THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-10-November-2019

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

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Abstract

Agriculture is the largest and most important sector of Indian economy. Agriculture contributes 40 to 50 percent of national income and provides livelihood to 70 percent of the population of the country. Rubber plantation industry in India enjoys the distinction of having the highest rate of growth in comparison to that in other rubber growing countries of the world. According to International Labor 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 laborers 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 laborers 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.

THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-10-November-2019

Keywords: Laborer, Plantation, Plantation Crop, Rubber, Socio-Economic Condition.

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 Thattekadu, Ernakulum District, and 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 laborers and 988 female laborers. 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].

Statement of the Problem

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

ISSN:0971-1260

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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 1951worker 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.

Objectives of the Study

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 analyze the living condition of rubber plantation labourers.

Review Of Literature

Nagarajan P.S and Mathiraj S.P (2010) in their research paper on “Export and Employment Opportunities in Rubber Industry” have concluded that natural rubber is one of the most important agro-based industrial raw materials in the world. Global natural rubber output is slightly lower than consumption and that has helped rubber prices to touch high levels during 2005 and 2006. Despite being the fourth largest producer of natural rubber in the world, India is yet to achieve the status of a major rubber – exporting country.

Darling Selvi V (2004) in her article "Problems and prospects of rubber Cultivators" published in the Kisan World, states that the main problem of the rubber cultivators is the cost of labour. Since Rubber cultivation, maintenance and yield depend on labour force, labour availability is their ultimate problem. The other problems are cost of manure, climatic conditions, of market integration.

SanyalJoyjit, Dr. SikidarSujit, TimungAjit, (2015) in their paper “Socio-Economic Condition of Rubber Plantation Workers- A Synoptic Study”, has presented that the nature of work is

ISSN:0971-1260

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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.

Scope of 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.

METHODOLOGY

Type Of Research

This research is descriptive and analytical in nature.

Population

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

Sampling Method

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

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.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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.

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 analyzed 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 Wages	Less than Rs.500	40	11.2
		Between Rs.500-Rs.800	250	80.1
		More than Rs.800	60	20.3
	Number of Earning Members in the Family	One	170	63.4
		Two	150	52.3
		Three	60	6.8
	Other Sources of Income	Business	-	-
		Farming	43	12.3

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		None	300	90.2
	Approximate Annual Household Income	Less than 1 lakh	160	48.7
		Between 1-2 lakhs	155	46.3
		Above 2 lakhs	25	8.1

Source: Primary Data

From table 1, it could be assessed that 11.2% of them earn „Less than Rs.500‟ per day, 80.1% of them earn „Between Rs.500-800 per day‟ and 20.3% of the respondents earn „More than Rs. 800 per day‟. 63.4% of the respondents family there is only one earning member, there are two earning members in 52.3% of the respondent's family and 6.8% of respondents family there are three working members. 48.7% of the respondents annual income is „Less than 1 lakh‟, 46.3% of the respondents annual income is „Between „1-2 lakhs‟ and 8.1% of them earn, Above 2 lakhs‟ per year.

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 Respondent	Percentage
Education	**Highest Level of Education of the Family Members**	Upto 10th std	34	10.4
		Plus Two	101	31
		Under Graduate	109	33.4
		Post Graduate	82	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 „up to 10 std‟, 101(31.0%) of the respondents family members are educated up to „Plus Two‟, 109(33.4%) of the respondents family

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members are „Under Graduates‟ and only 82(25.2%) of the respondents family members are „Post Graduates‟.

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 analyzed that, 64.1% of them live in quarters, 77.0% of the respondents live in „Semi Pucca house‟. 12.7% of the respondents posses refrigerator, 24.2% of the respondents posses T.V, 5.4% of the respondents posses radio, 5.6% of the respondents posses telephone, 9.8% of the respondents posses two wheeler, 16.0% of the respondents poses gas stove and 26.3% of the respondents posses 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% posses „less than 5 cents „of land, 14.4% posses „5-10 cents of land‟, 1.8% of them posses above 10 cents of land and 71.2% of them do not posses 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.

Findings of the Study

Analysis of socio-economic condition of rubber plantation labourers reveals that 80.1% of the respondent’s daily wage is between Rs.500-Rs.800. There is only one earning member in 63.4% of respondent’s family. Analysis of annual income shows that 48.7% of the respondent’s annual income is less than 1 Lakh. 33.4% of the respondent’s 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 posses mobile phone, 24.2% of the respondents posses T.V, 16.0% of the respondents posses gas stove, 12.7% of the respondents posses refrigerator, 9.8% of the respondents posses two wheeler, 5.6% of the respondents posses telephone and only 5.4% of the respondents posses

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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.

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 neighboring 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.

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 were 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

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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 useful to the policy makers and the society at large.

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