

Introduction of sugarcane varieties in the Presidency.

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Introduction. Sugarcane is one of the important 'cash' crops, grown on a fairly extensive scale, in some of the districts of the Presidency. The crop received attention, even in the early years of the Agricultural Department, when it was under the control of the Board of Revenue. During the years 1895 to 1897, the area under this crop in the Godavari district, declined, due to the ravage of "Red-rot" (*Colletotrichum falcatum*). It was in 1898, that an Economic Botanist, the late Dr. Barber, was appointed to investigate the disease and overcome it, if possible. In 1901, a small extent of land was leased in the Godavari district, to grow different canes and select therefrom the resistant types. It was felt that this was the most practical method to deal with the situation. This resulted in the establishment of Agricultural Research Station, Samalkot, which was opened in 1902, for this purpose. This crop, as the facts indicate, received attention, even long before the Department became an independent one, as it did in 1906, the year in which a whole time Director of Agriculture was appointed.

Government enterprise. The introduction of varieties from foreign countries, took place, long before the appointment of the Economic Botanist. The available records indicate, that the throwing open of the English market in 1835, was the first occasion when attention was paid to this crop. The credit goes to Dr. Robert Wright, who was then the Secretary of the Agri-Horticultural Society, Madras. He was the first person to take initiative in the matter, by addressing a letter in November 1836, to the Government of Madras, indicating the possibilities of improving the crop, with the object of manufacturing sugar and exporting the commodity to the English market. Acting on the advice of Dr. Wright, the local Government, requested the Government of Mauritius, in December 1836, to send a consignment of a few cuttings of sugarcane cultivated in that island. It took two years, for the request to be complied with and the consignment arrived in 1838 – over hundred years ago.

The entire consignment was placed in charge of Dr. Wright and, further, a subsidy was given by the local Government to meet the cost of multiplication and distribution of setts to different parts of the Presidency. The distribution was, in 1839, to the Collectors of each district for trial. In 1840, it is stated that demand for seed material was so heavy that the Society was not able to meet them. The local Government, till 1850, continued to support the scheme for distribution of seed material and even offered to remit assessment on lands, utilised for the multiplication of seed material. It was these canes, from Mauritius, that first solved the disease problem in the Godavari district. Some of these are still in cultivation both in our Presidency and in the adjoining Bombay Presidency.

Private enterprise. In addition to these steps, taken by the local Government, certain varieties from foreign countries were also introduced through private enterprise, as indicated below :—

(a) In 1844, sugar factories were established at Aska (Ganjam District), Chittiyalsa (Vizagapatam District) and near Rajahmundry (Godavari District) by some enterprising European businessmen. They had some share in the introduction of varieties from foreign countries, presumably, with the idea of getting better varieties of cane for their factories.

(b) Some foreign varieties, much in favour with the ryots of the Bombay Presidency, were also imported, by ryots of the bordering districts of South Kanara and Bellary.

(c) The indentured labour coolies, returning from foreign countries such as British Guiana, West Indies, South Africa, Natal, etc., were also responsible, to a certain extent, in the introduction of varieties.

Other varieties. Besides Mauritius, varieties were imported from Barbados, Demarara, Queensland, Fiji and Java. They have become so common with the ryots now, that their original names have been replaced by names in local Indian languages. The following instances will bear ruth of this statement :—

(i) *Hathakabbu* of Bellary District, *Tella cheruku* of Chittoor District, *Poovan* of Coimbatore District, *Keli* of Godavari District and *Palabontha* of Vizagapatam District are the names given in different localities, for one and the same foreign variety.

(ii) *Natalam*, *Patta Karumbu*, *Nama Karumbu*, *Namalu*, *Desari*, *Varalu Yerrapattavali* are the names given in different localities, for one and the same foreign variety—Striped Mauritius.

(iii) *Vellai* (otherwise known as Seemai) of Coimbatore District, *Yerra* (red Mauritius), *Arati Poovu* (Purple Mauritius), *Panni Karumbu* and Fiji B are some instances where foreign varieties have lost their original names. The present position is, that for statistical purposes, with the exception of a few—J 247 and Fiji B (Badila)—all these foreign varieties are reckoned as indigenous. The main object of this note, is to correct this misnomer.

Conclusion. In this Presidency, at present, these foreign varieties have completely replaced the indigenous variety. Since 1932, these foreign varieties are being gradually replaced by varieties evolved at the Imperial Cane Breeding Station, Coimbatore. The expression "Improved variety" has come to be synonymous with the "Coimbatore canes". Judging from the rate of progress made, it is not too much to expect, that in the course of about five to ten years, the whole area under sugarcane in the Presidency will be under "Coimbatore varieties".