

## Indian Clove Story : Chronicle of the Simpsons

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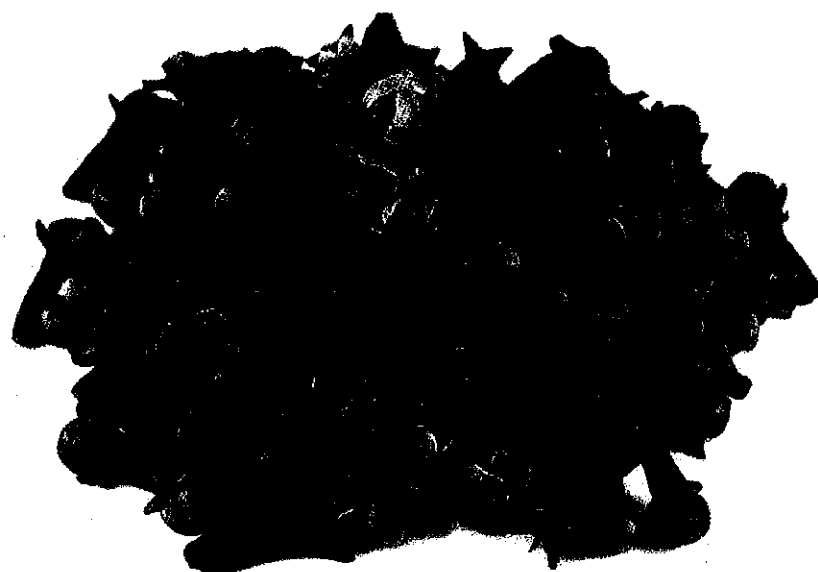
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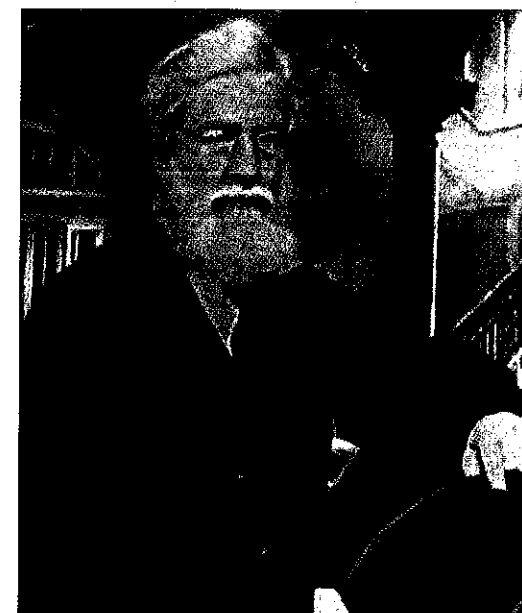


**A**t an elevation of 3500 ft above MSL, resides the Black Rock estate which harbors clove plantations in Ashambo hills (Kanyakumari district), the southernmost tip of Western ghats. The Black Rock estate unfurls the history not only on clove but also on the centenary life pedigree of Simpsons. It was in 1862 A.D., Rev. John Cox, who came to India to work as Missionary in Travancore, established the Black Rock estate. In memory of the missionary work carried out by Reverend John Cox, an institute at Thiruvananthapuram was named after him- Reverend John Cox Memorial CSI Institute of Technology. After the demise of his wife, he married a Hindu

girl who later got christened as Anna Amie Cox who gave birth to nine children. The eldest among them is the mother of Mr. Charles Harold Simpson during whose period, clove flourished in Black rock estate.

Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*), belongs to the family Myrtaceae, is a tall evergreen tree growing to about 20m in height. It is a native to Moluccas. Clove used for commercial purposes is the dried, unopened flower buds. The major clove growing regions of India are Kanyakumari, Nilgiris, Dindigal, Madurai, Shevroy hills and Kolli hills of Tamil Nadu, Kozhikode, Waynad, Kottayam, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram districts of

Kerala and South Kanara of Karnataka. Clove requires humid climate and grows upto 1000 m above MSL. A rainfall of 1500-2000 mm and a mean temperature of 25-30°C are required. Deep red loam, sandy soil, black soil and deep gravelly sub soil are suitable for clove plantation.



Reverend John Cox

Clove flowers are bisexual. The flower bud is 1-2 cm long and has a cylindrical thick ovary consisting of four fleshy sepals. The male phase starts along with the opening of flowers. The stamens shed after two days. The female phase starts before the male phase is over. The fruit is one seeded drupe, popularly known as mother clove which contains one oblong seed of about 1.5 cm length. Flower buds are usually harvested when they turn pink in colour. The harvesting season of clove is during the months of February to March. Harvesting is done using step ladder and care must be taken not to break branches.

Mr. C.H. Simpson in his booklet on clove-growing strictly advocates that no pickers should climb on trees to harvest clove buds and that the branches should not be bent downwards. Down in the memory lane, Mr. Arthur Simpson, son of Mr. C.H. Simpson, recalls how his father

and grandfather used to strictly inspect clove harvesting. They say picking is a specialized job and pickers have to be trained and very closely supervised, as otherwise, not only will they pick immature buds but also break branches and twigs and seriously impair the bearing capacity of the tree. Harvesting at correct maturity determines the quality of the crop as immature cloves will give a black product. Nowadays, harvesting of clove buds has become cumbersome due to high labour wages.

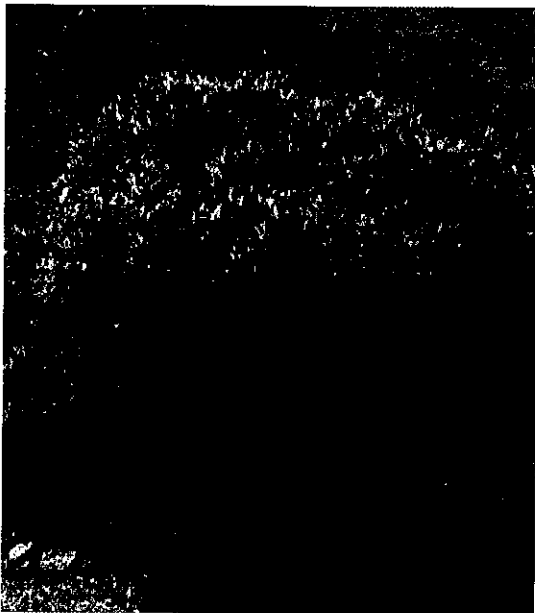
Generally, the alternate bearing is common in clove even though regular bearers with moderate yield are also observed. Some clove growers lament that the peak yield is obtained in the gap of four year period; wherein the hike in yield is observed during the fourth year and thereafter the yield gradually diminishes. By resorting to application of organic manures, regular bearing habit is observed in some plantations.



Mr. C.H. Simpson

The harvested flower buds are separated from clusters by hand and spread in the drying yard for drying. Normally, it takes 4-5 days for drying and well dried cloves will be only one third of the original weight. Well dried clove

will not bend or break when pressed. Breaking is an indication of over drying. On an average, 3-4 kg of dried buds can be harvested from 15-20 year old clove trees and 15-20 kg from 75 year old trees. The stalk of the buds might be dried separately as they fetch a fair price and is utilized in the extraction of clove stem oil. Clove buds on distillation yields 19% bud oil, 3.5 to 4% leaf oil and 4% stem oil.



■ *Dwarf clove*

Clove in Black Rock estate have originated from a few seedlings introduced from Mauritius. Lured by the heavy crop of seven 50 year old clove trees (planted by his great grandfather, Rev. John Cox), Mr. C.H. Simpson after return from service in World war 1, in 1920, took planting up of clove in Black Rock estate at varying elevations on experimental basis. With his experience in clove growing for more than half a century, not only could he establish clove trees at Black Rock estate (250 trees per acre) but also could select trees with significant characters like high yield and earliness.

In contrary to the regular tall and symmetrical nature of clove, dwarf and bushy clove (2 m tall with a canopy width of 5 m and profuse

branches) are also seen. Their leaves are arranged in a cluster and are longer, broader and thicker, compared to ordinary clove and the fruits are reddish brown and smaller than the normal type.



■ *Stem borer affected Clove tree*

Stem borer infesting the bark is the major menace in clove plantations where in severe cases, the infested trees have the tendency to break and fall during heavy wind. The attack of wild animals like elephants and sambar deer also poses threat to clove plantations.

Time and era has changed and Mr. C.H. Simpson now resides only in memories. The Black Rock estate which once upon a time beamed with pride and glory has been disintegrated into 40 different plantations. For the welfare of the clove growers, Blackrock Traditional Clove Growers Group has been formed under PKVY scheme with its office at Nagercoil, Mr. Arthur Simpson as President and Mr. P. Lalaji as Secretary. Even after battling with Ockhi cyclone, each and every clove tree survives in the beautifully terraced Black Rock estate, spreading sweet clove aroma and fulfilling the Simpson's dreams.

