

Flower Trade in Madras.

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When my friend and General Secretary of the Union, Mr. B. Viswanath, requested me to read a paper before this Conference I readily accepted it as a call to duty. But, it was rather difficult for me to select a subject, for, the time allotted for the paper was only 15 minutes and a person like me who has been spending his time almost in retirement and has not been in touch with Research workers and District officers might not be able, I was afraid, to furnish useful information to an up-to-date audience like the one assembled here to-day. However I made up my mind to write something about the "Flower Trade in Madras" with the idea of awakening and stimulating the interest of such successful students as, at the close of their career in this College, wish to launch into practical farming.

At present owing to the financial stringency and the consequent retrenchment in all lines of service, several of the successful students find it difficult to secure Government service, and much less, employment under private land-owners. Several of our young men think that farming as an occupation is mere drudgery and an unprofitable one. To make them realize that farming is an enjoyable and profitable occupation, application of commercial ideas in agriculture is necessary to keep abreast with the changing conditions. At present in other countries there is a widespread and intelligent movement towards more diversified and intensive farming. By adopting this method, farming can be made to pay better, because it aims at greater profits on each acre cultivated and at meeting special market requirements. The one great point in commercial farming is to produce such articles as will pay best. In several places there is a steadily increasing demand for certain products that can be easily raised and cultivation of flowers is one of them. Hence it is my humble opinion that a study of the flower trade in important places like Madras may tend to awaken the interest of at least some of our members and it is with this object I chose this subject for to-day.

The flower trade in Madras is in the hands of a particular caste people known as "Shatannies"—followers of Chaitanya, a reformer of the 15th century. They are all Vaishnavites and their avocation is the selling of flowers. They trade also in scented roots and leaves as well.

The chief flowers and scented roots and leaves sold in the Madras market can be classed under two heads viz, (1) those that are available throughout the year and (2) those that are available in particular seasons only.

Rose, Kasturipattai (*Nerium odorum* or the Sweet scented oleander, Dhavanam (*Artemisia Abrotanum*), Maruvam (*Marjorum*), Thiruthulai (*Ocinum sanctum*), Kuruver—roots of *Plectranthus*, come under the first group. Under the second group rank the Chrysanthemums of sorts, different species of Jasmine, *Virutchi* (*Ixora* sp.): Kattumalligai used by Muhammadans, Kathirpatchai (*Pogostemon Patchouli*) Nila Sampangi (*Polyanthes tuberosa*), Kodi Sampangi (*Pergularia minor*) Nagalingam (*Couroupita guianensis*) Manoranjitham (*Artabotrys odoratissimus*), Thalamboo (*Pandanus odoratissimus*).

The above are not only grown to some extent in and around Madras, but are also imported from several distant places through Railways (M. S. M. Ry., S. I. Ry., and East Coast.)

Let me first mention the localities from which the flowers classed in the first group come for sale.

(a) *Roses*. These come from Avadi, Ponneri, Nallayanayudupalayam, Gummedipundi, Poonamalle, Guindy, Kaladipettai and Thandyarpet. Margali to Masi (i.e. December to February) is the main season for this flower. About 8000 flowers a day come to the market in these months. In other months only 25% of that produced in the main season comes to the market for sale. During the season the price of a hundred flowers ranges between 6 annas and 12 annas. In other months it may vary from 8 annas to one Rupee.

(b) *Kasturipattai* (*Sweet-scented Oleander*). In addition to the quantity produced locally, quite a large quantity is brought by rail from villages round Valathur, Gudiyatham, Chittoor, Trichinopoly,

Srirangam, and some stations in Erode—Trichinopoly line. Daily between 4 and 5 bundles, each bundle containing 20 thousand flowers, come by railway. This is sold in the Madras Kothaval bazaar. The price ranges between 6 pies and 10 annas per 1000 flowers according to the demand.

(c) *Dhavanam* (*Artemisia Abrotanum*) and *Maruvam* (*Marjorum*). In and round Madras these are grown in Kaladipettai, Thondayarpet and in Triplicane, but in these places the production is limited to four months in the year *viz.*, Margali to Panguni (December to March).

By railway these come into Madras all throughout the year from Virinjipuram, Jolarpet and Chittoor. About one hundred basketfuls of each are sold daily. A basket contains from 80 to 100 bundles of leaves of 2½ pallams each. The price of a basket varies from Rupee one to Rs. 2—8—0.

(d) *Thiruthalai* (*Ocimum sanctum*). This is grown locally in places like Washermanpet, Tondiarpet and Kaladipettai. This is used only for pooja in temples and for making garlands. Five basketfuls of leaves each containing about half a Madras maund are sold daily. A basket sells from 8 annas to Re. one.

(e) *Karuvur* (*Plectranthus* sp.). Locally this is grown in Tondyarpet, Kaladipet and Kasimedu. By train this arrives from Papanasam and Kumbakonam also. The roots of this plant which have grown to a length of 1½ to 2 feet are dug out with tufts and are packed in baskets after cutting away at the base of the plant. Six basketfuls of roots, each basket containing one hundred tufts or tussocks are sold daily. The price of a basketful varies from 12 annas to Rs. 1—8—0.

(a) *Chrysanthemum*—*Samanthi* (Tamil). This flower is available in the market in all months of the year except the four months (Panguni to Ani—March to June). Apart from local production, the following three important tracts also supply this flower. During the months of Adi to Puratasi (July to September) the supply is obtained from Malur near Bangalore. The flowers from this tract are the biggest in size, about 8000 flowers weighing one Ry.,

maund. White coloured, yellow coloured and pink coloured flowers are received from the above place, white no doubt predominating. About 35 to 40 bundles each containing 10 to 12 thousand flowers, come daily. The price of a thousand flowers ranges from 6 annas to Rs. 3. At this part of the year as there is a large demand, higher prices are generally realised.

During Puratasi to Karthigai—September to November—the produce from Jolarpet, Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Chittoor, Valur, Katpadi, Lutteri, and Gudiyatham floods the Madras Market. These flowers are yellow and white in colour and are much smaller in size than the Madras supply. Sixteen thousand flowers generally weigh a maund. About 50 bundles each containing 16 to 20 thousand flowers are received daily. The price at this part range between 2 to 8 annas per 1000 flowers. During Margali to Thai (November to January) the supply is received from villages near Dindigul, Kodai-kanal Road, Srirangam, Karur &c. These flowers are of yellow colour only and are the smallest in size. Twenty thousand flowers usually weigh a Railway maund, 50 to 60 bundles each containing 20 to 25 thousand flowers are received daily. As there is a great demand for flowers at this part of the year and as other flowers are not to be had in abundance at this period better prices are usually realised. The price ranges between 8 as. and Rs. 1—8—0 per thousand flowers.

(b) *Jasmines of sorts.* Malligai, Mullai, Gundu malligai, Iruvatchi, Jaji etc. The same go under different names in other places.

All the above sorts are available only between Panguni and Vaikasi (March to May) in abundance and in smaller quantities from Ani to the end of Avani (July to September). During the main seasons (i. e., between March and May) 1500 Madras measures of flowers will come into the market daily. In other months only 33% of the above will be coming.

These come from a radius of 10 to 15 miles from Madras, the chief place being, Cowle bazaar near Pallavaram, Poonamalli, Nandampakam, and Kattupakam near Poonamalli, Kodampakam,

Puliyur &c. near Madras. A Madras measure of this flower weighs about 24 tolas. The price of such a Madras measure varies from one anna to Rs. 2 according to demand. (This year the price on a particular day in July was Rs. 4 per M. M.)

There are two chief bazaars in Madras which go by the name of "Koodams" one located in Triplicane and the other near Mint Buildings. The Triplicane bazaar draws nearly two thirds of the total supply, while the Mint Building bazaar takes in all the rest.

A peculiar system prevails in selling. Producers bring their flowers and measure out in one of the above bazaars where they are customers. A note is made about the quantity brought by each customer against his name in the account book together with the rate settled for that day by the proprietor of the Koodam and accounts are closed weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. The producer does not at all fix the price. After the supply is received from all the customers the proprietor of the Koodam fixes the daily rate of a Madras Measure according to the demand and supply and charges a commission of one anna in the Rupee. If any money is required by any producer over and above the value of the quantity supplied by each, advances are made by the proprietor of the bazaar charging 12% interest and executing an agreement at the same time that he will regularly supply his produce to that particular bazaar.

(c) *Kattu Malligai* (*Jasminum angustifolium*). During the months of Karthigai, Margali and Thai (November to January) when it is not possible to procure other Jasmine varieties this comes to the market. The Muhammadans are the usual purchasers. About 100 bundles each containing one m. m. come daily to the market. The price ranges from one anna to Rs. 1-8-0 per m. m. This is sold only in Triplicane bazaar as it is a Muhammadan centre.

(d) *Thalambu*—*Pandanus odoratissimus*. There are two main varieties the yellow and white coloured flowers. Each of these again is subdivided into thorny and thornless. The latter is believed to be an introduced variety. The yellow flowers usually command better price as they are more fragrant. From Avani to Masi (January to February) this flower is available in the market. Chittoor

Tirupathur, Nagari, Puthur and Pundi are the chief centres from which this flower comes. About 100 to 120 basketfuls each containing 100 flowers are sold daily. The price of a basket ranges from Rs. 1—8—0 to Rs. 3 per 100 flowers.

(e) *Virutchi—Ixora*. This is grown locally in Mylapore and Kusapet and is also received from Koyambadi near Arumbakam and also from Poonamalli. This flower is available in the market during 10 months in the year. In December and January this is scarce in the market. Daily 3 to 4 basketfuls come to the market each basket fetching not less than Re. one.

(f) *Kadirpachai (Pogostemon Patchouli)*. This is grown locally and is also received from Conjeevaram side. Four basketfuls of leaves are received daily during November, December and January and is sold like Thiruthulai.

The other flowers named in group (2) are brought in small quantities and as such the details about them are not worth noting.

Gentlemen, you may now ask me a question as to in what way the above information interests our members?

An amateur who wants to start life in practical farming cannot do better than go in for flower farming. Market advantages in big towns and cities are too important to be disregarded. A keen demand for all kinds of flowers not only in cities but even in small places ensures large profits. Several temples require these flowers and some flowers like Jasmine varieties have long been known and have been recommended by Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and Muhammadan writers. Most of the flowers are highly esteemed on account of their fragrance and some particular flowers are used in the worship of special deities and are used as votings and hence held very sacred. Jasmine particularly is supposed to form one of the darts of Kama Deva—the Hindu God of Love. There is therefore much to be said in favour of flower farming and its demand. It is an excellent system of producing a monthly cash income and may be managed so as to yield a higher rate of profit than ordinary farming. Flower Farming is as simple as anything else and may be pursued with

pleasure and profit. Flower farming has been actually demonstrated by the many who have succeeded in making it pay as a very lucrative concern. Half an acre each under Roses and Chrysanthemums alone near big towns will yield 5 to 10 times more than any of the paying farm crops. With regard to over-production there need be no fear, as perfumes could easily be made, and there is a great demand for perfumes in most households.

Too much cannot be said about the opportunity for profit in growing flowers and I know of no better way of getting the amateurs, who want to launch into farming as a profession, interested in such matters than that of bringing to their notice the above narrated facts.

Discussion :—

Mr. C. Tadulinga Mudaliar—supplemented information regarding the Scientific names of many of the flowering or scented plants mentioned by Rao Bahadur J. Chelvaranga Raju.

Rao Sahib M. R. Ramaswami Sivan—complimented Mr. Raju on the very interesting and detailed information which he was able to obtain from traders in Madras and the thoroughness with which he had dealt with the subject. He agreed with Mr. Raju that Flower Farming was one of those interesting side-lines of Agricultural work which deserved attention at the hands of the novice.

Mr. T. V. Rajagopalacharya—remarked that from personal experience he could endorse the statements made by Mr. Raju as to the lucrative nature of Flower farming. He said he knew the case of a garden near Coimbatore, where land was leased out at the rate of Rs. 100 per acre. In order to make the best of flower production it was necessary that one should closely study the question of demand and supply of the locality concerned and also the nature of the seasonal demands.

Mr. Govinda Kidavu—cited the case of the Christian cultivators in Mangalore and Udipi where the women of the family were able to earn about Rs. 500 per year from a small plot measuring only about 5 cents.

Mr. Tirumuruganatham Pillai—suggested the manufacture of Attar and other scents as one of the side lines of flower farming whereby the effect of a glutted market may be remedied.

Mr. C. V. Venkataramana Ayyangar, M. L. C.—stated that one of the Muhammadan flower sellers of Coimbatore owned an extensive flower garden near the town and that it was a really profitable proposition.

Mr. J. C. Raju—in replying said that he had experimented with the manufacture of "attar" and that it was one of the side-lines by which an extra profit could be obtained. As to competition, he was of opinion, that there was enough scope for the expansion of the Flower Industry and there was not likely to be any difficulty owing to over-production.

Brief Thoughts.

They use the whip (the horse complains).

Who lack the sense to use the reins.

You cannot travel far on a lame excuse.

The "Do It Now" motto is very good if its advice is taken, but reading it everywhere or framing it above one's desk, does not absorb its virtue. It is a habit to be formed.

The courage to take hold when all looks promising may be largely hope and enthusiasm. The holding on when the prospect has grown dark and the way hard is something far braver and stronger.

We "try to do our best," we say, but so long as it is only *duty* it is likely to be a hard and wearing service. Only *love* can fill the measure to overflowing and turn it into a sweet privilege.

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