.**

▪ Ayurvedic Influence:

- Spices have been integral to **traditional Indian medicine, Ayurveda**, for centuries. Many spices were believed to **possess medicinal properties** and were used to treat various ailments.

▪ Arab and Persian Influence:

- During the mediaeval period, Arab and Persian traders played a crucial role in further disseminating Indian spices to the West.
- The spice trade flourished, and **spices became luxury commodities in Europe.**

▪ European Spice Trade:

- In the **15th century, European powers**, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch, and later the British, sought direct access to India's spice-producing regions.
- This led to the exploration and establishment of maritime trade routes, contributing to the **Age of Exploration.**

▪ Colonial Control:

- **European colonial powers** aimed to control the spice trade, leading to the establishment of trading posts and colonies in India. Competition for dominance in spice-producing regions, especially in Kerala, was fierce among the Portuguese, Dutch, and British.

▪ Monopoly of the British East India Company:

- The [British East India Company](#) played a significant role in monopolising the spice trade during the colonial period.
- They controlled spice production, distribution, and trade routes, impacting the livelihoods of local spice farmers.

▪ Spice Plantations:

- The British introduced large-scale **spice plantations in India**, particularly in regions like Kerala and Karnataka, focusing on spices like black pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon for export.

▪ Post-Independence Revival:

- After gaining independence in 1947, India continued to be a **major player in the global spice market.** Government policies supported spice cultivation, and India remained a significant exporter of various spices.

▪ Diverse Spice Production:

- Today, India is known for producing a wide variety of spices due to its diverse climate and geography. Spices like black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, turmeric, cumin, and coriander are cultivated in different regions of the country.

▪ Global Influence:

- Indian spices have not only shaped the country's culinary traditions but have also left a significant impact on global cuisine. The use of Indian spices is widespread in international

cooking, **contributing to the globalization of culinary practices.**

What is the Scenario of the Indian Spice Market?

▪ Production:

- India is the **world's largest spice producer**. It is also the largest consumer and exporter of spices.
- The production of different spices has been growing rapidly over the last few years.
- Production in **2021-22 stood at 10.87 million tonnes**. During 2022-23, the export of spices from India stood at USD 3.73 billion from USD 3.46 billion in 2021-22.
 - During **2021-22, the single largest spice exported from India was chilli** followed by spice oils and oleoresins, mint products, cumin, and turmeric.

▪ Exports:

- India is the largest exporter of spice and spice items. During 2022-23, the country exported spices worth USD 3.73 billion.
- India exported 1.53 million tonnes of spices. From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the total **export quantity from India grew at a CAGR of 10.47%**.

▪ Varieties:

- India produces about **75 of the 109 varieties** which are listed by the [International Organization for Standardization \(ISO\)](#).
- The most **produced and exported spices are** pepper, cardamom, chilli, ginger, turmeric, coriander, cumin, celery, fennel, fenugreek, garlic, nutmeg & mace, curry powder, spice oils and oleoresins. Out of these spices, **chilli, cumin, turmeric, ginger and coriander make up about 76% of the total production**.
 - The largest spice-producing states in India are Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Assam, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

What are the Government Initiatives to Promote Spices?

▪ Export Development and Promotion of Spices:

- This initiative by the [Spices Board of India](#) aims to support the exporter to adopt high-tech processing technologies and upgrade the existing level of technology for the development of industry and to meet the changing food safety standards of the importing countries.
- The **Spices Board of India** is set up for the development and global promotion of Indian spices.
 - It acts as a **link between Indian exporters and importers abroad**. The main activities of the board involve promotion, maintenance and monitoring of quality, financial and material support to growers, infrastructure facilitation and research.

▪ Spices Parks:

- Spices Board has **launched eight crop-specific Spices Parks** in key production/market centres intending to facilitate the farmers to get an improved price realisation and wider reach for their produce.
- The purpose of the park is to have an integrated operation for cultivation, post-harvesting, processing, value-addition, packaging and storage of spices and spice products.

▪ Spice Complex Sikkim:

- The Spices Board submitted a project proposal to the state's cell for setting up a **Spice Complex in Sikkim** seeking financial assistance for facilitating and demonstrating common processing and value addition in spices to help farmers and other stakeholders in

the state.

▪ **Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH):**

- The CCSCH is a subsidiary body of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which is a joint initiative of the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **World Health Organization (WHO)**.
 - The **Codex Alimentarius Commission** is responsible for setting international food standards to ensure the safety, quality, and fairness of food trade. **India is its member since 1964.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. The staple commodities of export by the English East India Company from Bengal in the middle of the 18th century were: (2018)

- (a) Raw cotton, oil-seeds and opium
- (b) Sugar, salt, zinc and lead
- (c) Copper, silver, gold, spices and tea
- (d) Cotton, silk, saltpetre and opium

Ans: (d)

Q. In making the saffron spice, which one of the following parts of the plant is used? (2009)

- (a) Leaf
- (b) Petal
- (c) Sepal
- (d) Stigma

Ans: (d)

- Saffron is one of the most expensive spices in the world. It is made from the stigma of the flower Saffron crocus.
- Female reproductive part of a flower, pistel, consists of ovary, style, and stigma. Stigma is the part that gets pollen from the pollinating agents.
- **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer**