

Bonding over hard evening's work

By [Ravindran Raman Kutty](#) - March 5, 2023 @ 7:00am



A cleared rubber field is safer for workers as thick underbrush can be a breeding ground for snakes, civets, centipedes, scorpions and wild boar. FILE PIC

My father was sharpening his rusty sickle blade, checking at the same time if the wooden handle was strong enough to withstand the upcoming busy days.

He was preparing for *anthee velai* – work done in the evening to clear the underbrush in the tapping fields.

Rubber trees do not need green shrubs to protect them from the heat, especially in our tropical heat. However, overgrown shrubs were a threat to rubber tappers, as they were a breeding ground for snakes, civets, centipedes, scorpions and wild boar.

My late uncle, Sankaran Nair, our senior estate field conductor, usually assigned my father to coordinate and execute some of the evening work. This included assigning workers to certain lots.

MORE NEWS

- **Child citizenship: MP says previous admin did all the hard work**
- **Loke: We are working hard to locate 'MV Dai Cat 06'**
- **Sea Games: Hard work and persistence pay off for US-based Shereen [NSTTV]**
- **Malaysia-S'pore bond flourishing**

MOST POPULAR

LATEST

MOST READ

- 21m [Missing pair found drowned in Sungai Kelantan](#)
- 39m [Meet the French luthier making music out of mushrooms](#)
- 41m [Nearly 500 arrested on fifth night of France riots after teen laid to rest](#)
- 1h [Guadeloupe crushes Cuba in Gold Cup, 4-1](#)
- 1h [Ministers' aides claim months of unpaid salaries, contemplate resignation](#)
- 1h [Neglected elephant boards jumbo flight home to Thailand](#)
- 1h [Thousands rally across Australia in support of Indigenous reform](#)

The first thing my father would do was to identify 20 young, energetic and capable workers. This job was done only after the daily tapping was complete, meaning these men would forego the evening rest and faced hours of extra toil and sweat to get the job done.

At 2.30pm, the workers would gather near our estate sundry shop, owned by Malabari. I would assist my father in taking the workers' attendance.

Mr Krishnan and his tractor would pick all of us up and head for the assigned lots.

The undulating terrain of laterite roads made the tractor ride bumpy and bouncy. The tyres creaked on the rough roads. I loved sitting in the tractor cab beside Mr Krishnan. I felt energised and excited cruising through the thick and green rubber plantations. The cool evening breeze made my body feel relaxed.

Once we arrived at our destination, my father would assign lots to each person. Almost immediately, we would begin our *tasa-adi* – clearing the shrubs. I do not remember anyone using gloves or any other protection for arms or legs, hands or feet.

The continuous gripping of sickles and parang made our palms blister, but the work did not stop.

The team would clear the bushes along the well-laid rows of rubber trees, using our hands and athletic legs, walking up the steep terrain and even coasting down the slopes, removing the thick undergrowth and flattening the cleared ground. Swishing and chopping were the sounds amid the occasional banter among friends working together to keep our estate clean and safe.

It was hard work. We did not carry any drinking water; to quench our thirst, we would just scoop water from the crystal clear streams that coursed through the landscape. Mother Nature always provided for those who worked hard. There were also no toilet breaks. But if we needed to answer nature's call, we would slip away to a quiet area.

If the weather was good, our work could stop around 6.30pm or 7pm. By then we would be drenched in sweat.

Our efforts and trail of work were obvious as we could see fallen shrubs and plants lying amid the lines of rubber trees. The rays of the evening sun would filter through the rubber trees; the entire area looked clearer and brighter. This was just after a day's work. *Anthee velai* would continue for many days until all the lots in the fields had been cleared.

Mr Krishnan and his blue tractor would take us home – a group of men in sweat-soaked shirts and trousers filled with lovegrass and weeds hanging from our sickles and parang. Fortunately, we never had leeches in our estate because of its high elevation.

ACROSS NEW STRAITS TIMES



NATION 2 hours ago
[Ministers' aides claim months of unpaid salaries, contemplate resignation](#)



NST VIRAL 3 hours ago
[#NSTviral: Waze takes woman on road less travelled 'balik kampung' journey. \[WATCH\]](#)



LEADER Jul 2, 2023 @ 12:00am
[NST Leader: KLIA, a corruption gateway?](#)



NST VIRAL Jul 1, 2023 @ 7:14pm
[#NSTviral: 'Inspector Sheila' loses her cool at online commenters](#)



NATION Jul 1, 2023 @ 4:49pm
[Corruption, victimisation of tourists by Immigration officers not new, says Matta](#)

WHAT TO READ NEXT

The ride home took 20 to 30 minutes. My eldest sister would greet us with a cup of hot *cha-ya* (brewed tea). After that, my father would ask me to double-check the workers' attendance in the evening's work.

This would go on for days, as long as the fields needed to be cleared. Once *anthee velai* was completed, my uncle would pay each worker, including yours truly, RM100 to RM200. This was a big sum in those days, especially when everyone was paid RM2.50 per hour.

The evening sky would lead the sun away, and the day surrendered to the night. After a good shower and a hearty meal, my family and I would gladly go to our beds. Another uncle, (the late) Mr Subramaniam, would ring the estate bell at 9pm sharp – lights out, dreams would fill our hours of slumber, till the chimes were heard again at 5am the next day.

Like many other estate events or tasks, *anthee velai* promoted cooperation and camaraderie among the people.

Tasks such as this could be experienced only in estates, and formed another unforgettable memory for me to cherish and place deep in my heart of my days as a boy growing up in an estate.

Anthee velai provided extra income for the hardworking estate worker. The job required tonnes of strength and bucketloads of sweat.

But they were happy, laughing, joking and looking forward to another day in an estate that never failed to feed them besides providing a breeze no air-conditioning unit could ever provide.

What a wonderful life it was...

The next instalment of the Estate Chronicles will be published in a fortnight

RELATED VIDEOS

RELATED ARTICLES

HOCKEY Jan 16, 2023 @ 5:51pm
[Speedy Tigers forced to work hard before downing Chile](#)

NATION Jun 14, 2023 @ 3:37pm
[We are quiet but working hard, says Suhkam chairman](#)



COLUMNISTS Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:00am

[Getting people at ease with data-gathering tech](#)



NATION Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:03am

[Aidiladha Rahmah Sale initiative well-received in five states](#)



NATION Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:20am

[Nga: SPNB completed 15,445 RMR units, surpassing 12MP target of 15,000 by 2025](#)



BADMINTON Jun 27, 2023 @ 11:20pm

[Tang Jie-Ee Wei achieve career-best ranking, Zii Jia drops to No 14](#)



CRIME & COURTS Jun 27, 2023 @ 11:08pm

[Nervous behaviour raises suspicion: Malaysians caught smuggling E-Cigarettes into Singapore](#)

BRANDED CONTENT



NATION Jun 22, 2023 @ 5:20pm

[Light at the end of the tunnel for Malaysian youth](#)



BUSINESS Jun 22, 2023 @ 10:16am

[SJPP: Government guarantee schemes for business financing](#)



BUSINESS Jun 16, 2023 @ 5:55pm

[HSPP elevates SME products to international level](#)



NATION May 15, 2023 @ 10:50am

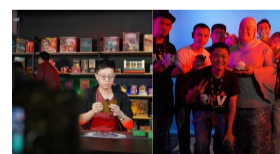
[Digitally empowering communities through education](#)



NATION May 25, 2023 @ 6:36pm

[McDonald's Malaysia, Education Ministry honours 25 outstanding teachers nationwide](#)

STORIES FROM SAYS



Jun 30, 2023 @ 6:08pm

[This Gaming Community Is Throwing Fun Meet-Ups, Tournaments, And More For Local Gamers](#)



Jun 30, 2023 @ 5:42pm

[Report: Minister Allegedly Barges Into KLIA To Help A Chinese National Enter The Country](#)



iCloud+ 50GB
RM 3.90/month
iCloud+ 200GB
RM 11.90/month
iCloud+ 2TB
RM 44.90/month

Jun 30, 2023 @ 5:40pm

[Apple Raises Price Of 2TB iCloud+ Storage To RM44.90 Per Month](#)