

## Souvenir of the Rose Society of India Summer 1976

### New Roses for India

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Raising a new rose variety – a prize winner – is surely the ultimate ambition of every rose grower. Just imagine how dull our favourite hobby would be if we did not have that annual flood of novelties, each more beautiful than the last – though some may be more beautiful in the catalogue inspired imagination of the enthusiast than in the garden. In fact, it was this disconcerting variation between description and reality that first turned my thoughts to rose hybridising.

Growers in the more favoured parts of the country like New Delhi or Bangalore may not feel this need for better roses for India as keenly as the majority who garden in the more tropical or coastal areas of the country. There are very few roses, say of the type of MONTEZUMA, which do well every where. I can still see in my mind's eye, that bush some 6 feet tall in my Madras garden less than a 1000 yards from the sea – a lovely blaze of vermilion and pink with more than 50 exquisite blooms. Though roses like 'Montezuma' are rare it is such roses which sustain enthusiasm for the hobby in tropical areas and we cannot have too many of them,

All this is very well, you may say, but how does one go about it ? Well, I have been going about it for the past 10 years and while I cannot pretend to fully answer the question, my experiences, were, I thought worth recording, though success has been so far, only partial. When initially I thought of hybridising, the first clue was provided by Sri Bhattacharji, India's pioneer rose hybridiser, who in his book "Rose growing in the tropics" has with scientific precision pointed out that foreign raised roses do well in India through sheer accident – for these roses are bred to bloom successfully in temperate climates and to survive their severe winters. Also, they are bred to flower in their summers, while in India, excepting in places at an altitude, the best blooms are those produced in winter.

So, in keeping with this line of reasoning, I thought the best approach would be to look around and choose such roses that do well in India with little attention and try to breed other desirable qualities into them, mainly brilliance of colour which is often lacking. Here I should mention Dr. Pals penetrating analysis of the subject in his well known book which should be read by all interested in rose hybridisation.

Ultimately (I was then working at a place near Hyderabad) 4 common rose types were selected :

1. The Tea roses – Etoile de Lyon and Lady Hillingdon have proved the most rewarding.
2. The Edward Rose (Rose Edward) – commonly used for making garlands.
3. Gruss an Teplitz – a fragrant red rose, quite common in Delhi.
4. Cécile Brunner – with its small and exquisite blooms, well known in Delhi and in fact every where in India.

Starting with these, and using them mainly as seed parents, some progress has been made in evolving varieties better adapted to the Indian climate though there are still many unsolved problems arising from differences in chromosome number and the recessive nature of the disease resistance of the varieties adopted to the local climate.

The easiest to work with are the Tea Roses, and from one of my early crosses with a Pink Tea rose has come 'First Offering' which is if I may say so myself, a lovely dwarf floribunda in a most appealing shade of dark red. Much credit goes to Mr. Kasturirangan (of K.S.G. Sons) the well-known Bangalore horticulturist, for encouraging me at the right time by introducing it through his catalogue. Further work on the same lines is in progress but nothing introducible has emerged so far though I do have a lovely apricot seedling from Lady Hillingdon and a beautiful pink one from Etoile de Lyon. The chief problem in this line is to breed out the tendency to mildew and partial sterility arising from chromosome number variations,

In many ways the easiest of the lines has been that of Gruss an Teplitz. There I was lucky. One of my first crosses with an orange floribunda (unfortunately the parentage was misplaced) produced what Shri Kasturirangan has introduced as MAHADEV which, under Hyderabad conditions at least, is the most dazzling orange you could imagine, brighter than Orangeade, Zorina or Prominent. Further along this line, has come KANCHI, which is a lovely purple pink Hybrid Tea which may be better suited for the tropical areas of the country. Again in the same series has come a very interesting seedling from a cross with Whisky Mac, which, in a further generation produced KADAMBARI, a cream edged lac-red floribunda.

Unlike Gruss an Teplitz, work with the Edward rose has proved very difficult. The rather common pink colour is quite dominant in the later generations, and the much loved fragrance quite elusive. My earlier efforts were nearly all failures, But what I can only call a chance cross with the yellow climber Golden Showers produced a real giant of a plant. In Madras this seedling grew to 15 feet and bore, ultimately, lovely quartered blooms of

exquisite fragrance. But the proportion of plant to flower was all wrong. The flower had very little pollen and as a seed parent was sterile. But one fine morning I found a few fertile pollen grains and looking around the garden, only Sterling Silver was in bloom. So this rather unlikely cross was made, and believe it or not, out of this came 3 seedlings in lovely shades of magenta purple with attractive fragrance, though not of the Edward type. But it has proved a problem to transmit this colour while retaining the fragrance. Perhaps next year I will have something to show.

Hybridising with Cécile Brunner was even more arduous. In fact, from 1966 to 1971 several hundreds of crosses produced mere rubbish. But a seedling with a dwarf polyantha at last produced something worth-while. I have been feverishly crossing this seedling with everything in sight. Only time will tell whether anything will come out of this, though I must confess that I can even now visualise the dwarf and dainty plants of the Cécile Brunner type in every possible (and impossible) colour which will I hope be finally evolved.

Work on these new lines has been quite fascinating, frustrating, maddening and rewarding. But, as I am sure you will agree, all in a good cause. I hope some of you may be tempted to take up and carry on the challenge, Here's wishing you welcome to the tribe of hybridisers – and good luck !