



A Case Study

Rubber plantation : A new strategy for afforestation of rural areas in Tripura

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Abstract : The study made an attempt to assess the overall growth of rubber plantation in Tripura. The result indicates that rubber plantation was increasing very rapidly in Tripura. It is evident from the paper that smuggling of woods and illegal migration were the basic reasons for deforestation in the state. Government of Tripura introduced various institutions like, TRPC, TFDPC for extending rubber plantation in rural areas. Return from mature rubber plantation always motivated local people for rubber plantation. Therefore, rubber plantation is a new weapon before government for afforestation in rural areas.

Key Words : Rubber plantation, Forest, Income, Population, Migration

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Forest is an integral part of the culture and tradition of Tripura. It also maintains the environment, bio-diversity, land, soil, water, air regimes. Any imbalance in equilibrium of the components affects the system adversely and has an adverse impact on human life. The state has a geographical area of 10,492 sq. km of which 6,293 sq. km about 60 per cent is the forest area as per legal classification in the state. As per report of the Forest Survey-2003 of India, only 52.2 per cent are well stocked, the remaining forest areas are degraded. Rubber plantation has become a much-talked phenomenon in the State of Tripura. The State Forest Department, aiming at soil and moisture conservation, first introduced rubber in Tripura in 1963. India ranks third in terms of production of natural rubber in the World after Thailand and Malaysia. Kerala is the largest and Tripura is the second largest producer of natural rubber in the country. Rubber is a tropical crop. The species has proved excellent for permanent

settlement of tribal jhumias.

The main objectives of this paper are to evaluate the reasons of deforestation in Tripura and to analyze the growth of rubber plantation in the state.

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from various parts of the state. Secondary data were collected through available literature in form of books, journals, reports and websites.

The forests in Tripura are mainly tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen and moist-deciduous. Substantial area is covered with bamboo and it forms the basis of tribal culture of the State. Forests maintain the environment, bio-diversity, land, soil, water, air regimes. Any imbalance in equilibrium of the above components affects the system adversely and has an adverse impact on human life.

A significant number of persons and families in Tripura continued to depend on forests and jhum or shifting cultivation as their main source of cultivation. Almost 10 per cent forests area is under jhum or shifting cultivation in the State. Jhum or shifting cultivation has an intimate relationship with forest use, not only in terms of habitation

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and cultivation of tracts, but also because the forestry sector provides important supplementary income and inputs in daily lives of tribal people residing in forested areas. Jhum cultivation has become unproductive owing to frequent exposure of soil as evident from the reduction of jhum cycle to the present day 2-3 years from earlier 5-6 years. The Government of Tripura has taken innovative approaches towards the development of tribal livelihood systems. The number of families involved in four major plantation schemes clearly shows that raising rubber plantations has been one of the important means of jhumia rehabilitation.

Population exploitation is the basic reason for the deforestation. After 1971 large numbers of Hindu Bangladeshi peoples migrated in Tripura. Migration quantity was so large that tribal who previously was majority now converted into minority. Large quantities of trees are illegally selling from hilly areas to Bangladesh through rivers.

With the intervention of the Rubber Board since 1967, rubber got domesticated and coming out of the estates, it has reached to the small growers' yard. In 1976 Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation Ltd. (TFDPC Ltd.) was set up to bring out more area under rubber cultivation. In 1982, Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation Ltd. (TRPC Ltd.) was formed with the main objective of economic rehabilitation for the shifting cultivators and tribal marginal farmers through rubber plantation.

Rubber Board started implementing Group and Block plantation schemes from 1992 and thus a revolution set off. Rubber Board kept on promoting rubber from village to village and a spectacular progress could be achieved. Till 2008-09, Tripura had about 46,588 hectares of rubber plantation. Total production of rubber in the State was a 25,588 Mt in 2008-09 (Economic survey of Tripura 2008-09). Recently a Rubber Mission has been set up by Government of Tripura for better co-ordination of all the agencies involved in taking up plantation and marketing of rubber. Rubber Plantation in Tripura needs no further introduction. The people of Tripura have placed it in their heart and made it the major source of

income within 45 years of inception. It has become a popular crop in Tripura providing a lot of employment opportunities in the rural areas. Rubber Board is providing both technical as well as financial assistance for promotion of Rubber cultivation in the state. State Government agencies like TFDPC Ltd. TRPC, TTAADC etc. are also doing their own efforts for expansion of rubber cultivation in the State.

In Tripura in rural areas it has been found that large percentage of land is waste land. In hills also many areas are open and now-a-days rubber plantation shows a new hope for tribal people for earning income and at the same time as a way of afforestation.

Concluding Observations:

Smuggling of valuable woods and migration from Bangladesh are the basic reasons for deforestation in Tripura. Such type of deforestation badly affects the socio-economic condition of the state. Rubber plantation is a way for afforestation in rural areas. It is useful for solving various problems in rural areas. It works against deforestation and at the same time created employment opportunities in rural areas.

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