

A Study on Socio-Economic Condition of Rubber Plantation Labourers in Kanyakumari District

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Abstract : Plantation is a part of agriculture, in which the cultivation of crops is better planned and refined. According to International Labour Organization the term 'Plantation' includes any agricultural undertaking regularly employing hired workers which is situated in the tropical or subtropical regions and which is mainly concerned with the cultivation or production for commercial purposes of coffee, tea, sugarcane, rubber, bananas, cocoa, coconuts, groundnuts, cotton, tobacco, fibres (sisal, jute and hemp), citrus, palm oil, cinchona or pineapple; it does not include family or small-scale holdings producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers. Plantation crops include variety of products like Tea, Coffee, Rubber, Pepper and other spices; Tobacco also is classified under this category. Rubber is one of the prominent plantation crops of our country and has considerable significance on the Indian economy. In Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari District accounts for 98 percentage of production of rubber. They provide employment to 1874 people mostly from the rural area where there is very little employment opportunity. This study is to find the Socio-economic condition such as income, education, wealth, place of residence and employment status of rubber plantation labourers of Kanyakumari District. Due to variety of reasons the conditions in the rubber plantations remained unsatisfactory for a long time. Socio-economic condition of plantation labourers remained very unsatisfactory with low wages, unhygienic working and living conditions. The questionnaire is the major tool in collecting data. Convenient sampling technique is used for data collection. Percentage analysis is used for analysis.

Keywords - labourer, plantation, plantation crop, rubber, socio-economic condition

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

One of the prominent plantation crops of our country is rubber and has considerable significance to the Indian economy. Rubber is an elastic substance made from sticky, milky white liquid called latex extracted from the bark of the rubber tree (*Hevea Brasiliensis*) through a process called tapping. Rubber is a brazil native crop introduced in india by the british; however cultivation in commercial scale were initiated as early as 1873. In 1895 the first rubber plantations were set up on the hill slopes of Kerala. In 1902 the first commercial Hevea plantations were established at Thattakadu, Ernakulum District, Kerala. In India rubber plantations are spread over 5.97 lakh hectares cultivated in 16 states. It has been traditionally confined to Kerala and Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu of which 90% of the total output is from Kerala, next comes Kanyakumari District, followed by Tirpura with 4%. In Tamil Nadu, Nilgiri, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Coimbatore and Salem are the chief rubber producing districts of Tamil Nadu.

Kanyakumari District accounts for 98 percentage of production of rubber. It has suitable soil and climate for the cultivation of rubber trees. Out of 91807 hectares of total crop area, rubber is cultivated in 19500 hectares. There are 126 small scale rubber-based industries registered under the District Industries Centre (DIC). They provide employment to 1874 people^[1]. Rubber is being cultivated in three taluks of the District: Kalkulam Taluk - 180 rubber estates, Thovalai Taluk - 13 rubber estates, Vilavancode Taluk - 230 rubber estates according to Rubber Board, Marthandam. According to department of Economics and Statistics of Kanyakumari District there are 41 registered rubber estates with 7373.126 hectares of land in which there are 1998 male labourers and 988 female labourers. Land coverage under rubber plantation in Kanyakumari District is 27407 hectares, which is more compared to food grains- 1242 hectares, oil seeds- 24232 hectares, and fruits and vegetables 957-hectares of land^[2]. The district produced 85117200 Kg (approx) and an average yield of 4200 Kg/ha of rubber during the year 2013-2014^[3].

1.2 Problem Of The Study

Plantations are considered to be the major labour absorbing industry in the country. In the cultivation and production of rubber, Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu holds a dominant position. It has been maintaining a unique position since the introduction of natural rubber cultivation in the country. More than 50000 people depend on this industry for their existence as growers, processors, dealers and workers along with their families^[4]. Hence there is a great need to nurture and retain this plantation industry. Due to variety of reasons the conditions in the plantations remained unsatisfactory for a long time. It employs millions of labours mostly from the rural area where there is very little employment opportunity. Here labourer means workers, according to PLA act 1951 worker means a person employed in a plantation for hire or reward, whether directly or through any agency, to do any work, skilled, unskilled, manual or clerical. Socio-economic condition of plantation labourers remained unsatisfactory with low wages, unhygienic working and living conditions. Due to this plantation workers are shifting to other sectors owing to better wages and working conditions.

1.3 Objectives

The study is concerned with an assessment of the socio-economic condition of the rubber plantation labourers in Kanyakumari District. The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the income and education level of rubber plantation labourers.
2. To analyse the living condition of rubber plantation labourers.

1.4 Review Of Literature

Sanyal Joyjit, Dr. Sikidar Sujit, Timung Ajit, (2015)^[5], in their paper “Socio-Economic Condition of Rubber Plantation Workers- A Synoptic Study”, has presented that the nature of work is very hard. They are engaged in 8-10 hours of work. Most of the employees have no other tasks leaving apart the plantation work. The region surrounding still remains underdeveloped so the employees have no other sources of employment to improve their lifestyle. The present wage structure is not adequate to run their family. They are leading life in poor condition and also not able to provide proper education facilities to their children.

Government of India Ministry of Labour & Employment Labour Bureau, (2008- 09)^[6], conducted a survey and found out that economic condition of the Workers, particularly women workers, in rubber plantations of Tripura is poor. About 50 per cent sampled women workers in the plantations in the state are employed either on temporary or on casual basis. At all-India level only 7 per cent women workers are temporary or casual. Housing facility is available to only 15 per cent workers in rubber plantations of Tripura whereas at all-India level this figure is more than 75 per cent. The average daily earnings of workers are also lowest in the state’s plantations of rubber when compared with these plantations of other states covered during the survey. Various other benefits provided to the workers are also minimal in the state vis-à-vis other states.

1.5 Need For The Study

Rubber has been regarded as a source of foreign exchange. Rubber plantation has being upheld as a key sector in India’s inclusive growth strategy. Thousands of people in Kanyakumari District depend on plantations for their livelihood. Issues such as comparatively low wage and inconvenient working conditions in plantations have made the sector unattractive to labourers. Further studies related to plantation labourers are also outdated ones; belonging to 1960’s and 1980’s and no recent studies are being carried out, hence there is a dearth of literature. Several changes have taken place in the working environment, in production practices, in the living conditions, amendment in the act, socio-economic factors etc in the recent years. These changes demand lot of attention for the sustenance of the rubber plantation. The studies already carried out are mostly relevant to tea and other plantation crops but not pertaining to rubber. However, most of the empirical work of rubber plantation is related to production, productivity, marketing and trade aspects of plantations. Therefore a detailed study is necessary in this area. Hence there is a need for a new study to be carried out and also it would serve as a base for further study related to labourers and rubber plantation as a whole.

II. METHODOLOGY

1.6 Type Of Research

This research is descriptive and analytical in nature.

1.7 Population

The population considered for the purpose of this study are the labourers of registered rubber plantations of Kanyakumari District. Labourers include tapper, field worker and supervisor.

1.8 Sampling Method

The researcher has chosen 326 sample labourers at random by using lottery method. Stratified random sampling method has been used for selecting the respondents.

1.9 Method Of Data Collection

The present study is carried out based on the information collected from the primary sources, as much information is not available from secondary sources. The primary data were collected using structured questionnaire.

III. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Socio-economic condition concerns the factors that can impact an individual or family's social status and economic status. It is a combination of economic and social position of an individual or a family in relation with income, education, wealth, place of residence and employment status. In this study income includes daily income, sources of income, earning members in the family, and annual house hold income. Education includes level of education of family members and the interviewee. Wealth includes ownership of house, type of house, house hold possessions, amenities provided and possession of size of land. Place of residence include locality. Employment details include type of employment and number of working days. Analysis is carried out using percentage method.

3.1 Income and Socio-Economic Condition

Income is one of the socio-economic variables which determine ones economic status in the society. Wages are paid to tappers based on block system (fixed number of trees/field to be tapped per day). Wages paid to the labourers and other sources of household income were analysed using percentage method and are shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of Socio-Economic Variable and Income

Variable		Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
INCOME	Daily Wage	Less than Rs.300	32	9.8
		Between Rs.300-Rs.500	235	72.1
		More than Rs.500	59	18.1
	Number of Earning Members in the Family	One	166	50.9
		Two	145	44.5
		Three	15	4.6
	Second Job	Yes	33	10.4
		No	293	89.6
	Other Sources of Income	Business	-	-
		Farming	33	10.1
		None	293	89.9
	Approximate Annual Household Income	Less than 1 Lakh	153	46.9
		Between 1-2 Lakhs	149	45.7
		Above 2 Lakhs	24	7.4

Source: Primary Data

From table 1, it could be assessed that 9.8% of them earn 'Less than Rs.300' per day, 72.1% of them earn 'Between Rs.300-500 per day' and 18.1% of the respondents earn 'More than Rs. 500 per day'. 50.9% of the respondents family there is only one earning member, there are two earning members in 44.5% of the respondents family and 4.6% of respondents family there are three working members. 89.6% of the respondents do not have a second job and 10.4% of them are having second job. 89.9% of them do not have a secondary source of income and only 10.1% of them do farming as their secondary source income. 46.9% of the respondents annual income is 'Less than 1 lakh', 45.7% of the respondents annual income is 'Between '1-2 lakhs' and 7.4% of them earn 'Above 2 lakhs' per year.

5.2 Education and Socio-Economic Condition

Education is an important factor which has direct relationship with the socio-economic condition of the people. An evaluation of one's status is partially decided by what kind of education one has received. Literacy statistics 2015-2016 of the study area Kanyakumari District shows that there are 1548738 total literates, out of which there are 780541 male and 768197 female literates in the state. However, the education profile among plantation laborers might vary from rest in the district. Table 2 shows the classification of respondents based on the highest level of education of the family members using percentage analysis.

Table 2. Analysis of Socio-Economic Variable and Education

Variable	Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
EDUCATION	Highest Level of Education of the Family Members	Upto 10 Std	34
		Plus Two	101
		Under Graduate	109
		Post Graduate	82
			10.4
			31
			33.4
			25.2

Source: Primary Data

As seen from the table 2, out of the 236 sample respondents, 34(10.4%) of the respondents family members are educated 'upto 10 std', 101(31.0%) of the respondents family members are educated upto 'Plus Two', 109(33.4%) of the respondents family members are 'Under Graduates' and only 82(25.2%) of the respondents family members are 'Post Graduates'.

5.3 Living Condition and Socio-Economic Condition

Circumstances that affect the way people live especially regarding their well being. In this study living conditions include ownership of house, type of house, house hold possession, prevailing facilities, possession of land, place of residence and employment details are analysed in table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of Socio-Economic Variable and Living Condition

Variable	Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage	
LIVING CONDITION	Ownership of the House	Own House	88	
		Rented	9	
		Lease	20	
		Quarters	209	
				27
				2.8
				6.1
				64.1
	Type of House	Kutcha House	31	
		Pucca House	44	
		Semi Pucca House	251	
				9.5
				13.5
				77
	House Hold Possessions	Refrigerator	148	
		TV	283	
		Radio	63	
		Telephone	65	
		Two Wheeler	115	
		Gas Stove	187	
		Mobile Phone	307	
				12.70%
				24.20%
				5.40%
				5.60%
				9.80%
				16.00%
				26.30%
	Availability of Drinking Water	Always	249	
		Sometimes	67	
		Never	10	
				76.4
				20.6
				3
	Availability of Electricity	Always	115	
		Sometimes	195	
		Never	16	
				35.3
				59.8
				4.9
Availability of Sanitation Facility	Always	117		
	Sometimes	155		
	Never	54		
			36	
			47.5	
			16.5	
Availability of Road	Always	65		
	Sometimes	20		
	Never	241		
			20	
			6.1	
			73.9	
Availability of Transportation	Always	49		
	Occasionally	28		
	Never	249		
			15	
			8.6	
			76.4	
Possession of Land	Yes	94		
	No	232		
			28.8	
			71.2	
Area of Land	Less Than 5 Cents	41		
	5-10 Cents	47		
	Above 10 Cents	6		
	Nil	232		
			12.6	
			14.4	
			1.8	
			71.2	
Locality	Urban	69		
	Rural	242		
	Resettlement Colony	15		
				21.2
			74.2	
			4.6	
Type of Employment	Full-Time	134		
	Part-Time	164		
	Temporary	16		
	Contract	12		
			41.1	
			50.3	
			4.9	
			3.7	
Number Of Working Days Per Month	Less Than 10 Days	12		
	Between 10-15 Days	72		
	Between 15-20 Days	127		
	More Than 20 Days	115		
			3.7	
			22.1	
			39	
			35.3	

Source: Primary Data

It could be assessed from the table 3 that, 64.1% of them live in quarters, 77.0% of the respondents live in 'Semi Pucca house'. 12.7% of the respondents possess refrigerator, 24.2% of the respondents possess T.V, 5.4% of the respondents possess radio, 5.6% of the respondents possess telephone, 9.8% of the respondents possess two wheeler, 16.0% of the respondents possess gas stove and 26.3% of the respondents possess mobile phone. 76.4% of the respondents have opinion that drinking water is 'always' available, 59.8% of the respondents have opinion that 'sometimes' electricity is available, 47.5% of the respondents have opinion that sanitation facility is 'sometimes' available, 73.9% of the respondents have the opinion roads are 'never' available and 76.4% of them have the opinion that transportation facility is 'never' available. 71.2% do not possess any land. 12.6% possess 'less than 5 cents' of land, 14.4% possess '5-10 cents of land', 1.8% of them possess above 10 cents of land and 71.2% of them do not possess any land. 74.2% of them live in rural area. 50.3% of them work as part-time labourers. 3.7% of them get work 'less than 10' days in a month, 39.0% of them work between 15-20 days in a month.

IV. Findings

Analysis of socio-economic condition of rubber plantation labourers reveals that 72.1% of the respondents daily wage is between Rs.300-Rs.500. There is only one earning member in 50.9% of respondents family. Concerning secondary job it was assessed that 89.6% do not have a second job. 89.9% of them do not have a secondary source of income as they do not have such opportunity. Analysis of annual income shows that 46.9% of the respondents annual income is less than 1 Lakh. 33.4% of the respondents family members are 'Under Graduates'. 64.1% of the respondents live in quarters. 77.0% of the respondents live in 'Semi Pucca house'. Regarding house hold possessions, 26.3% of the respondents possess mobile phone, 24.2% of the respondents possess T.V, 16.0% of the respondents possess gas stove, 12.7% of the respondents possess refrigerator, 9.8% of the respondents possess two wheeler, 5.6% of the respondents possess telephone and only 5.4% of the respondents possess radio. Analysis of prevailing facility exposes that 76.4% of the respondents have opinion that drinking water is 'always' available, 59.8% of the respondents have opinion that 'sometimes' electricity is available, 47.5% of the respondents have opinion that sanitation facility is 'sometimes' available, 73.9% of the respondents have the opinion roads are 'never' available, and 76.4% of them have the opinion that transportation facility is 'never' available. 71.2% do not possess any land. 14.4% of the respondents own '5-10 cents of land'. 74.2% of the respondents live in rural area. Analysis of employment detail shows that 50.3% of them work as part-time labourers. 39.0% of them work between 15-20 days in a month.

V. Suggestions

The study reveals that majority of the respondent's daily wage is low; hence the management can consider revising the wage comparative to other labour intensive sector or neighbouring states in order to improve their socio-economic condition. Increasing the wage beyond the minimum wages act helps the labourers to manage the increasing cost of living. Improving and maintaining the infrastructure facilities such as road, sanitation, electricity and transportation will improve the standard of living of the labourers. The management can improve the social security measures provided to the labourers during off season. Encouraging and supporting the labourers to do farming or raise cattle or poultry as their secondary source of income.

VI. Conclusion

The study was conducted to find the Socio-Economic Condition of Rubber Plantation labourers in Kanyakumari District. Only organized rubber plantations were considered for the study. The study covers only Kanyakumari District and not applicable to any other region where rubber is grown. The researcher gathered information from the rubber plantation labourers through questions framed to understand about their wages, education, living conditions, and employment status. Most of the employees have no other tasks leaving apart the plantation work. The region surrounding still remains underdeveloped so the employees have no other sources of employment to improve their lifestyle. The present wage structure is not adequate to run their family. Though they have drinking water, road, transportation and sanitation facility but not maintained properly. They are leading a life in poor condition and hence the younger generations are pursuing better paid jobs. Further studies may be conducted to explore the various other reasons for the plantation labour migrating to other jobs. Studies may also be conducted to find out the extent of the estate owners adhering to the plantation labour Act. The study would be of much use to the policy makers and the society at large.

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