

For them, orange is the colour of hope

TURNAROUND 20 years ago, bringing food to the table seemed to be the sole point of farming for the Mishmis of Arunachal. Today, orange cultivation has changed their lifestyle for the better

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WAKRO (LOHIT DISTRICT): Angyamlu Tayang, a 35-plus agriculturist from Pukhri village, has sent her eldest daughter to Bengaluru for studying chartered accountancy. The younger one studies in Class X of Navodaya Vidyalaya, located about 100 km away.

Two decades ago, Tayang could never have imagined that her daughters would — one day — step out of their small village. “Whatever little money I earned back then was through weaving. Their education has become possible entirely because of our orange plantation,” says she. Today, Tayang makes anywhere between ₹1,30,000-₹1,50,000 annually from 1,000 orange trees on a three-acre plot of land.

Commercial orange plantation has heightened the aspirations of marginal farmers from the Mishmi community in Arunachal Pradesh’s Lohit district. Thanks to the hard cash they get, the residents are able to send their wards to private English medium schools. In Tillai village, some 22 km from Wakro, 70-year-old Dumhongsa Rangmang owns orange orchards stretching over 35 acres of land. After years of abject poverty, the area’s fortunes have turned for the better over the last 12-15 years.



“Our area was always known for oranges. So, the government encouraged

commercial plantation by providing seeds, equipment and even money,” he says.

Rangmang’s orchards yield almost four trucks of oranges, getting him ₹4-5 lakh per year. “Now, we can afford to go to Dibrugarh or Tinsukia in Assam for medical emergencies,” his eldest son, 35-year-old Brumkho, says.

With black soil and suitable eleva-



■ Angyamlu Tayang at her orange plantation in Lohit district. She earns around ₹1,50,000 from the plantations annually.

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tion, the Wakro circle of Lohit district has a success story to tell. One tree yields about 1,500-2,000 oranges, which means a minimum income of ₹1 lakh per acre. “The government has been aiding us in this regard for the last 15 years. Today, orange trees cover almost 10,000 hectares of land,” says RN Megeji, district horticulture officer, Lohit.

However, several factors — including poor maintenance, lack of fertilisers and water shortage — have been taking its toll on orange production in recent years. “Our department conducts regular training for farmers with regard to maintenance. Unfortunately, they don’t seem to be implementing anything we tell them,” says Ramashankar Singh, horticulture development officer at Wakro.

Of late, several farmers have moved from orange cultivation to tending tea gardens — which are supposed to be more commercially viable. Among those considering such a move are Sitapmai

Dillang, 35, and Aramlu Bru, 45, residents of Mawai village who have been seeing revenue from orange cultivation decreasing with each passing year.

Though Dillang earns around ₹1 lakh per year, she has to take loans from traders to pay for her daughters’ education. Bru, who makes about ₹70,000 per year through orange cultivation, admits that the “losses may make me shift to tea gardening”.

However, the Mishmis are not getting the best deal for their oranges, with traders — all non-Arunachalis — skimming the cream of the profits as they send truckloads to Karimganj in Bangladesh. Though the Centre set up a mandi at Tezu and Wakro some years ago, neither the farmers nor the traders seem to be interested.

“The risk-taking capacity of the Mishmis is nil,” Singh said, adding that things could change for the better if they decide to shed their fears.

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