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## A case study on the working condition and wage structure of rubber tappers in Kerala

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### Abstract

Rubber cultivation is the most dominated cropping pattern in central districts of Kerala especially in Kottayam District. Rubber had occupied the second largest area in the state with 21 percent of the gross cropped area. But the share of Kerala in natural rubber production has come down from 92 percent a decade ago to 69.99 percent owing to various reasons such as termination of subsidy, continuous fluctuations in price, farmers moving to alternate crops, increase in cultivation of rubber in non-traditional regions such as North-East. All these factors have affected the working and living conditions of the labourers in this particular sector. This paper aims to understand the socioeconomic background, working condition and wage structure of rubber tappers in Kerala. 60 respondents were selected using convenience sampling. Both primary and secondary data was used for the study. The result showed that the socio- economic condition of rubber tapper show only a slight improvement but still the situation is not good enough to improve their standard of living. Due to the continuous fluctuation in rubber price and seasonal variation, rubber cultivators are not encouraged to concentrate more on improved rubber production.

**Keywords:** rubber, wage structure, working condition

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### Introduction

In India, traditional rubber growing states include Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which account for 81 percent of production. The non-traditional growers of rubber include northeast states such as Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Odisha, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Sheet rubber is the most preferred form of processed rubber accounts for 70 percent of processed rubber. Block rubber comprise 17 percent and latex 12 percent of rubber production in the country. In Kerala, the cropping pattern is dominated by cash crops, rubber is one among them. Rubber is a perennial crop and its cultivation practice in Kerala started in the British era. The state accounts for 92.16% of the natural rubber production of the country. Considering the state, Kottayam district has an extensive area producing the crop. As per the data of the state government, during the period 2019-2020, 5, 51,030 hectares of land were used for rubber cultivation. Total production accounted for 5, 33,500 million tones and productivity is 1559 kg/ha. Rubber occupies the second largest area in the state with 21 percent of the gross cropped area. But the share of Kerala in natural rubber production has come down from 92 percent a decade ago to 69.99 percent owing to various reasons such as termination of subsidy, continuous fluctuations in price, farmers moving to alternate crops, increase in cultivation of rubber in non-traditional regions such as North-East. All these factors have affected the working and living conditions of the laborers in this particular sector.

### Objectives

1. To assess the socio-economic condition of the rubber tappers.
2. Wage structure, employment pattern and level of wage.
3. To analyse the influence of migrant labourers in this sector.

### Statement of The Problem

Due to the continuous fluctuations of rubber prices, small land holding cultivators have left trees untapped or tapping was done irregularly. This practice has affected the socio- economic condition of the rubber tappers. And also, the irregular climatic conditions have also worsened the living conditions of the tappers. Another factor that affects the native laborers is the flow of migrant laborers. So, this study aims to analyze the working condition and wage structure of the native rubber tappers.

### Research Methodology

Data Source: Both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from books, journals and internet.

Data Collection: 60 respondents were selected using convenient sampling method.

Data Analysis and Interpretations: Percentages, averages and tables have been used for data analyzing and interpretation.

### Review of Literature

(T. Siju, 2017). High fluctuations in rubber price during the post liberalisation period had led to uncertainty in income from rubber cultivation. This has affected both the growers and the tappers. Comparing with other agricultural labourers, the wage rate of rubber tappers is less. In order to restrict further fall in net income from rubber farming the producers have adopted labour-saving strategies. This practice has affected the working condition of tappers, traditional single grower dependence system was destroyed and tappers become dependent to multiple growers. All these factors made this sector less attractive for job opportunity. So, as a result demand supply gap emerged in this sector. Even though various interventions were done by the rubber board, a proper were not identified.

Tia Mathews (2012) observed that in Kerala, the production of natural rubber is greatly influenced by climatic and seasonal factors. Production period is at its peak during October to January which is almost 45 percent of the total production. Due to the variation in climatic condition the production of natural rubber has declined in recent years. Fall in number of tapping days has also affected the production. Also, the export of natural rubber from Kerala is growing at a diminishing rate.

### Findings

#### Socio-economic Profile

**Table 1**

Variable	N	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Below 40	3	5
40-50	11	18
50-60	27	45
60-70	19	32
70 and above	0	0
<b>Annual Income</b>		
Below 10000	8	13
10000-30000	33	55
30000-50000	19	32
50000-70000	0	0
70000 and above	0	0
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Primary	15	25
High School	32	52
Higher Secondary	12	29
Diploma	2	3
Graduation and above	0	0
<b>No. of Family members</b>		
2 and below	12	20
3 – 5	30	50
5-7	18	30
7 and above	0	0
<b>No. of earning members</b>		
1	23	77
2	6	20
3	1	3
4 and above	0	0
<b>House Owned or Rented</b>		
Own	60	100
Rented	0	0
<b>Area of land owned</b>		
Below 10 cents	12	20
10-30 cents	13	22
30-50 cents	29	48
50-70 cents	4	7
70 cents and above	2	3
<b>Alternative source of income</b>		
Yes	4	7

No	56	93
Size of house		
Below 500	10	17
500 – 750	32	53
750 – 1000	17	28
1000 and above	1	2
Source of drinking water		
Surface well	49	82
Bore well	7	12
Panchayath Connection	4	6
Fuel		
Natural Gas	41	68
Firewood	19	32
Loan availed		
Yes	32	53
No	28	47

- 70% of rubber tapper under study receive Rs. 2 per tree and 30% receive Rs.1 per tree.
- 93% of the respondents' annual cost for purchasing and repairing tapping equipment's incur a cost between Rs.250 – 500. For 7%, it costs between 500 – 750.
- 45% of the respondent's taps between 120 – 160 days, 38% taps between 160 – 200 days and 17% between 80 – 120 days.
- 60% of the respondents taps 200 – 300 trees per day, 30% taps 100 – 200 trees per day, 10% taps 300 or above trees per day.
- For 92% of respondents wage received through tapping alone is insufficient to meet household needs.
- 23% of the respondents do jobs other than tapping trees in this sector. They receive additional wage for the job done.
- 88% respondents receive incentives from rubber planters.
- 58% of the respondent's works 6 – 7 hrs per days, 27% works 5 – 6 hrs and 15% works 7 – 8 hrs.
- 42% of the respondents have health issues related to rubber tapping and 58% doesn't has any health issues.
- 60 respondents state that climatic condition affect rubber tapping.
- 62% of the respondent's states that tapping is not done on rainy days, 8% opt that tapping is done on rainy days and 30% opt that sometimes tapping is done on rainy days.
- 40% of the respondents has been working as rubber tapper of 30 – 40 years, 30% for 20 – 30 years, 27% for 40 and more than years and 3% for less than 20 years.
- 100% of the respondents observes changes in their income from the initially working period.
- 100% of the respondents observes technological advancement in rubber tapping. But tappers under the study are not updated with new technology.
- There are certain reasons that rubber tappers are not updated the new technology. 70% opt that it is difficult to use, 18% opt lack of proper training and 18% opt poor technological knowledge.
- There is no influence of migrant labour in rubber tapping sector
- 100% of the respondents are aware about the rubber broad.
- 82% of the respondents has received training from rubber broad for tapping trees and 18% have received any training.
- None of the respondents has availed any financial support from the rubber broad.
- 36% of the respondents receive government aid and 63% doesn't receive any aid.
- 53% of the respondents are member of kshemanidhi scheme and 47% are not member of any kshemanidhi scheme.

### Suggestions

- Since rubber tappers have only seasonal employment some measures need to be taken to ensure regular livelihood.
- Due to fall in rubber price majority of the plantation owners doesn't find it economical to hire a tapper for the whole process. This affects their earning and measures needs to take to improve their situation.
- Unlike other sections rubber tappers do not have formally organised groups to raise their concerns and plights. Formation of such groups may help to improve their situation.

### Conclusion

In short, the socio- economic condition of rubber tapper show only a slight improvement but still the situation in not good enough to improve their standard of living. Due to the continuous fluctuation in rubber price and seasonal variation, rubber cultivators are not encouraged to concentrate more on improved rubber production. This in turn affects the wage receipts of the rubber tappers. Through these years, there is no much effect of

migrant labours on this sector. Role of rubber broad and government should be improved in this sector. Technological advancement in rubber tapping should be efficient to meet the needs of rubber tappers.

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