

A STUDY OF THE WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF LABOUR IN RUBBER PROCESSING FACTORIES

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Rubber is a crop which involves a degree of processing. In the case of large estates the processing factories are located within themselves, while processing the rubber of small growers is undertaken by crepe mills spread all over Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Around 15-20 per cent of the crop is scrap rubber. These are converted into estate brown crepe or crumb rubber. There are separate factories for manufacturing crumb rubber as well as estate brown crepe rubber. The present study covers only the crepe mills.

The study was carried out in 1988-89 and the data related to the period 1987-88. At the end of 1988, there were 124 crepe mills in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. For the purpose of collecting data, an investigator visited 102 crepe mills. Although he could visit 102 mills he could collect data only from 67 mills. The others were not working at the time of visit. The operation of the crepe mill is often seasonal, depending upon the availability of scrap rubber. The investigator contacted two workers from every crepe mill, totalling 134 workers from 67 mills. The data were collected in a pre-tested questionnaire. The information collected included the family background of workers, their education, age, dependants, size of

Table I:
Age distribution of workers.

Age	No.
18 to 25 years	21
26 to 35 years	47
36 to 45 years	46
46 to 55 years	16
Above 55 years	4
Total	134

The family size of workers is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: No. of families with children.

	No. of families	Dependants (other than own children)	No. of families
1 child	26	1 dependant	22
2 children	43	2 dependants	23
3 children	25	3 dependants	17
4 children	9	4 dependants	9
5 children	3	5 & above	5
Total	106		76

family, length of service, nature of work, working days in the previous year, income from the crepe mill, supplementary income, savings and expenditure.

Family background: Of the 134 workers, 132 were male and the rest female. Of the total, 78 workers belonged to christian, 47

to Hindu and 9 to Muslim community. Out of 134 workers, 5 were illiterates. Of these 3 were Malayalam speaking workers, while 2 spoke Tamil. 15 workers studied upto SSLC and 2 beyond SSLC. The percentage of literates therefore formed 96. Of the 134 workers 112 were married but only 106 had children. The age

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distribution of the workers is given in Table 1.

From the table it can be seen that families with more than 3 children formed only 11 per cent and families with more than 3 dependants formed 18 per cent.

Income and expenditure: On an average, the workers earned Rs.508/- per month from their main occupation and Rs.160/- from subsidiary occupation. In addition to these sources, other family members contributed on an average Rs.119/- per month. The total monthly income of the worker's family was Rs.787.

The workers were found to spend more than what they were earning. The total monthly expenditure per family was Rs.811/- showing a deficit of Rs.24/- per month. The average expenditure per head (per capita) was Rs.197.80. The deficit was met from their bonus payments and by borrowing. Although this was the general picture there were some workers who had savings also. Thus 21 workers had some sort of insurance with the LIC, 17 workers had joined chitty and 10 workers had small bank deposits. Gold ornaments were found with 104 families. The pattern of expenditure showed that 65% of expenditure was on food followed by 12% on the item "entertainment and others". This item included

Table 3:
Average expenditure per head
of the worker and his family (monthly).

Items	Rs.	Percentage
Food	127.83	65
Clothing	13.80	7
House rent	0.90	1
Education 6.00	3	
Fuel & lighting	9.38	5
Medicine	6.76	3
Travel	7.95	4
Entertainment & others	25.18	12
Total	197.80	100

expenditure on beedy, cigarettes, alcaholic beverages and film. The details are shown in Table 3.

Social security benefits from crepe mills: The study showed that the minimum wages notified by the Government were being paid in 57 mills, while 2 mills engaged workers on piece rate and 1 mill engaged the workers on a productivity linked wage system. Seven crepe mills followed different wages. Of these 1 factory engaged women workers only. The average working days were 6 per week and working hours were 8 per day. Fifty eight mills gave washing and uniform allowances to the workers and 62 mills gave annual bonus. Sixty one mills gave

leave with wages to the workers. However, Provident Fund facility was available only in 20 mills. There was no uniformity in the annual bonus paid to the workers. It varied from 8 to 19 per cent. Out of the 134 workers 14 workers had undergone prolonged medical treatment during the last 5 years. However, there is no evidence to attribute that the disease was caused by the working conditions in the crepe mills.

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Rubber Honey

Rubber tree is a prolific producer of honey. In the rubber tree, honey is found at the extra-floral nectory glands at the end of the petiole where the leaflets join. It is estimated that honey from rubber plantations form around 40 per cent of the total Indian production of honey. Studies show that about 15 hives can be placed in a hectare of rubber plantation. In a normal year about 10 Kg. of honey can be obtained from one hive.

Honey is a saturated solution of sugars. Rubber honey contains three major sugars viz., fruit sugar, grape sugar and cane sugar. Cane sugar forms only a way small percentage and hence rubber honey is devoid of the harmful effects associated with cane sugar.