

Estate Chronicles: Mark of a good rubber tapper

By [Ravindran Raman Kutty](#) - June 11, 2023 @ 7:15am



If a rubber tree was tapped hurriedly by amateurs, it would bleed a colourless sap, a serious sign of tree damage. FILE PIC

RUBBER trees are the main asset of any rubber plantation. The care and respect shown to the trees can be equated with the labourer's welfare. Benchmarking the rubber trees was essential to estate management, and our estate was no exeption.

A rubber tree was often checked for quality. This was done through *pootu vaikiruthu*, or spot marking, where a dot would be placed on the tapped spot of a rubber tree.

This benchmarking system was to prolong the lifespan of the tree and to maintain its yield.

DAMAGE CARE

MORE NEWS

- Estate Chronicles: Pit 'holes' were scary
- Estate Chronicles: On the way to school
- Estate Chronicles: 'Ayya Kottai', our local creche
- Estate Chronicle: Doubled-tapping for rainy days








The tapper would tap a tree on alternate days, and would have to show evidence to the estate management, usually represented by a field *mandor* or *kangani*, that he/she had been careful and had not tapped too deep so at to damaged the xylem (tissue in the trunk that transports nutrients from the roots) or phellem (inner tissue of the bark). These standards were decided by the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia.

If a rubber tree was tapped hurriedly by amateurs like me, it would bleed a colourless sap, a sign of serious tree damage.

MOST POPULAR

LATEST

MOST READ

- 11m  [6pc to 8pc construction margin growth expected](#)
- 20m  [S&P Global : Supply chains almost back to normal](#)
- 1h  [Missing pair found drowned in Sungai Kelantan \[NSTTV\]](#)
- 1h  [Meet the French luthier making music out of mushrooms](#)
- 1h  [Nearly 500 arrested on fifth night of France riots after teen laid to rest \[NSTTV\]](#)
- 2h  [Guadeloupe crushes Cuba in Gold Cup, 4-1](#)
- 2h  [Ministers' aides claim months of unpaid salaries, contemplate resignation](#)

ACROSS NEW STRAITS TIMES



NATION 3 hours ago

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



NST VIRAL 4 hours ago

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

This meant the tapping knife had gone past the bark, damaging the xylem.

This was why children were barred from entering a rubber plantation as they would often want to help their toiling parents, but were unaware of the damage that they might cause to the trees.

My siblings and I were also guilty of going against this rule as we pitied our parents struggling to tap 500 trees daily, and our main aim was to ease their burden. However, we could do this only on weekends or during school holidays.

Pootu vaikiruthu was done on the 30th or 31st day of the month. We would dip a stick 0.5cm in diameter into black or white paint provided by the estate and mark a tree.

Each tree required three markings — one in the centre and one at each end of the tapping area. There were four lots with 500 trees each, meaning we would have to mark 2,000 trees in about three hours over the weekend.

'KAUNDA KAUNDI'

One morning in December, during the school holidays, my siblings and I, and the children of the other rubber tappers of the estate, got together near Lot 16, (now the area close to Technology Park Malaysia and Mimos).

After cleaning the rubber cups, we decided to play a game called *kaunda kaundi*. It was an easy game that required two sticks, one measuring about 0.7m (the bat) and the other, 0.2m (the projectile).

We would dig a hole in the ground and players would break up into two teams. After deciding which team would begin batting, the projectile stick would be placed across the hole, and the batter from the starting team would wield the batting stick.

The batting player would hook his/her batting stick under the projectile stick and flick it up as far as possible. The opposing team members had to scramble to catch it before it hit the ground.

If the projectile was caught by the opposing team, the teams would switch roles. This game was indeed super fun.

However, while the game was getting intense, a Volkswagen suddenly stopped in front of us and from the car emerged Mr Gan Tong, the estate owner!

Knowing very well that we were not allowed to play in the plantation grounds, he instructed us to walk while he "escorted" us home in his car behind us.

The 10 of us, all under 12 years old, were nervous and afraid, and we began thinking of a plan to escape.

PUNISHMENT ESCAPE

The road meandered on a steep hillside flanked by tall rubber trees. The increasing heat of the 10am sunshine caused rubber seeds to fall and crack on the road, some on our heads, too.

The sun's rays peeped through the tall rubber tree branches, the magpies were singing, and the river was just a stone's throw away, roaring in glory as it was the highest point of the mini waterfall.



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



LEADER Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:01am
NST Leader: Wagner's mutiny



COLUMNISTS Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:00am
Getting people at ease with data-gathering tech



COLUMNISTS Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:01am
Time to tap private sector to finance public projects



CRIME & COURTS Jun 27, 2023 @ 11:08pm
Nervous behaviour raises suspicion: Malaysians caught smuggling E-Cigarettes into Singapore



LETTERS Jun 28, 2023 @ 12:00am
Boosting nation's competitiveness

BRANDED CONTENT



NATION Jun 22, 2023 @ 9:00am
QGB celebrates succesful outing at Lima'23



HEAL May 25, 2023 @ 10:40am
Beat the heatwave by staying hydrated



NATION May 15, 2023 @ 10:50am
Digitally empowering communities through education



BUSINESS Jun 16, 2023 @ 5:55pm
HSPP elevates SME products to international level

These sounds were music to my ears. Had it been any other time, I would have answered their call, but at that moment, there was nothing but fear in my veins.

Some of the tappers from the neighbouring lots stared at our parade. They would have guessed that we must have been caught doing something against the rules of the plantation and would soon have to face the wrath of the scary estate owner.

They were worried as they knew that there was no reasoning with the estate owner when rules were broken, although we had meant no harm.

My cousin Rajan came up with the idea to run off the road in different directions into the plantation bushes — the owner would not be able to chase us then.

Within seconds, we dispersed down the slopes and vanished into bushes, leaving the estate owner shouting at us.

After a while, he sped off, leaving us all free. We emerged from the bushes with creepers and love grass on our clothes.

We realised that we had walked more than 1km, but any distance would have been fine to be free of a very angry estate owner.

We rushed back to our parents and told them about the nasty incident amid giggles and laughter.

Our parents were calm and cool, listening intently to our story, probably knowing that no harm was intended. Indeed, they were also relieved to know that none of us injured ourselves running into the bushes or were attacked by snakes.

MARK OF STATUS

The *pootu* or *tilak* is usually seen only on a Hindu woman's forehead, signifying her status as married or single. A red *tilak* meant she was married, and a black *tilak* meant she was single.

For rubber trees, a black dot meant the tapper who had tapped that tree was good, but if the tree had a red dot, then the tapper was in the danger zone.

The gap between the tapping from the month before and the current month was between 3/4 and one inch.

If the gap was more than one inch, the red *pootu* would be given.

Luckily, my parents never got a red *pootu* but there were tappers who did. The mark was a sign of serious damage to the tree bark.

A repeated red dot would be punishing to the tapper. He/she would be moved to a lower yielding field or maintenance work — repairing roads, cutting grass or cleaning the estate manager's or chief clerk's house.

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

Keywords: [Technology Park](#), [Rubber Trees](#), [Research Institute Of Malaysia](#), [Rubberresearch](#), [Punishmentescapethe](#), [Technologypark](#), [Pootuvaikiruthu](#), [Schoolholidays](#), [Institutemalaysia](#), [Gantong](#), [Mbhd](#), [Area](#), [Bhd](#)



NATION May 25, 2023 @ 6:36pm

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

STORIES FROM SAYS



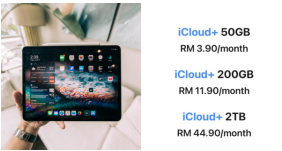
Jun 30, 2023 @ 6:08pm

[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](#)



Jun 30, 2023 @ 5:40pm

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



Jun 30, 2023 @ 5:35pm

[What Is Hippotherapy? Here's How This Couple Uses Horses To Empower Kids With Disabilities](#)



Jun 30, 2023 @ 5:25pm

[This Low-Density Development On Andaman Island Comes With Fully Furnished Homes](#)

RELATED VIDEOS