

# Rubber plantation : A new hope for rural tribals in Tripura

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## SUMMARY

This paper attempts to highlight the sources of income from rubber plantation. The results indicate that rubber plantation is expanding very quickly in Tripura. It is evident from the study that in Tripura various government agencies are present which are working for rehabilitate the tribal Jhumias through rubber plantation. Tribals can earn income from both immature and mature plantation but the scope of income in mature plantation is higher than immature plantation. Increasing employment is helpful for reducing poverty. There is large scope for employing more rural tribals in rubber plantation and it will also work against deforestation. Thus the paper suggests that Government of Tripura should afford more for expanding rubber plantation in rural areas for reducing unemployment.

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**Key words :** Development, Jhumia, Latex, Poverty, Unemployment

Rubber is an important commercial crop in Tripura. Government of Tripura earns large amount of revenue from this cash crop. Kerala and Tripura are the two states which are known for rubber cultivation. A rubber plant has to grow for about seven years before it can be tapped on a regular basis. Rubber based agro-forestry involves a complex and diverse cropping system that combines the growing of rubber and other agricultural crops in the area in a sustainable manner. Rubber has been identified as one of the thrust areas in Tripura, in view of its suitability to the terrain and the acceptability amongst the people. Tripura government is contemplating to utilise unused land across the state to make the state one of the major rubber producing states around the globe. The rubber park, a joint venture between the Tripura Industrial Development Corporation (TIDC) and the Rubber Board, is the second of its kind in the country after the rubber park in Kerala's Irapuram. The rubber plant (its botanical name is *Hevea brasiliensis*) produces sticky, white latex that is collected and processed to produce natural rubber. The *Hevea brasiliensis* plantations flourish in tropical temperatures. Rubber plantation is mostly situated on sloping and undulating lands.

Rubber plantation can be classified in two ways, immature plantation and mature plantation. Immature

plants are those whose ages are less than seven years and if it is more than seven year than it is called as mature plant. Apart from its commercial value, rubber planting has been recognized as a major economic activity around which the rehabilitation projects for 'shifting cultivators (Jhumias) has been set up (Niar, 2009). The main objectives of this paper are to analyze the growth of rubber plantation in Tripura and to identify various sources of income from rubber plantation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through personal interview with the tribal tappers. Secondary data were collected through available literature in form of books, journals, reports and websites.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rubber plantation is a popular cash crop among the rural tribals in Tripura. Rubber was introduced in Tripura in 1963 by the Forest department.

Table 1 indicates that in Tripura rubber plantation is expanding very rapidly from the initial stage.

Table 2 shows that rubber board is more ahead in rubber cultivation in Tripura (Economic Review of Tripura, 2009).

Rubber has already started influencing the socio-economic profile of rural tribals. The state government, right from the beginning has been giving great importance to rubber and the Rubber Board has been implementing a

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**Table 1 : Shows the year wise extension in area of rubber plantation**

Sr. No.	Year	Area (in ha)
1.	1976-77	574
2.	1981-82	3590
3.	1986-87	10085
4.	1991-92	17860
5.	1996-97	23936
6.	2001-02	30576
7.	2006-07	35760
8.	2007-08	39670
9.	2008-09	46588

Source: Rubber Board, Tripura

**Table 2 : Shows agency wise area brought under rubber plantation in 2007-08**

Sr. No.	Name of the agency	Area promoted by the agency(ha)	Proportional share
1.	TFDPC Ltd.	10744	30.04
2.	TRPC Ltd	6047	16.91
3.	TTADC	1100	3.08
4.	Rubber Board	17869	49.97
	Total	35760	100

Source: Rubber Board, Tripura

variety of programmes for the development of tribals through rubber plantation. The state government agencies like Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation Ltd. (TFDPC) and Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation Ltd (TRPC) also have contributed significantly for the development of rubber plantation in rural areas.

The Rubber Board started implementing Group and Block Plantation Schemes from 1992 onwards and thus a revolution was set off. These schemes had changed the whole scenario of rubber cultivation in Tripura. The Rubber Board keeps on promoting progress. For tribals, an integrated approach has been adopted, and a World Bank Project implemented in the period 1994-2000. A tribal development plan was implemented in Tripura covering about 4000 tribal families. These families, mostly comprising Deb Barma, Jamatiya, Reang and Chakma tribes were involved in Jhum or shifting cultivation. In a bid to settle these Jhumia people, the Rubber Board along with the Tripura Government resorted to rubber plantations. Rubber Block Plantation for socio-economic settlement of the Jhumias in Tripura has been considered a great success. Tribal peoples can earn income through various ways from rubber plantation, like as

#### **Immature plantation:**

##### *Intercropping:*

During the initial years of a plantation when the

interspaces receive plenty of sunlight, a variety of intercrops (*i.e.* banana, medical plant, pineapple, ginger, turmeric etc.) can be cultivated.

##### *Causal worker:*

In immature plantation causal workers are needed for cutting the unnecessary small plants, forming the boundary of garden and also looking the drainage facilities. In many cases watchman were also employed by authority for providing the security of the garden.

#### **Mature plantation:**

##### *Tapping:*

Tapping is the process of collecting latex from rubber plants. Those workers who involve in this work are known as rubber tapper. Tapping work is generally done in early earning.

##### *Rubber agency:*

Private garden owners produce large amount of latex/sheet and in many cases they are unable to sell those things directly in rubber factory. In this case rubber agency can collect those rubber latex /sheet. Unemployed tribals also can employ themselves in those agency or they can also start new agency.

##### *Rubber industry:*

Rubber sheet is the basic input of rubber industry. In rubber factory various types of product are produced by using rubber. In those factories large number of unemployed tribals can get their job.

##### *Rubber wood:*

Rubber wood has emerged as an alternative source of timber. Processed rubber wood can be used in furniture paneling, flooring and household articles.

##### *Rubber seed:*

Rubber seed is a minor source of non edible oil. The oil content ranges from 14-16% of the total weight of seeds. Rubber seed cake can be used up to 20% of the total weight of cattle feed.

##### *Rubber honey:*

Rubber tree is a rich source of nectar. It is found at the extra-floral nectar glands at the end of the petiole where the leaflets join. About 15 hives can be placed in a hectare of rubber. About 10 kg of honey is obtained from one hive. It contains mainly glucose and fructose that are easily digestible.

**Firewood:**

Common people can collect branches of the broken trees which they can be use as fuel. In every year during March-April all leaves of trees are generally falls and it is also used as fuel in rural areas. In this way this will reduce pressure on forest for collecting firewoods.

**Biogas:**

Biogas can be produce by using spoil latex.

**Causal worker:**

In rubber processing centre there are also additional workers needs for various activities *i.e.* accounting, security, water collection etc.

**Conclusion :**

Rubber is a more popular plantation crop in Tripura. Contribution of Tripura in rubber production is higher than other states in North-East India. In this state there are many government agencies (*i.e.* T.R.P.C., T.F.D.P.C.,

Rubber Board etc.) are present which are working for expanding rubber plantation in hilly areas where maximum peoples are tribal.

In Tripura large numbers of rural tribal live below the poverty line and rate of unemployment is also very high. This poverty and unemployment are the major reasons for violence and revolt. Extension of rubber plantation in rural areas may be a policy for solving poverty and unemployment. Rural people can earn income from rubber plantation in various ways. In immature plantation people can earn income through intercropping in rubber plantation and also as causal worker. Mature plantation is the main source of income because for latex collection. At the same time rubber wood is more popular for furniture production. In Tripura rubber plantation is an instrument before government for rehabilitant tribal Jhumias in rural areas.

Therefore, rubber plantation benefits tribals in two ways providing income to rural tribal people and works against deforestation.

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