

'Chengalikodan' spreads a golden glow over banana farmers

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'CHENGALIKODAN' Nendran Banana also called 'Chengazhikode' Banana has a 'Midas Touch'. The life of people who toil all year round to make the golden-coloured banana - the most popular and tasty Nendran cultivated in the state and offered as Kazhchakulas in several temples including the Guruvayur Sree Krishna temple - also has a glittering story to tell the world, amid the stories of flood devastation.

This story has many dimensions, including the underestimated grit and resilience power of the farmers, who recovered quickly from emotional and physical fatigue of the flood than anyone else. The flood has shattered the hopes of Chengalikodon farmers like many others engaged in cultivating the various crops. The Geographical Indication (GI)-registered banana originated from the erstwhile Chengazhikodu village here which is now called Kariyannur in Erumapetti. Around 65 farmers are mainly engaged in the cultivation of 'Chengalikodon' variety of banana in the village who cultivated around 16,000 banana plants for the Onam market. But the deluge not only dashed their hopes by uprooting the banana plants nearing Onam harvest, it also dealt a major blow to them by damaging the banana rhizomes. The farmers used to take



T G Pramod at his leased banana farm where saplings were planted soon after the flood

The Changalikodon is different from other varieties of Nendran, as Kazhchakula will have around 20-25 golden yellow colour fruits in each hand and if cared well, there would be seven to 10 such hands

Changalikodon is grown places close to the banks of Bharatapuzha like Chowannur, Puzhakkal, Wadakkanchery, Pazhayannur and Ollukkara blocks in Thrissur. The farmers have a tradition of their own, which is handed down from generation to generation

Chengalikodon are used as 'Kazhchakula' to be given as offering in temples, especially in the famous Guruvayur temple, and also as gift to relatives and friends as a token of culture/gratitude during Onam

The crop is mainly cultivated in organic way and it starts by August-September period.

around four rhizomes from a healthy Nendran variety banana to grow banana plants for the next sea-

son. The unexpected flood has led to rhizome rot in banana farms, affecting the next cropping season as

well, which normally begins by Onam. However, the farmers shocked by the unforeseen loss regained their composure quickly and reached out to various agencies, including private and government ones, to supply tissue cultured Chengalikodon Nendran plants to meet the crisis and plant more crops this year to offset the loss suffered in the just concluded season.

T G Pramod, a coconut climber by profession, who cultivated 500 crops for the Onam season and lost around 350 matured plants in the flood, told 'Express' normally the drought and wind cause damage to the banana farms in the village. But this year the loss arrived in the form of floods. Further, the demand for the unique variety has nosedived as the state unanimously decided to abstain from the celebrations in the event of the natural calamity.

"If a kg of banana had fetched me a farm price of ₹ 75-80 per kg last year, it nosedived to ₹ 50-55 per kg this year, despite the huge shortfall in production and proportional rise in annual cost of production", said Pramod, who cultivates banana on leased land.

"I suffered a loss of ₹1-1.5 lakh. But I can't lie back after the disheartening loss. Instead I decided to plant 800 banana plants for the coming season. Though we are used to crop damage at times, it will be a major help if the fall-out of the loss-

es can be contained," he said. Sexagenarian Narayanan P hailing from the region said, "I had planted around 750 new banana saplings before the floods struck. Majority of them were lost in the deluge. The crop insurance will be provided only when the banana plants are at least three months-old. So I have to bear the losses. But this will not hold back the farmers since they are exposed to the vagaries of weather and they can indeed come to terms with the loss than anyone



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Pramod, a farmer

else," he said. Johnson from Erumapetti, a member of the Chengalikodon Banana Growers' Association, said the Association has decided to plant around 30,000 banana plants in the village in the post-Onam season as opposed to the 16,000 grown - half of which had been destroyed in the floods - during the last season. The area under acreage will be doubled from the current 24 acre in the village in a phased manner. P Indira Devi, Kerala Agricultural University Research Director, though questions the efficacy of farming carried out in the state.