

A STUDY OF RUBBER WOOD MARKET

Dr. V. HARIDASAN

Introduction

Rubber is a perennial crop which provides a variety of materials to man. The original motivator for developing rubber plantations was the latex it produced. Later

it dawned on man that rubber wood too can be a useful addition to the variety of products that the rubber tree offered. With the depletion of forests and the growth of population, the need for using rubber wood has been felt in India. From a recent study using satellites, it has been found that the forest cover in India has been considerably lower than the 20 and odd percentage reported in official statistics. Therefore there has been an urgency to meet the growing wood requirements of the country from dependable sources and rubber wood can be one of them.

Until three decades ago, rubber wood was used only as firewood in India. In the sixties it began to be used for manufacturing packing cases. With the rapid industrialisation of the country and the exhaustion of low-priced wood sources, more and more people turned to rubber wood for a number of uses. Packing case manufacturing industry however continues to be the most important consumer of rubber wood* in India and a paper on the subject has been published recently. The present study attempts to evaluate the use of rubber wood in other sectors of wood-based industry.

* 'Rubber wood-A study of supply and demand in India', by Haridasan V. and Sreenivasan K. C., Rubber Board Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 4 April-June 1985, pp.19-21.

Materials and Methods

The data required for the study were collected by visiting the units consuming rubber wood. In the first stage the lists of factories producing plywood, veneers, splinters etc. were collected from the Industries Department of Kerala and the Kanyakumari District Industries Centre, Nagercoil. Making use of the lists, visits were made to the factories in 1985-86. A total of 273 units could be visited for this purpose. The data were collected by the author from the owner, manager, managing partner or managing director as the case may be, by direct interview.

Most of the factories in Kerala got some quantity of wood from the Forest Departments on the recommendation of the Industries Department. The two Departments maintained records relating to the units. The information obtained from the Departments was used for testing the veracity of the data given by individual units. The data related to the period 1984-85.

Results and Discussions

Table I shows the distribution of units in Kerala and Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The total quantity of rubber wood consumed by the 273 units was 3.27 million cft (92.7 thousand cmt.) in 1984-85. Of this quantity, 98.0 percent was accounted by the units in Kerala. The study covered the factories producing plywood, veneers and splinters for safety matches and other units producing accessories for textile industry and furniture.

Table II shows the units producing plywood and the quantity of

rubber wood consumed by them. It will be seen that 37 percent of the total consumption of rubber wood in the plywood sector was in Calicut district. Some plywood units in the district also produced veneers and splinters as well. The largest number of units was also in the same district. There was no plywood unit in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu.

Excepting five units, the plywood produced by all was mainly used for manufacturing teacheast and naturally the size of the plywood was usually around 75 x 75cm with three plys of wood (around 3 mm thickness). Some units also produced plywood for seat and back of chairs. The plywood produced by the units also found use in the manufacture of suit cases. The five units were fairly large ones and they produced wood of different sizes and qualities. They were found using some form of chemical treatment for rubberwood. The five units used rubber wood for inside ply of commercial plywood when quality wood was in short supply. Three of the five units also occasionally used rubber wood as block-board for flush doors. No plywood factory was found using the chemical impregnation method for treating rubber wood. It may be mentioned that two large units operating in Kerala, reported that they were not using rubber wood and hence they are not included in the study.

Table III shows the units producing veneers and splinters for safety matches. Traditionally veneers and splinters have been produced from soft wood. Unfortunately soft wood is in short supply and the manufactures

have to fall back upon the available substitutes. Although rubber wood is not the best substitute for veneers and splinters, in the absence of any suitable wood it is being used by the industry. Quilon district has the largest share of consumption in this sector followed by Palghat district.

Table IV shows the details of the rubber wood consumption in other spheres of the industry. There were only 16 units in this sector. The Table shows that these units are located in Trichur, Kottayam and Quilon districts of Kerala. The main items they produced were bobbins and shuttles for textile mills. In Kottayam district one unit produced door and window frames and shutters and also furniture after chemical impregnation treatment of rubber wood. In the same district another unit was producing penelling material after treating rubber wood.

But the unit discontinued that line of operation recently.

The clear felling of forest trees has been almost stopped in Kerala and the Kerala Government introduced the distribution of wood to registered SSI units a few years ago. The distribution is made by the Forest Department on the recommendation of the Industries Department of the State.

Table V shows the demand for wood as assessed by the Industries Department and the quantity of wood distributed to the different units in Kerala. The Table shows that only 14% of demand was met from the supply of wood from the Forest Department. It also shows that around 67 percent of the demand was met by rubber wood purchased from the open market.

An attempt has also been made to estimate the total quantity of rubber wood consumed by the

packing case manufacturing industry and plywood, veneers and splinters and other sectors of the industry discussed in this paper. It would show that a total quantity of 16.9 million cft (0.49 million cmt) of rubber wood was consumed in Kerala and Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu in 1984-85 as per the two studies. The two studies show that the small scale wood based industry in Kerala and Kanyakumari district is sustained and supported mainly by the rubber wood.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Dr. M. R. Sethuraj, Director and Shri. P. N. Radhakrishna Pillai Joint Director for their valuable suggestions. I also record my gratitude to Shri. P. Mukundan Menon RPC, and Shri. M. G. Jagadish Das Join RPC for their advice. The help rendered by Shri. K. G. Sreenivasan and Shri. V. Purushothaman is acknowledged.

TABLE I
District wise Classification of Rubber wood Consumption
(1984-1985)

District	No. of Units	Quantity(CMT)	%
Alleppey	16	909	1
Kottayam	27	9598	10
Ernakulam	18	5701	6
Trichur	41	12400	13
Palghat	18	4605	5
Malappuram	5	1515	2
Calicut	69	20102	21
Cannanore	11	12772	14
Quilon	42	21581	23
Pathanamthitta	4	1416	2
Idukky	5	731	1
Total Kerala	256	91330	98
Kanyakumari Dist.	17	1342	2
G. T.	273	92672 (3.27 million cft)	100

TABLE II

District wise Consumption of Rubber wood in Plywood factories (1984-1985)

District	No.of Units	Quantity (CMT)	%
Alleppey	2	179	-
Kottayam	7	5392	11
Ernakulam	9	4384	9
Trichur	16	6737	14
Palghat	1	285	-
Malappuram	2	552	1
Calicut	54	18190	37
Cannanore	6	11781	23
Quilon	12	1008	2
Pathanamthitta	2	1360	3
Total Kerala	111	49868	100
Kanyakumari Dist.	—	—	—
G. T.	111	49868 (1.76 million cft)	100

TABLE III

District wise Consumption of Rubber wood in veneers & splinters manufacturing Units (1984-85)

District	No.of Units	Quantity (CMT)	%
Alleppey	14	731	2
Kottayam	18	3798	10
Ernakulam	9	1317	3
Trichur	14	4171	11
Palghat	16	4237	11
Malappuram	3	963	2
Calicut	15	1911	5
Cannanore	5	991	2
Quilon	28	19441	49
Pathanamthitta	2	57	—
Idukky	5	831	2
Total Kerala	129	38448	97
Kanyakumari Dist.	17	1342	3
G. T.	146	39790 (1.40 million cft)	100

TABLE IV

District wise Consumption of Rubber wood in units other than Plywood, veneers & splinters (1984-85)

District	No. of Units	Quantity (CMT)	%
Alleppey	—	—	—
Kottayam	2	408	14
Ernakulam	—	—	—
Trichur	11	1491	49
Palghat	1	85	3
Malappuram	—	—	—
Calicut	—	—	—
Cannanore	—	—	—
Quilon	2	1030	34
Pathanamthitta	—	—	—
Idukky	—	—	—
Total Kerala	16	3014	100
Kanyakumari Dist.	—	—	—
G. T.	16	3014 (0.11 million cft.)	100

TABLE V

Wood Requirement, Quantity Alloted and Quantity of Rubber wood Consumed (1984-85) (256 Units - Kerala)

	Quantity (CMT)			
	Plywood	Splinters & Veneers	Others	Total
Demand for wood as assessed by the Industries Department	60000	53000	23000	136000
Forest Dept. (Quantity allotted)	9000 (15% of requirement)	5600 (11%)	4200 (18%)	18800 (14%)
Other sources	1132 (2%)	8952 (16%)	15786 (69%)	25870 (19%)
Rubber wood consumption according to the study	49868 (83%)	38448 (73%)	3014 (13%)	91330 (67%)