

## RUBBER PLANTING- A RURAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE\*

P. K. NARAYANAN

Jt. Director (Rubber Promotion), Rubber Board.

The late V. K. Krishna Menon, the former Defence Minister of India who had played a crucial role for the liberation of Goa in the early sixties, had described India as a "rich country of poor people". This may sound odd. What he meant precisely is that the country is rich in natural resources but the failure to explore and exploit those resources to the advantage of mankind has left the people poor. This sad state of affairs is literally true of most of the Indian States including Goa. Those who travel through the length and breadth of Goa will get the impression that there are large stretches of arable fallows still remaining untapped. The Government and people of Goa have done remarkably well in the last few years to generate wealth out of its land resources. But a good lot still remains unexploited. The reason why we are here to-day, amply testifies the popular abiding interest in improving the lot of the peasantry of this nascent State by exploring the possibility of introducing rubber cultivation on a massive scale making use of the arable fallows suitable for the purpose.

A sizable section of the population of Goa lives in villages where farming and allied vocations provide them the just means for a livelihood.

Generation of wealth through proper utilisation of the rural resources, resorting to the adoption of appropriate technology in the farm sector is one of the few acceptable means to accelerate the pace of rural development. Land kept unfarmed now has to be subjected to judicious crop husbandary, through meticulous planning, organisation and management.

Rubber is one crop which could be gainfully cultivated in Goa rather extensively in areas with good soil depth and light irrigation potential. In the midland areas of Kerala, rubber plantations have successfully elevated the agricultural and rural economy to commanding heights. Impressed by the brilliant performance of this agrarian venture there, the Forest Department and a number of individual entrepreneurs have opened up rubber plantations in Goa with a high degree of success. No doubt, they had to face a lot of initial problems as they were not quiet sure as where-to-get-what and how-to-do, even though an extension outpost of the Rubber Board functioned there from mid sixties. Recently, with the establishment of a Regional Office, the Board had intensified its efforts in Goa by launching motivational and awareness drives leading to the creation of a climate congenial for accepting rubber cultivation as an effective means to upgrade the rural

economy of Goa. As a result there has been unprecedented interest among the people to take up rubber planting.

A unique built-in advantage of the development programme envisaged by the Board is its self-contained nature in that, it provides to make available the entire finance needed for planting rubber and maintaining it up to the level of maturity, besides extending technical guidance to the farmers at all the critical stages of cultivation of this crop. In other words, if you have land suitable for planting rubber in Goa and if you are willing to put it under rubber, between the Rubber Board and Banking institutions the entire finance needed for raising the crop and its upkeep up to the bearing stage will be made available to the farmer as cash subsidy and long term soft loan at reduced rate of interest. In addition various inputs would also be delivered to the farmers at concessional rates. In short, those who come forward to take up rubber planting in Goa under the Rubber Board's programme, could become the owner of a high-yielding rubber plantation without spending anything from their pockets. The repayment schedules of the loan component are so fixed as to come into effect only after the plantation, raised using the subsidy and loan, starts yielding. The programme would appear to be well conceived so as to attract

\*Paper presented at the 'Seminar on Rubber' held at Ponda, Goa on 29th May 1989.

even the less resourceful rural farmers to whom finance is indeed a limiting factor to take up new ventures like rubber planting.

It could be estimated that anything between 30,000 - 50,000 hectares of land could be identified in Goa as fit for planting rubber. As against this, the present hectareage is only less than 1,000. The enthusiasm generated as a result of the recent awareness campaign set in motion by the Rubber Board unit in Goa, indicates that there will be sizable adoption of this crop from now on. To-day's exercise also is likely to attract a large number of agriculturists to go in for rubber.

Economics of rubber cultivation reveals that a hectare of plantation could ensure a net return of Rs. 15,000-20,000 per annum even from moderately yielding plantations. Another beneficial aspect is that Rubber planting on a large scale would promote development of rural areas to a very great extent as it will pave the way to create a lot of income-generating activities in the rural sector.

Rubber planting is one of the highly labour intensive agricultural vocations. A hectare of plantation will provide regular daily on-farm employment to 0.7 man power. In the initial years of planting there are several operations such as clearing of land, lining, pitting, filling the pits with soil and manure, terracing, planting, raising cover crops, manuring, plant protection etc., which absorbs labour at the average of 0.5 mandays per hectare per day. Out of the Rs. 30,000/- to be spent for planting and maintaining a hectare of plantation to the bearing stage, Rs. 18,000/- is the cost of labour, i. e. 60% in terms of man power it is around 800 man days. In the case

of mature plantations also, around 60% of the recurring expenses incurred for upkeep, tapping and processing is for labour. These are only for direct agricultural operations. Development of engineering infra-structure like roads, buildings etc. and supervisory overheads provide substantial extra employment avenues.

A lot of ancilliary activities also emerge once rubber planting assumes larger proportions in Goa which are listed below:

#### 1. Nurseries:

Raising of high yielding planting materials is an essential pre-requisite to commence commercial rubber plantations on a large scale. There will be sizable demands for high yielding materials as planting programme gains momentum. This would open up opportunities for enterprising people to start nurseries in different parts of Goa necessitating and generation of employment income. In Kerala which is the largest producer of natural rubber in the country, around 60 percent of the requirement of planting materials is met by the private rubber nurseries numbering over 2,000. This is a highly lucrative economic activity.

#### 2. Input distribution:

A well laid out net work of input outlets will become necessary for distributing fertilizers, fungicides, chemicals, tapping knives, collection cups, cup holders, spouts, rubber rollers etc. to the rubber plantations in course of time when plantations come up in a big way. This will create opportunities for organising a large number of small scale manufacturing and trading units in farming centres.

#### 3. Rubber trade:

Rubber is a controlled co-

mmodity and its trade has to be done strictly under a Dealers' licence from the Rubber Board. Raw rubber is mostly marketed in the form of smoked sheets. Outlets for procuring the same will have to be organised in the rural centres when tapping of plantations become widespread.

These are some of the activities that will generate additional employment and income in rural areas as a sequel to widespread adoption of rubber planting in Goa. Such ventures would transform [the rural areas to regions of hectic economic activity leading to accelerated rural development.

Rubber planting is one of the highly reliable areas of investment. It is a forest crop which brings back the already upset ecological equilibrium. Besides enabling productive and economic utilisation of arable fallows, it generates massive rural employment and affords effective soil and moisture conservation. Availability of raw rubber on a large scale can pave way for new rubber based rural industries in the State. We have here MRF, the tyre giant, which is a shining example of industrialisation potential held by rubber. It also provides timber, oil, oil cake and honey. The average timber yield from one hectare of rubber plantation at the close of its 32 year economic life is 200 cubic metre. Rubber trunk wood incidentally is gaining widespread global acceptance for furniture, packing cases, plywood and construction needs. Rubber plantations can bring in sizable revenues to the State's exchequer. States like Goa which have immense potential for large scale rubber planting could safely go in for the same and in course of time elevate its economy to a pride of place. □