Coffee: The Pride of Ticos

12/08/2018



At the end of the 18th century, coffee came to Costa Rica for the first time. It was also the first Central American country to develop this important crop. In those remote times, our country had subsistence agriculture, but with the arrival of coffee in these lands, the way of thinking of the Costa Ricans began to change.

The richness of Costa Rica lies in the cultural diversity of its people: coffee is a culture in itself with a tradition built day by day, with a gained value for the people who are dedicated to its cultivation.

Costa Rican coffee is the main engine of development for the national economy. It was from almost the birth of the country as an independent nation, that coffee cultivation in the mid-nineteenth century had social and cultural consequences.

Coffee has been very important for our country, which is why it has lent its identity to create symbols and stereotypes that are of great emblematic importance for Costa Ricans.

By the time of independence, in 1821 Costa Rica was the poorest and most backward population of the Spanish colonial empire. However, by the year 1830, the country showed progress and economic recovery due to the abundant profits

from coffee exported to England. In this way, coffee was positioned as the first and only export product of the country at that time.

Today the coffee themes are one of the most represented motifs in the arts, crafts, folklore and popular culture of the Ticos.

Coffee for Costa Rica became a civilizing agent, the “grain of gold” for the prosperity that was obtained from it; it became a great economic and social advance that was strengthened with the process of idealization and construction of national identity.

And this is how it deserved the title of “grain of gold” since the profits that were obtained from it allowed the development of banking, the road that connects San Jose and Puntarenas, the construction of railways to the Pacific and the Atlantic, the emergence of hospital services and education among other advances.

Over time, a class of medium and small peasant farmers was formed in the territory of the central valley, occupying large areas for the cultivation of coffee, thus forming a social and political elite enriched by the cultivation of coffee. This oligarchy marked the political destinies of Costa Rica for many years.

The government introduced policies that were achieved in the coffee industry, including the granting of land for coffee plantings and the delivery of coffee plants to farmers interested in producing coffee.

In the 19th century, coffee was the main part of banknotes and coins in Costa Rica; in fact, its image is present in the national coat of arms. The folkloric literature captured the genotype of the peasant of the central valley with his jovial air, simple good-natured and somewhat naive.

National art and architecture had coffee as its main impulse. The National Theater of Costa Rica built in 1897 was mainly financed with taxes from the sale of coffee. It is considered a jewel and historical heritage of the nation, the decorations and works of art present in this building are allusive to this bonanza obtained by the magnificent export of grain.

Coffee arrived to make a myth-symbol of a successful past and the promise of an assured future. This is how the idea arises that in Costa Rica “the best coffee in the world” is produced

Stereotypes of Coffee in Costa Rica

The carts are an interpretative art; they are intimately linked to coffee, within the coffee culture in Costa Rica, and have a tradition that dates back more than three centuries.

Being a resource through which the past is idealized, coffee continues to be manifest in new forms of expression such as the cultivation of organic coffee, “ecological and in harmony with the environment”

The production of Gourmet coffee, the coffee tours that attract foreign tourists, the most diverse handicrafts associated with the cultivation of coffee: the coffee pot and the tin cup, the painted cart and its yokes of oxen loaded with coffee beans, the little houses of Abobe, the peasant woman with her colored petticoat, the baskets to collect the grain, the handkerchief, the machete and the peasant.

At present, although it is no longer the only export product that the country has, coffee remains positioned among the most valuable products of Costa Rica and is recognized worldwide for its high quality.