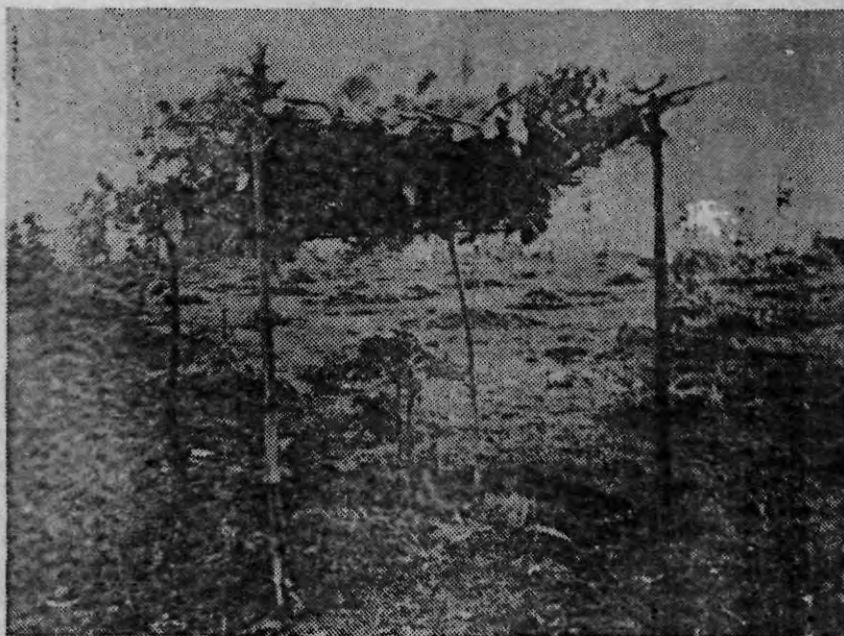


TRIAL RUBBER PLANTATION IN MAHARASHTRA

TR Chandrasekhar,
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Dapchari, Maharashtra.

The consumption of natural rubber in India has been increasing consistently during the last few years. The production in the year 1982-83 was 165,850 metric tonnes while the consumption was 195,545 metric tonnes, the shortage being met by import of natural rubber involving foreign exchange. The demand for rubber in the country is increasing year after year thereby widening the existing gap between demand, and supply. In order to meet the ever growing demand, every effort is being made by the Rubber Board to increase the production both by maximising the output from the existing holdings and also by introducing rubber to new areas. The non-availability of land for further expansion being the limitations in the traditional rubber growing tracts it has become a necessity to explore new areas for rubber cultivation. As a sequel to this, in 1981, the Rubber Board



A Field plant with overhead shade



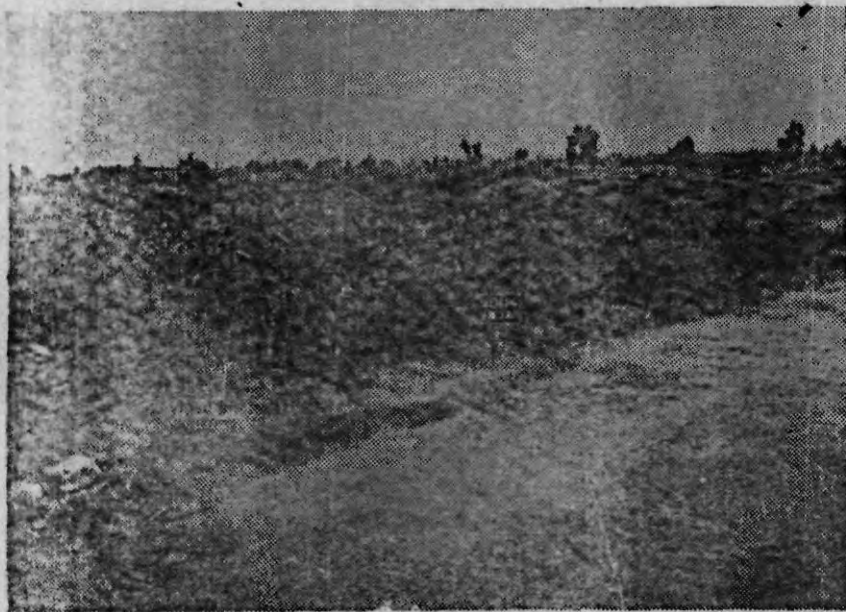
12 Months old field plant

with the help of the State Government of Maharashtra, has initiated a Trial Rubber Plantation Project in Konkan at Dapchari. (Altitude: 58 metres, MSL). The Trial Rubber Plantation is about 145 kms away towards north of Bombay in the Thane Dist., on the Bombay-Ahmedabad National Highway. The Government of Maharashtra has handed over an area of 50 hectares to the Rubber Board under the Konkan area Development scheme.

The Konkan area, stretching from north to South is between 15° and 20° north latitude, comprising a narrow strip of land on the western ghats of Maharashtra. The area is distributed in four districts namely Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Raigad and Thana. Indiscriminate felling of the forest cover and shifting cultivation practised by the local people has

completely denuded the area. The topography of the land and the erratic rainfall, associated with prolonged drought periods, have rendered the area unsuitable for cultivating annual agricultural crops leaving vast area unutilised.

The area receives an average annual rainfall of about 2500mm restricted to about 4 to 6 Months from June to October, the number of rainy days being 65 to 98 days (1977 to 1982). The prolonged drought period of about 6 to 8 months is a problem for raising perennial crops like rubber. With the exploitation of perennial sources of water supply from dams, streams, etc., and also with the adoption of special irrigation techniques coupled with a package of other cultivation practices it is possible to overcome the problem. In the case of perennial tree crops it is likely that the problem of



1982 Seedlings (9 months old)

drought will be less severe when the canopy closes. Further, rubber cultivation with leguminous ground cover will considerably improve the physiochemical properties of the soil which in turn will help to conserve soil moisture.

Since rubber cultivation is labour intensive it can provide gainful employment to the local people particularly Adivasis who could thus be induced to abandon shifting cultivation so harmful to the agricultural potentiality of the area. The price of rubber in the nearby market is invariably higher than that prevailing in the traditional areas. Timber which would become available at the time of replanting would also fetch a very high price because of its high local demand for fuel and for making packing cases.

The project initiated in 1981 by the Rubber Board aims at the following:

1. To find out whether rubber can be cultivated in the region,
2. To study the yield performance
3. To work out the economics of cultivation and
4. To evolve a suitable planting material and cultivation practices for the region.

The Rubber Research Institute of India after taking over the land at Dapchari has established a seedling nursery with about 4,000 seedlings and a budwood nursery of 16 clones in the year 1981 itself. The growth of plants was satisfactory and is comparable to the plants of the conventional areas. The seedlings after sixteen months have grown to a height of 2 to 4.5 metres with girth

ranging from 3.5 to 11 cms. The additional expenditures involved were for watering and shading. A clone trial with twelve clones has already been laid out in 1982 using polybag plants. The growth of plants is satisfactory. The plants have attained an average height of 2 metres in twelve months and also they have developed 6 to 12 whorls of leaves. The plants in the seedling nursery established in 1982 are also growing well. New Experiments both under irrigation and non-irrigation facilities are being taken up on a phased programme.

The preliminary experience shows that it is possible to grow rubber in the Konkan area. This could be achieved by providing shade in the initial years of planting and irrigation during the drought period. Since rubber a perennial crop it requires a more years to know the growth and yield performance. It would be premature to conclude anything positively at this stage because the Konkan belong to a non-traditional area, the crop would be exposed to new agroecological situations. The special techniques needed for raising the crop in the area are to be worked out and the commercial feasibility is to be

(continued on page 20)



Five months old polybag plants

concern. If this fact is accepted, I am sure that the rubber producers in our country will rise to the occasion and take up the challenge of catering to the full needs of the rubber goods industry either through intensive or cultivation techniques.

Need based import

There has been sufficient reason for the rubber producers to be panicky in the past. That is why they are allergic to the very mention of imports. I have no dispute about the fact that the country is short of rubber at present. Imports to the extent to fill up the gap between demand and domestic availability are justified. But imports should not be for the sake of imports alone or to push own domestic prices but it should be aimed only as an operation to ensure uninterrupted supply to the industry during periods of real shortage.

I do subscribe fully to the apprehension of the Chairman, Rubber Board and to endorse his concern about the apparently irrational manner in which rubber imports are handled now. Arrival of imports and release to the consumers should be timed in such a way that it does not cause violent fluctuation in the domestic market.

I wish the Government of India set right the present systems and see that import operations are employed as a tool only to maintain stability in supply, prices and market. For healthy growth of the industrial sector also stability is essential.

Bright future

I am one who strongly believes that rubber goods industry has a bright future in this country. Rubber will put to more and more new uses by virtue of its all-purpose nature. When we think of new rubber-based industries, it would be worthwhile to consider the locational advantage of Kerala. I would utilise this opportunity to make a special plea to my friends from leading industrial houses of the Rubber Industry to go over to Kerala and avail of the ideal

climate that awaits them for establishing new industries. Kerala is endowed with natural resources including rubber. It is obvious that the heavy cost of transportation of raw material to the factory site would be minimal if the manufacturing centres are located in Kerala. Another significant advantage would be the savings on taxes. I assure you everything within the command of my Government for such ventures. I trust that this request would engage your earnest consideration.

I would like to mention here two specific commitments my Government have given to prospective entrepreneurs. The first is that for the initial five years the lower power tariff that prevailed before the recent revision will be available to them. The second is that for the first five years it will be ensured that there is no stoppage of work hindering productivity.

Modi-an example

Another area where the Industrial Houses of the rubber industry could move in is assisting rural development activities in regions with concentration for rubber small holdings. I am aware of the pioneering work being done by M/s. Modi in this direction in one of the villages in Kerala, where they disseminate new technology, among small holders through field extension service. Big industries should engage in such activities to fulfil their obligations to the society. This would supplement the efforts of Government agencies already involved in rural reconstruction.

The ultimate objective of "Integrated development of the rubber Industry" could be achieved only if the various components within the rubber industry foster mutual trust and confidence. I am given to understand that this Seminar is being convened primarily to create an awareness among the different interests on the extent and nature of their inter-dependence.

I hasten to congratulate the organisers for the efforts put in to set a common forum of this type for effective interaction. Once

again I assure you the goodwill and patronage of my Government for all your endeavours.

Jai Hind!

□

(continued from page)17

established. For attempting large scale planting it is also essential that all agronomic requirements of the crop in the area have to be established on scientific footing. However, experiments are being envisaged to evolve cheaper methods of irrigation and shading so that rubber cultivation in the area becomes an economical proposition. Once a suitable clone is identified for the Konkan region, no doubt, the region can substantially contribute towards overcoming the shortage of natural rubber in the country. □

THE WEEPING WOOD

The latex that flowed out
from a rubber tree
in Vigyan Bhavan attracted
the attention of
many visitors who
assembled there to see
the exhibition
arranged in connection with
the National Seminar
on Rubber held in
New Delhi
on 10th Sept. 1983.
Surprisingly enough a few
visitors asked:-

"Is it true that the
milky liquid called latex
comes out] from a tree?"

To them, it was a
surprise. It is still more
interesting
to learn that quite a
number of people
are there in the North
who have not seen
a rubber tree in their life.