CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rubber has its due contribution in the economic progress of the country. From the very beginning of its cultivation during the early part of this century, rubber has consistently played its imperative role in the economic and industrial growth of the country. The beginning of this century witnessed the hard work put in by the early pioneers. The Indian Rubber Board came into being in 1947 by an Act of Parliament as a corporate body to look after the rubber industry. The research activities of Rubber Board have made significant contribution to the rubber plantation industry with sustained research and development activities coupled with extension and advisory services for transfer of new technology to the field. The rubber-producing sector had a quick change over from the traditional methods to modern cultivation practices. The Indian Rubber Plantation Sector is dominated by smallholdings, which accounts for almost 88% of the production and area. Of these 95% of production is in Kerala. The preponderance of small and marginal growers makes the sector vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen, fluctuations in price and also experience difficulty in gaining access to technology and information. To overcome these difficulties and strengthen the sector, the Rubber Board has promoted a group management system by encouraging formation of Rubber Producers’ Societies since 1985. The formation of Rubber Producers’ Societies at the regional and sub-regional levels has imparted dynamism in all spheres of cultivation activities among the small and marginal rubber growers in Kerala. In the wake of globalization, when the small holdings sector has to
compete with the international market, the need for strengthening/rejuvenating the Rubber Producers’ Societies sector become exceedingly important.

The main objective of the Rubber Producers’ Societies is to work for the prosperity of the area of its operation with particular emphasis on improving the social and economic status of its rubber grower members and also to serve as an effective media for dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge on rubber among its members. The scope of activities of Rubber Producers’ Societies have been considerably expanded and broadbased from time to time on the basis of the feedback received from the small growers. All activities connected with rubber right from cultivation up to final marketing are areas where the Rubber Producers’ Societies can render effective service to the member growers. In a nutshell, it has to function as a nucleus rubber development centre. A study on the evolution of the Rubber Producers’ Societies would point out that the self reliant approach based on the concept that community management and local self reliance are key organizing themes and recognizing that development is ultimately achieved by individuals and families that have the freedom and opportunity to create a future of their own choosing through a moulding of local and external knowledge and resources, has been recognized by only a few. The societies which had knowingly or unknowingly embraced the idea are gradually emerging in the direction of self reliance. Lack of sustained activities and several peculiarities in the production as well as marketing sector at the regional level have adversely affected the evolution of these societies as vibrant self-reliant groups.
1.1. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The problem under study is “An Evaluation of the Working of Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala “Rubber producers’ societies are voluntary and non-profit associations of Small Rubber growers organized with a view to achieve agricultural, economical, and social development and also to attain the progress of the operational area. The study evaluates the functions of Rubber Producers’ Societies in the state of Kerala. The study analyses the various aspects of working of Rubber Producers Societies. The major functions of Rubber-Producer’s Societies include transfer of technology; collection, processing and marketing of rubber; supply of inputs; training and extension programmes; and linkage with other organizations. Other functions also include membership drive, management, raising and utilizing funds, maintenance of accounts and its audit, and social commitments. The study seeks to find out the various problems faced by Rubber Producers’ Societies in the state. The problems mainly relate to management, members, finance, collection, processing and marketing, and others.

1.2. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objectives of the study includes the following:

1. To evaluate the functions discharged by Rubber Producers’ Societies in the state of Kerala.
2. To analyze the problems faced by Rubber Producers’ Societies
3. To give recommendations to strengthen the working of Rubber Producers’ Societies in the State.
1.3. **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology adopted for the research is explained below:

1.3.1 **Type of Study**

This study is an exploratory, descriptive and analytical study. This study explores into the depth of the problem, describes its various aspects, and analyze the different situations of the problem. It is also a sampling study which considers only the samples of the units of study.

1.3.2 **Type of Data**

Primary Data and Secondary Data are used for the study. Primary data relate to the different and various aspects of the working and the problems of Rubber Producers’ Societies. Primary data is collected from the samples of Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala. The secondary data relating to all the aspects of Rubber Producers’ Societies are also used for the study. All the available sources are tapped for collecting the secondary data.

1.3.3 **Sampling Design**

The Sampling Design adopted for the study is as follows:

1.3.3.1 **Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame is the Directory of Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala published in 2006 by National Federation of Rubber Producers’ Societies. According to the Directory, there are 2052 Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala.
The state is divided into 25 regions and the 2052 societies are distributed over the 25 regions. The sample frame thus is the population from which the required samples are selected.

### 1.3.3.2 Sampling Unit

The Sampling Unit is the Rubber Producers’ Society registered as per Charitable Societies Act and listed in the Directory published by National Federation of Rubber Producers’ Societies.

### 1.3.3.3 Sampling Size

The Sample Size is fixed at 200 Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala. The sample size is determined at this level after taking into account a number of factors such as time, money, effort and volume of work etc.

### 1.3.3.4 Sampling Technique

The sample size of 200 Rubber Producers’ Societies are selected according to Stratified Random Sampling Method. In Stratified Sampling Method, the process of grouping all the 2052 Rubber Producers’ Societies into relatively homogenous subgroups is adopted.

Grouping is made according to the regions. There are 25 regions in the state and hence there are 25 stratas. These stratas are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Proportionate Allocation Method is used to determine the sample fraction in each strata. Sample fraction in each strata is proportional to that of the total population.
To get the required samples from each stratum, simple random sampling method is applied within each stratum. Since a complete list of Rubber Producers’ Societies in each region (strata) is available, Lottery Method is adopted to select the required random samples of Rubber Producers’ Societies in each region.

T1. Selection of Samples of 200 Rubber Producing Societies in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total No. of RPS</th>
<th>Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.</td>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.</td>
<td>Nedumangad</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.</td>
<td>Punalur</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>04.</td>
<td>Kottarakkara</td>
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<tr>
<td>05.</td>
<td>Adoor</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.</td>
<td>Changanassery</td>
<td>107</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.</td>
<td>Kanjirappally</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Pala</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Erattupetta</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Thodupuzha</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Muvattupuzha</td>
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<td>Kothamangalam</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2052</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3.4 **Method of Data Collection**

Direct Personal Investigation is used to collect the requisite primary data from the 200 samples Rubber Producers’ Societies. Interviews are planned with the Board of Directors of the sample Rubber Producers’ Societies. Member growers of these Rubber Producers’ Societies are also consulted for collecting the primary data. The comprehensive data are collected from each Rubber Producers’ Societies through a number of sittings with the concerned respondents.

Secondary data is collected from the relevant literature survey. All the details relating to the working of Rubber Producers’ Societies are collected from available sources including internet.

1.3.5 **Technique of Data Collection**

A pre-tested and structured schedule of questions is used to collect the requisite primary data. A pilot study was conducted for this purpose. The schedule of questions cover all the information relevant and useful for the study.

1.3.6 **Period of Data Collection**

Primary data is collected from sample Rubber Producers’ Societies for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2008. Data is also collected for earlier and later periods, wherever and whenever considered necessary.
1.3.7 Analysis of Data

Primary Data collected from sample Rubber Producers’ Societies is analyzed to evaluate the various aspects of the working as well as the problems of Rubber Producers’ Societies. Appropriate statistical techniques are used to analyze the data. Data were analyzed with a view to arrive at valid conclusions.

1.5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A thorough and detailed review of the available literature on the topic of study is done with a view to appraise the developments occurred in the Rubber Industry with special reference to Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala. The papers presented in various seminars and a number of studies made on Rubber Producers’ Societies constitute the core of literature. Of these only the highly relevant information is given as under:

P.C. Cyriac\(^2\) (1989) has remarked that the Rubber Producers’ Societies are groups of 50 to 200 small rubber growers residing in a locality. The societies have service area of two to three kilometres radius. Rubber Growers having a rubber area of 0.20 hectares (50 cents) are eligible to become members. This small group makes the interaction among themselves more effective. He was the person who actually put forward the concept of RPS in Rubber Plantation industry in Kerala.

P.K. Narayanan\(^3\) remarked that the transfer of appropriate technology on a seasonal basis to the vulnerable section of the rubber planting community in an
intelligent manner, coupled with timely delivery of quality inputs and equipment at cheaper rates is perhaps the largest single factor that would help maximize production and productivity of rubber from small holdings. Productivity of small holdings has been remaining lower than that of the professionally managed large estates. In the light of this the Rubber Board felt it necessary to promote group approach among rural smallholdings at the village level for timely transfer of technology and delivery of inputs.

The role of the Rubber Producers’ Societies as a nucleus for dissemination of information and distribution of inputs to the members is highlighted by K. S. Varma. The RPS channelize and expedite the distribution of financial and technical assistance from the Rubber Board and the government by group action. They can improve the quality and price of the rubber produced by members by helping them to follow proper agricultural practices, better processing, product manufacturing and group marketing.

The reason for the failure of the Rubber Marketing Co-operative societies, according to K. K. Abraham (1990) is the absence of roots for them in the villages where farmers live, cultivate and produce rubber. The Rubber Producers’ Societies run by farmers at the village level make the co-operative movement strong and beneficial by having the necessary roots and foundation. They have been registered under the Charitable Societies Act in order to make them function effectively eliminating the complications in the working and red-tapism. The Rubber Producers’ Societies are the self help groups of the small rubber growers and are considered as non-governmental organizations in the rubber cultivation
fields. It was with the intention of establishing a forum to save the small rubber growers from exploitation by developing a fellowship of the growers that P.C. Cyriac, the then chairman of the Rubber Board initiated the activities of the RPS.

Having made a study of the marketing channels of Natural Rubber with special reference to co-operative marketing in Kerala, K. K. Kuriakose⁶ (1995) stated that the formation of the Rubber Producers’ Societies in each village for daily collection of latex and scrap rubber, facilitates the full utilization of the production capacity of the processing factories run by the marketing societies. The Rubber Producers’ Societies in the villages need to be strengthened by providing required professional support through appropriate agencies. The study suggests that the Rubber Board and the government should take special effort to increase the financial assistance given to the small rubber growers and strengthen rubber marketing societies and the Rubber Producers’ Societies.

A. K. Krishnakumar⁷ (1999) says that the RPS, a valuable asset, attempts the reformation of the small-scale rubber growers. The small farmers having an average of less than half hectare of rubber-cultivated land in possession produce 87 per cent of the total rubber produced in India. But they get less than the market price. The main reason for this is the shortage of basic facilities and the fact that the small farmers are unorganized. Only the RPS can make the technological and scientific knowledge available to the farmers, distribute agricultural implements to them and make available other facilities that they need.

In a study about the technology adoption in rubber smallholdings in Kerala, T. U. Ushadevi⁸ states that the RPS helped a lot in the diffusion of
technology among the small rubber growers. The technology package adopted by the estates is more advanced than that of the small growers. The future of rubber economy in India and Kerala depends on performance of the small holding sector. Adoption of the practice of testing soil and leaf is very poor among small rubber growers of Kerala.

A. K. Krishankumar⁹ (2000) emphasis the impact of various schemes implemented by the Rubber Board qualitatively and quantitatively leading to higher productivity and higher income levels. An assessment of impact of Rubber producers’ Societies in the small holding sector also has been made with relation to its role in acting as a conduit for transfer of technology. Though there are 2,000 RPS the level of performance among them vary significantly. When some perform exceptionally well others are relatively weak. A constraint analysis of the factors leading to the varying level of performance of the various RPS across the state also have been described. 70 percent of the RPS could maintain the same level of productivity. A factor analysis for the various indicators identified as contributing factors to the level of performance of the RPS have also been described. The paper also describes the initiatives of the Board involving farmer resource persons and implementing women and tribal development projects in the rubber sector. Experience in promoting consortium of RPS for processing and marketing also have been highlighted.

V.K. Rao⁰ observes that the Board though has adopted a group approach in its extension programme about 35 years ago, a real participatory extension approach has been initiated only during the last 5 years. For the rubber sector to
survive the changes, considerable strengthening of the small holding sector is required. Participatory extension with a focus on institution building at grass roots level can be the best means to achieve it at a faster rate.

E. Lalithakumari\textsuperscript{11} and Jom Jacob describe the important component of natural rubber industry in India. They outline the Production Sector, Imports and Exports, Price, Types of Rubber and the present status in the world scenario. According to them Indian Rubber Industry passed through many vicissitudes and attained a fairly significant position in the global arena in terms of its size and different structural parameters.

P. Mukundan Menon\textsuperscript{12} (2002) gives a detailed account of the past, present and future situations of Natural Rubber in India. He outlines the history of the rubber tree and the growth and development of rubber plantation industry in the country. He also examines how the overall development and prosperity of the industry has been achieved, what factors have played crucial roles in the process and what the foreseeable future can be considered to hold for natural rubber in India.

Joseph Sebastian\textsuperscript{13} reveals that the Janatha Model Rubber Producers’ Societies at Aimcombu has been instrumental in the overall development of the rubber farming community it has been serving. The sustainability of small and marginal farmers could be ensured if other Rubber Producers’ Societies can follow this example.

K. K. John\textsuperscript{14} remarked that the RPS could do some commendable job for stabilizing the price of natural rubber, especially at time of price slide by helping
the growers to withhold their produce till the price increases. By providing safe and sufficient godown facilities, the RPS can help the growers to postpone the sale of their produce till the prices improves. He added that by giving sufficient godown facilities, supply of rubber could be regulated in accordance with the demand and price by blocking the immediate entry of natural rubber into the market. The Rubber Board and Government should provide funds for the construction of godowns to RPS.

S. Usharani\textsuperscript{15} (2003) conducted a study to analyze the performance of some Rubber Producers’ Societies and also to quantify the impact of marketing of Natural Rubber though Rubber Producers’ Societies. The objective of the study are (i) to analyze the performance of selected Rubber Producers’ Societies in Thiruvanthapuram District; (ii) to assess the impact of marketing of Natural Rubber through selected Rubber Producers’ Societies as latex/sheets; and to assess how far marketing has helped the organizational development of these Rubber Producers’ Societies. It was evident that group processing and marketing of Natural Rubber through Rubber Producers’ Societies could ensure quality upgradation in the small holder sector, which could wipe off the ‘thekkan’ grade gradually. Due to the distinct tier system prevailing in the Natural Rubber market, exploitation by middlemen occurs at different levels in the case of private marketing sector. The marketing channel through Rubber Producers’ Societies and companies limit the exploitation level. Here the loss in price due to downgrading, incorrect weighing etc. are eliminated, helping the growers to realize better price for the members of Rubber Producers’ Societies.
A F S Budiman\textsuperscript{16} discusses the global price trend of Natural Rubber. The price of NR is currently the most significant issues of the global rubber industry and trade, as NR has now become more of a social commodity affecting the livelihood of over 35 million small holders worldwide. He says that the most important period for price forecasting is most likely the medium-term, ranging from two to five years ahead, as this is generally the time-scale on which business investment decisions are made. With imminent shortage of NR supply in the near future, medium – and long-term trend of NR prices are quite favourable but still hard to secure due to great uncertainties of the world situation in the forthcoming years, which could influence the demand side to a great extent.

P.V. Geevergees \textsuperscript{17}. T James Mathews and P. Achuthankutty observed in a paper the various advantages of group processing and marketing management system namely (a) revival of inactive Rubber Producers’ Societies through extension support (b) sharing of resources available with the farmers and between Rubber Producers’ Societies (c) switching over strategy for production of different types of rubber as per market demand (d) improvement in bargaining capacity, and (e) quality improvement through collective improvement through collective processing and strict supervision. The challenges facing the rubber plantations particularly the small growers can be addressed through group approach. The consortium of Rubber Producers’ Societies and marketing companies in the co-operative sector now under operation in some regions of the traditional rubber growing tract of Kerala has proved its worth in this context.
K. Tharian George\textsuperscript{18} (2004) reviews the major achievements of the Economics Division of Rubber Research Institute of India. The achievements include

- Building up a comprehensive database and analytical inputs on yield performance of major planting materials, rubber products manufacturing industry, foreign trade in rubber and rubber products, rubber wood and honey from a policy perspective.

- Comprehensive studies on the dominant smallholding sector such as resource use efficiency, intercropping practices, impact if input subsidy scheme, labour management and primary marketing with relevant policy inputs.

- Pioneering in-house study on the operational efficiency of rubber plantations at different levels of management.

- First crop – specific study on the implications of WTO Agreement with relevant policy inputs to the concerned authorities.

Mr. A. V. Antony\textsuperscript{19}, Mr. M. N. Gopinath and Mr. T.V. Mathew (2005) have undertaken a study which aimed at an evaluation of practices adopted in holdings with high productivity levels and compare it with holdings with relatively low productivity to identify gaps. Significant correlation was obtained for practices adopted even during immature phase, such as soil conservation measures, ground cover management, manuring and plant protection measures. Wide variation among adoption of technology has been noticed between regions.
Age of farmers, extension support, retention of excess non rubber trees, etc. also have contributed to lower the productivity.

According to Mr. Sunny Varghese\textsuperscript{20}, Mrs. Claramma P.V. and Dr. Geethakutty P.S Natural Rubber processing in India was oriented to catering the domestic industry, which had been relying on Ribbed Smoked Sheets (RSS). 70% of the processed form of rubber in India is Ribbed Smoked Sheets which is against the global pattern. Traditionally, Ribbed Smocked Sheets have been processed in the individual smallholdings, where facilities for scientific processing are inadequate. One of the studies conducted indicated that only 19% of the small holders possess processing facility in the holdings. This implies that bulk of the rubber processed is adopting unscientific practices. Processing in individual holdings has several disadvantages as it leads to production of low quality sheets, lacking homogeneity, resulting in higher unit cost, lower return and drudgery for the small holders family and the workers. The environmental issues related to the disposal of effluent also has been posing problems.

Abdul Aziz\textsuperscript{21} and S. A. Kadir examines the research achievements, challenges and future directions for R & D in the rubber growing countries. The predominant role of the rubber smallholders in the NR industry today combined with declining interest of the plantation sector pose new challenges to the public sector R & D institutes in ensuring the continued viability of the industry. The mechanism of transferring research findings effectively to the small holders and encouraging the development of the small and medium scale industries (SMI) involved in rubber products manufacturing needs improvement.
A study has been conducted by Mr. B. Anilkumar\textsuperscript{22} and Mrs. M.D. Jessy with a view to analyzing the pattern of inter cropping in the small holdings and its impact on socio economic aspects besides its impact on the growth of rubber. The study has revealed that inter cropping has helped in increasing the income level of farmers and banana was identified as the most popular crop. Region wise difference in choice of crops has been observed. The paper discusses in detail the economics of various inter crops besides analyzing the impact of the inter crops on growth of rubber under different agro-climatic conditions.

S. Deepthi\textsuperscript{23} describes the analysis of performance of selected RPS involved in marketing of latex/sheets and assesses the impact of marketing NR through these RPS. The study also had the objective of analyzing the evolution of these societies into self reliant and viable units in the field. The study was carried out in the Kollam district where the RPS has not attained the same level of growth as in other parts of the state. An exploratory and analytical study compiling both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed. The results of the study indicate that marketing/group processing through RPS helped in improving the quality and also could limit exploitation of middlemen to a great extent. The stages of exploitation by middlemen in the marketing channel has been assessed and the gross revenue to the growers as a result of their participation in the RPS activities quantified. The difference in price realized by the growers in the RPS compared to non members has been statistically significant. Quantification of the impact of the RPS on adoption of cultural practices and organizational development has been carried out. The role of RPS in capacity building at the grass roots level also has been elucidated.
Kurian K Thomas and A.O.N. Panickar outline the genesis and development of Indian Rubber Plantation Industry. They point out the journey of rubber in the world from the wild to plantation rubber. The early and post-independence development of both rubber plantation and rubber manufacturing industry are very vividly narrated. They also bring out the present position of the Indian rubber industry.

Leelamma Varghes, N. Radhakrishnan Nair and M. G. Kumaran explain the process of latex collection and its pre-processing procedures. They discuss the procedure of latex collection in detail, including field coagulum, its transportation and the pre-processing of latex. The scientific procedures outlined by them help the RPS to evolve suitable methods and procedures to preserve and protect the latex collected.

Mr. Prince Sebastian, Ramesh B Nair and K.G. Unnikrishnan Nair presented a paper which contain an evaluation of the various training programmes for the small holdings sector conducted by the Rubber Board, such as training for small growers (both off and on campus), seminars, group meetings, annual campaign meetings etc. The study has been confined to the traditional region. A comparison of smallholdings, where growers have attended seminars/group meetings and other training programmes with holdings, where growers have had no exposure to such training programmes have been made. Plantations managed by growers who had attended seminars/group meeting etc. showed a productivity increase at 13.7% when compared to the control holdings. 55% of the growers in the trained category are producing Ribbed Smocked Sheets while only 18%
growers in the untrained category are producing quality sheets. Optimum tapping depth has been observed in the case of 92% of experimental holdings where trained tappers are engaged against the 73% in the control holdings. Over 85% of holdings owned by the trained growers have been categorized in the higher productivity range.

C. Sobhalekshmi (2006) conducted a study of 83 RPS in Muvattupuzha Region to assess their performance. The study revealed very wide variations among the RPS. Many critical factors for the poor performance of the RPS were located and a number of strategies were evolved to overcome the shortcomings.

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (2007) conducted a consultancy study on RPS on behalf and on the direction of RB with a view to assess the effectiveness of the current rubber extension delivery systems of Rubber Production Department of the Rubber Board and the Rubber Producers’ Societies. It identified the constraints to improve extension delivery by the Rubber Production Department as well as Rubber Producers’ Societies. It proposed alternative options to improve the effectiveness of extension delivery. It assessed the current pattern of time utilization by the extension staff of the Board. The Institute also developed a long term strategy to re-orient and strengthen the Rubber Production Department and also suggested the feasibility and ways and means to transfer extension responsibilities to Rubber Producers’ Societies and for capacity building.

S. P. Ganesh has examined the accelerated all round growth and prosperity for Natural Rubber industry during the last 55 years. That was achieved
essentially through modernization, a level of modernization no other major agricultural crop has achieved in India. Basically, the statutory protection afforded to Natural Rubber has made the growth possible. The role played by the Rubber Board, the development agency created under the statute, with its contributions in research and development, strong extension support, imaginative and liberal but judiciously distributed financial aids and an organizational system which has built up capability to identify, even anticipate, problems and design measures to effectively combat those has been great.

Planning Commission\textsuperscript{30} (2008) in its Kerala Development Report has categorically states the present situation of Natural Rubber in Kerala. Rubber prices have been given special emphasis and the variations for Kerala market and the world market has also been given due weight. The Planning Commission wishes the Rubber to be an agricultural commodity which definitely protect domestic producers against dumping by major foreign producer of natural rubber.

K. P. Mani\textsuperscript{31} (2009) observes that Kerala has the virtual monopoly over production of rubber in the country. However the crucial question is whether the excess supplies of rubber in relation to consumption “within State” will able to attract sufficient margins permanently. He asks whether the gap will be filled by domestic rubber or imported rubber.

M. Mohandas\textsuperscript{32} examines the implications of World Trade Agreement (WTA) on Kerala’s agricultural sector. It is very significant due to high trade intensity of Kerala’s cash crops. The state contributes 92\% of the national output of rubber which is also the same percentage for Kerala’s export share.
C.Gopalakrishnan\textsuperscript{33} pinpoints that India has recently become the third large Natural Rubber producing country and the fourth largest Natural Rubber consuming country. Practically all the country’s production of 630,000 tonnes was consumed domestically. Per capita rubber consumption (Natural Rubber and Synthetic Rubber) in India has gradually grown, but is still below that of China and the world average, let alone compared to the most industrialized country, USA. There is indeed plenty of room for the country’s rubber industry to flourish with a strong captive market. It is also heartening to notice that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is expected to double this year thanks to the privatization programme. Having such a good prospect for its rubber industry, on the production, trade and consumption sectors, India should be in dire need for larger exposure to the worldwide rubber industry and market. The State has unique position in the production of four plantation crops, viz tea, coffee, cardamom and rubber. The state accounts for 42% of the area and 43% of the production of these four crops. The total area under these crops is 6.41 lakh hectares which constitute approximately 30% of the net cropped area in the state.

1.6 OPERATIVE DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

**Rubber Producers’ Societies – RPS:** which are voluntary associations of small rubber growers at village level formed under the provisions of Charitable Societies Act and envisaged to function as a non profit making institution imparting technical and scientific know-how to the members for the general improvement of their plantations and thereby achieving economical and social welfare.
**The Rubber Board – RB:** The Indian Rubber Board was constituted under the Rubber (Production and Marketing) Act, enacted by the Indian Parliament 1947. The Act clearly defined the role of the Rubber Board in the development of the Rubber Industry and the Board was assigned with the task of implementing various development schemes.

**Natural Rubber – NR:** It is in the form of fresh latex and field coagulum(Scrap Rubber) collected from plantations. It is to be processed before use.

**Board of Directors – BOD:** They are the directors of RPS who are collectively known as Board of Directors.

**Ribbed Smoked Sheet – RSS** are those which are converted from fresh natural rubber latex after adopting the oldest method of processing. There are six grades of sheet rubber.

**Self Help Group – SHG:** They are Self help Groups formed by the members in the Rubber Producers’ Societies for self and mutual help.

**Small Rubber Growers:** A person who holds from 40 cents to 5 hectares of rubber plantation area in Kerala for all practical purposes although according to Rubber Act 1947, small grower means an owner whose estate does not exceed 50 acres (20.33 hectares) in area.
1.6 **NECESSITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

Transfer of appropriate technology on a seasonal basis to the vulnerable section of the rubber planting community in an intelligible manner, coupled with timely delivery of quality inputs and equipments at cheaper rates is perhaps the largest single factor that would help maximize production and productivity of rubber from small holdings. Proliferation of small holdings year after year on the one hand and inadequacy of extension personnel with Rubber Board to cater to the information needs of the rubber grower community on the other have been imposing severe constraints to fulfill these tasks. As a result productivity of smallholdings has been remaining far lower than that of the professional managed large estates. Rubber Producers’ Societies take care of the transfer of technology and enhancement of productivity of smallholdings.

Rubber Producers’ Societies have great scope in implementing development programmes in rubber industry. They can cut down the growing rate of unemployment in the state. They can also help in the proper re-utilization of resources and also make available to the Rubber Producers the benefit of value increase of the rubber materials and products. Kerala is producing about 95% of the total production of natural rubber in India. Hence there is vast scope for the products and marketing of the rubber-based products in the state. The need of the hour is to accelerate the pace of the total progress in the area of rubber production and marketing. Rubber Producers’ Societies are the only everlasting remedy for all the problems cropping up in production, processing and marketing of the rubber in the state.
Besides marketing the activities, use and popularization of Biogas Technology, Plant protection activity of member growers through various measures are also possible through RPS. They can also establish facilities for training on various aspects of rubber cultivation. Special attention can also be given for empowerment of rural woman in the societies’ activities. Proper training can be given through Self Help Groups. A number of welfare activities can also be organized to develop the service area. Lastly the RPS have made a significant impact in the modernization process of the rubber holding sector. The challenges facing the rubber plantations particularly the small growers can be addressed through RPS.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study are given below:

1. The study is limited to 200 Rubber Producers’ Societies out of a total of 2052 Rubber Producers’ Societies due to constraints of time, money and energy.

2. The scope of the study is limited to only the working and the problems of Rubber Producers’ Societies.

3. Only the important and relevant problems of Rubber Producers’ Societies are considered for the study.

4. Only simple statistical techniques are used for the study since the major portion of the data is of qualitative nature.
5. The study considers all the Rubber Producers’ Societies under survey as having equal status thus ignoring disparities, if any, in their working.

1.8. SCHEME OF THE STUDY

The study is presented in six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 Deals with introduction, statement of problem, objectives of the study, Research Methodology, Literature Review and Limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 Gives an overview of the history, growth and development of Natural Rubber, Rubber Plantation and Rubber Manufacturing Industries.

Chapter 3 Presents a brief account of Rubber Board and Rubber Producers’ Societies in Kerala.

Chapter 4 Deals with the evaluation of working of Rubber Producers’ Societies by analyzing the primary data.

Chapter 5 Gives an analysis of the primary data relating to important problems faced by Rubber Producers’ Societies.

Chapter 6 Presents the major Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion
REFERENCES


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