



RAMBUTAN, the exotic fruit

A money spinner for the Chowtas

Abe Jacob

Deputy Editor, CDB, Kochi -11

Chandrasekhar Chowta from Kasaragodu district, Kerala has set off a successful trial of intercropping rambutan in his coconut garden. Around 1000 rambutan plants have started yielding from the fourth year onwards in the Chowta farm. This new generation, much sought after fruit which has come to India from Malaysia and Thailand is creating a novel trend in the fruit market in country. Presently Rambutan fruit fetches around Rs. 200 per kg.

The village of Miyapadavu where the Chowta's farm is situated with its unique geographical features, language and culture, has more resemblance to a Karnataka village. Few small shops, community hall and schools are the only few old buildings of this village which is 40 km away from Kasaragod, the district head quarters.

Chandrasekhar Chowta, the owner of the chowta farm a very simple person in appearance is a graduate in Botany with post graduation and doctorate in Cytogenetic and Radiation Biology. He started his career as a teacher and later on his



The rambutan is a large, round topped, much branched evergreen tree. The crop is indigenous to the Malayan archipelago and is grown in the subtropical regions of South-East Asia. The fruits of rambutan are hairy and is very delicious, juicy and attractive. The one-seeded fruit is large, ovoid in shape and borne in clusters of 10-12 fruits. The soft curved spines (hairs) covering all the pericarp (rind) may be red or yellow in colour.



passion for agriculture made him quit his job and he became a full time farmer. Chowta lives in a joint family in a Victorian type bungalow in the Chowta farm itself. Chowta brothers are five in number. The eldest is Krishnananda Chowta who is well proficient in Tulu and Kannada and has made remarkable contribution to Kannada literature. The second is Chandrasekhar Chowta who is taking care of the 50 acre family property. His brothers Prabhakar Chowta and Manohar Chowta are also living with him in

the same house. Every year all the family members meet together once and Chandrasekhar Chowta presents the income and expenditure statement of that year's agricultural activities. The profit share of each member which will be around lakhs will be distributed to each member on the same day.

The Chowta garden is rich with all crops like coconut, arecanut, pepper, paddy, rubber, cocoa, banana etc. Even though paddy farming is not profitable, the family continues it, to meet the

Rambutan, less known fruit of subtropics



The rambutan *Nephelium lappaceum* belonging to the family Sapindaceae is a large, round topped, much branched evergreen tree. The crop is indigenous to the Malayan archipelago and is grown in the subtropical regions of South-East Asia.

The tree reaches a height of 15 m with compound leaf having 3-4 pairs of leaflets, each being about 15 cm long and 5 cm wide. The flowers are small, borne on terminal and axillary inflorescence. The fruits of rambutan are hairy and hence it is also termed 'hairy litchi'. It is very delicious, juicy and attractive. The one-seeded fruit is large, ovoid in shape and borne in clusters of 10-12 fruits. The soft curved spines (hairs) covering all the pericarp (rind) may be red or yellow in colour.

The fruit contains a big seed, which is surrounded by pearl white aril (flesh). The white, translucent, sub-acid, sweet flavoured aril is the edible flesh of the fruit. The taste is rather flat or insipid. It can be propagated vegetatively or by seeds. Seedlings are very variable because they produce both male and female plants (dioecious).

Normally vegetative propagation by means of patch budding is adopted. It can be planted at 7 x 10 m distance accommodating 140 plants per hectare. The tree is a shade loving fruit crop and hence can be grown as an intercrop in coconut plantations.

Shri. R Jnanadevan retired



Shri. R Jnanadevan, Deputy Director, Coconut Development Board retired from the service of the Board on 2nd July 2019. He has taken his masters degree in Agricultural Extension from Kerala Agriculture University and started his official career as Agriculture Officer in Kerala in 1985. He joined the Board in 1988. He served as faculty member on deputation in Agriculture Cooperative Staff Training Institute, Trivandrum from 2000 to 2001, as Director in Vegetable And Fruit Promotion Council Kerala (VFPCK), and as Deputy Director (Marketing) in Directorate of Cashew and Cocoa Development, Kochi. He was serving as the Editor of Boards publications, viz. Indian Coconut Journal, Indian Naliker Journal and Indian Thennai Idhazh. He was the Vigilance Officer and Grievance Officer of the Board.

family's daily consumption need. Pepper is cultivated in a small area and rubber is grown in around three acres. Arecanut is one of the most profitable of all crops in the Chowta garden. He gets around 25 tonne Arecanut in an year ie around Rs. 50 to 60 lakhs gross income from the Arecanut alone. He also gets around five quintal cashew nut in an year.

The Chowtas are having a 10 acre demonstration cum seed production farm wherein around 714 coconut mother palms of various varieties viz. Gangabondam, Malayan Dwarf Yellow, Pratap, Chowghat Dwarf Orange, Chowghat Dwarf Green, East Coast Tall etc. are planted. Now there are around 2500 yielding coconut palms in the Chowta garden. A small nursery is also attached to the farm where seedlings are sold @ Rs. 200 to the farmers.

On realizing the importance of Food Safety Standards, the Chowtas have made certain changes in the farm operations. He has started planting fruit crops along with coconut. It was on a trial basis that he planted rambutan plants as intercrop in his coconut garden. Initially he purchased 400 seedlings in 2014 and in 2015 he planted another batch of 600 rambutan seedlings. The rambutans are planted among his dwarf variety coconuts. The coconut trees are planted at a distance of 30 meter and the rambutans are planted in between each coconut. Thus 75 rambutan plants are planted among 75 coconut palms.

The rambutans are planted in between his 14 year old coconut palms as well as among the newly planted palms. He has planted N-18 and Wrong Grain rambutan varieties which are having good demand in the market. Out of the initially planted 400 rambutan seedlings, 350 have started yielding from last year onwards with around 150 kg yield



from each tree. Around 15 tonne fruit was sold to the wholesale merchants of Mysuru at an average price of Rs. 175 per kg. This year the Chowtas have started taking yield from the whole 900 trees. The market for Rambutan was opened @Rs.350 per kg during the last week of March. Later on the price decreased to Rs. 250. Chandrasekhar applies only organic manures for the rambutan crop. Alongwith harvesting, the trees will be pruned and then the manures will be applied. Along with coconuts, drip irrigation is facilitated in the garden for rambuttan. The same will be done twice in an year and the initial dose will be given again when the trees start flowering.

The Chowtas are expecting a yield of 70-75 tonne rambutan this year. The speciality of the rambutan fruit is that it reaches market when the usual fruit season gets over. Due to lack of heavy rain, the fruits were ready to harvest early and the product got good demand in the market. Earlier, Mysuru was the main market and now traders from Kozhikode, Kerala have also started to purchase Chowta's rambutan.

The rambutan trees decorated with the red fruits of the Chowta garden is a beautiful treat for the eyes. Chowta affirms that intercropping of rambutan in coconut garden is definitely having great potential as a money spinner for the coconut farmers. ■