

# Political and Legal Issues Existing in Rubber Producers' Society - A Case Study on RPS Poothrikka, Kerala

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**Abstract:** *Hevea brasiliensis* is one among the major source of Natural Rubber (NR). Rubber Producers' Societies (RPS) was formed as voluntary self help associations of small growers of NR, under the 12<sup>th</sup> Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act of 1956. The present study analysed the political and legal issues faced in Poothrikka RPS in Ernakulam district of Kerala. The primary data were collected from president and executive committee members of the society. The issues were studied in political and legal aspects and analysed using index methodology. The study concluded that there exist no such significant issues in the society.

**Keywords:** Rubber Producers' Society, Natural Rubber, Political issues, Legal issues

## 1. Introduction

### The Rubber Board

The Indian Rubber Board was constituted under the Rubber (Production and Marketing) Act, 1947. The purpose and vision behind the formation of the Indian Rubber Board was to promote production of natural rubber and rubber industry of the country. The fundamental principle behind the formation of such a body was based on identification that there is a high prospect for producing natural rubber and related fine products, which will eventually help to self sufficiency and generate more jobs thus help to give thrust to improve GDP of the country. Hence such an organization driven by technically qualified machinery could help the farmers to take benefit of knowledge sharing and understanding advantages of modern ways of cultivation from the experts.

The Act evidently defined the role of the Rubber Board in the development of the industry and the Board was assigned with the important task of implementing various development schemes. One of the prime advantages of having a common platform is that all the members are sharing their time tested and proven knowledge with other community members and help to implement best practices. Currently Board is helping farmers with the help of modern infrastructure and informs them adequately on all related topics to boost rubber farming and production.

### Rubber Producers' Society (RPS)

The Indian plantation sector is dominated by small holdings, which account for almost 88% of the total rubber production in the nation. Taking into account of the very large number of small holdings and the very low staff strength of extension machinery in the Rubber Board (Rubber Board is a statutory body established by Central Government with an

aim to improve rubber industry in India), individual approach for modernization and improvement was not practical in terms of financial viability.

The rubber marketing co-operatives promoted by the Rubber Board from early 1960s could not effectively reach the large number of farmers who were mostly confined to the villages due to the political and beurocratic control. So Rubber Board advanced the arrangement of grass root level associations at the village level called Rubber Producers' Societies (RPSs), so as to convey proper innovation to boost the profitability and creation of small holdings to meet the increasing need for NR. RPS was formed in the lines of Anand Milk Union Ltd., Gujarat to promote group approach among the rural small holders (Varna, 1978).

Rubber Producers' Societies are voluntary self help associations of small growers of natural rubber, registered under the 12<sup>th</sup> Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act of 1956, functioning on a model bylaw drawn and circulated by the Rubber Board and envisaged to work as non-profit making institutions bestowing specialized and logical ability to the individuals for the overall improvement of the area and specifically for the economic and social welfare of the small cultivators of rubber. RPS are the village level associations of small rubber growers formed to act as self-help groups to do whatever possible for the progress and development of rubber cultivation and all of its allied activities.

## 2. Literature Survey

Ministry of Labour & Employment Labour Bureau, Government of India, 2008-09 identified poor economic status of rubber plantation labor force working in Tripura, particularly female workers. Nearly 50 percent of employed

women were either on temporary or on casual basis, against an all-India level of meager 7 percent. In Tripura, only 15 percent of plantation workers were eligible for housing whilst an all-India level stays above 75 percent. In the state of Tripura, average daily earning of rubber plantations workers is the lowest against other states. Other fringe benefits or remuneration given to the workers are also minimal with reference to other states.[1]

Ajokporise and Akpere (2010) investigated the constraints of rubber production in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. They randomly chose one hundred and twenty rubber farmers from 12 assorted villages within the Local Government Area. Data was evaluated through stratified and random sampling method. The study revealed that 68.3% of the participants cultivated rubber between 3–5 hectares of land and they sell rubber product to the rubber factories in Sapele. Unprofessional or destructive tapping, ageing and conversion of the rubber farms to arable farms are the main threats faced by rubber cultivation. The study exposed that 93.3% of rubber farmland has been converted to arable crop farm; 84.2% of rubber trees were used for firewood; 81.7% destroyed by poor tapping and 41.7% accounted for aging of existing trees. The authors recommended to initiate an education campaign involving public participation thus generate awareness on using rubber trees for firewood and conversion of rubber plantations to arable crop land. Local government should come out with a suitable encouragement program to stop all of the above mentioned destructive methods. [2]

Sajeena (2010) in her thesis “Production and marketing of rubber in Kanyakumari district”, revealed that important factors which influenced the dynamic growth were namely captive domestic market and relatively remunerative price enjoyed by the crop during the study period. The study helped to expose that the major influencing factors affecting the feasibility of rubber producers’ were steady increase in cost of the production, instability of price and shortage of skilled labour. [3]

Deepa *et al.* (2015) in their paper “Innovation and Development: The case of Natural Rubber”, has presented that key issue faced by the owners on the scarcity of skilled tappers. Propagation of Low Frequency Tapping (LFT) was adopted as and when labour shortage started to impinge productivity. In this method, rubber trees are tapped in a reduced frequency rather than the traditional daily tapping method. By adopting LFT method would as well help in addressing the dryness of tapping plate. Another idea was to develop and implement mechanization of rubber tapping in order to overcome the issue of labour shortage. [4]

Mathiraj and Bindu (2015) studied the problems faced by Natural Rubber planters, a study conducted in five districts in Kerala. The districts selected for the study was Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Kannur and Pathamanamthita. Political interference, difficulty in finding labours, heavy competition, lack of financial resources, inability to market the product etc., were found to be the major problems faced by the rubber cultivators in Kerala. [5]

### 3. Problem Definition

The preponderance of small rubber growers in Kerala makes the sector vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen eventually results in price fluctuations and also difficulties in gaining access to technology and information. Lack of availability of timely and adequate credit, rapid rise in the wages of labourers and increase in the price of fertilisers are the other major problems faced by the small rubber growers. Ultimately this situation forces the farmers to get away from the rubber cultivation. Majority of small farmers are not having enough financial resources or reserves to manage the market dynamics influenced by the middlemen or market leading corporate companies.

Hence institutional support built upon a community basis can empower the framework of small farmers to manage adequate market strengths and also this would help farmers to get a realistic margin. There are various forms of interventions made by the government in organising agricultural marketing by the adoption of various administrative and legislative measures. Rubber Board is one such initiative made by Indian government to promote production of rubber and rubber industry of the country. But due to the very large number of small holdings and the very low staff strength in the Rubber Board, individual approach for modernisation and improvement was not practical. Hence the Board promoted Rubber Marketing Co-operatives during 1960s. Political and bureaucratic control hindered the self-help concept in co-operative sector. In order to solve this, the Rubber Board promoted formation of small voluntary associations of small growers registered under the 12<sup>th</sup> Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act of 1956 called the Rubber Producers’ Societies (RPSs) in 1986. In this context, the present study is a modest attempt to analyse the political and legal issues faced in Poothrikka Rubber Producers’ Society (RPS) in Ernakulam district of Kerala, India.

### 4. Methodology

The study was conducted in Ernakulam district of Kerala state, India during July 2020. Poothrikka Rubber Producers’ Society in Ernakulam district was selected which has category ‘A’ classification based on criteria such as conduct of statutory meetings, status of auditing of accounts, infrastructure facilities, participation in the Rubber Board schemes/extension programmes etc. The total management of the society is vested in the president and executive committee members. The view of management of the society was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using index methodology to study the structural and administrative problems. The responses to questions were plotted on a five point Likert scale. The scale used the responses such as strongly agree, agree, moderately agree, disagree and strongly disagree and the scores assigned to these rating were 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The formula of index is as follows:

$$\text{Index} = \frac{\sum_{i=1} \sum_{j=1} S_{ij}}{\sum \text{Max}S_j}$$

i = respondents

j = problems/constrain

$S_j$  = Score of  $j^{th}$  factor  
 $S_{ij}$  = Total score of  $j^{th}$  factor of the  $i^{th}$  respondent  
 $Max. S_{ij}$  = Maximum score for the  $j^{th}$  factor

Based on the index obtained, the results were compared to a standard derived

Scores obtained	Color classification
0-20	Negligible
21-40	Tolerable
41-60	Risk
61-80	Severe
81-100	Chronic

### 5. Results and Discussion

#### Political and legal issues faced RPS

For the study, the problems faced by the society related to politics is termed as political issues whereas the issues due to the violation of act and rules prescribed in the byelaw of the society is termed as legal issues.

**Table 1:** Political issues as perceived by the management

S. No	Statements	Score	Intensity
1.	Over politicization	10	(29) Tolerable
2.	Predominance of vested interest of a particular person's political view	9	(26) Tolerable
3.	Election of executive committee members are influenced by the politics existing in the locality	10	(29) Tolerable
4.	Heavy dependency on government capital rather than society's profit	10	(29) Tolerable
5.	Marketing is influenced by interests of political leaders in the locality	10	(29) Tolerable
	Composite index	49	28

Source: Compiled from primary data

Table 1 clearly depicts that all the stated problems related to politics are 'tolerable' which impacted a lot to the smooth functioning.

**Table 2:** Legal issues as perceived by the management

S. No	Statements	Score	Intensity
1.	Corruption	11	(31) Tolerable
2.	Election of office bearers not conducted at the annual general body as per rules	9	(26) Tolerable
3.	Audited accounts and annual performance report are not submitted to the annual general body	9	(26) Tolerable
4.	Enrolment of members to the society not as per act and rules	10	(29) Tolerable
5.	Annual budget and performance report are not scrutinised	10	(29) Tolerable
6.	Expenditure for the day-to-day functions not as per the approved budget	9	(26) Tolerable
7.	Monthly accounts of receipts and payments are not approved at the monthly executive committee meeting	9	(26) Tolerable
8.	Neglects tri-monthly & annual stock verification	9	(26) Tolerable
9.	Annual fee collections are used for the day-to-day expenditure of the society.	9	(26) Tolerable
	Composite index	85	27

Source: Compiled from primary data

Table 2 describes the legal issues of RPS Poothrikka. The calculated index ranged from 26-31. The composite index was found to be 27 which is 'tolerable'. All the statements was categorized in 21-40 which is 'tolerable'.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there exist no legal issues.

### 6. Conclusion

Even for every successful organisations, there exists some problems either in its structure, administration, functioning etc. Hence this study focused to discover the political and legal issues existing in Poothrikka Rubber Producers' Society. By analysing the data collected from management, the study concluded that there exist no such problems in the society.

### 7. Future Scope

Due to constrain of time, resources and COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the study was confined to one RPS in Ernakulam district. Only index methodology was used for the study. The qualitative dimension of the study includes the opinion of members of management collected through structured interview schedules. Only the important and relevant political and legal issues of Rubber Producers' Societies were considered for the study. The future researchers can conduct related studies in other states or do a comparative study which will provide clarity on the issues prevailing in RPS in different districts.

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## Author Profile



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