

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

Nyaya Pathrika

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IJM

*Rescued bonded labourers at a temporary shelter
anxiously waiting to return back to Odisha*



PRECEDENT-SETTING VICTORY AFTER 11-YEAR LEGAL BATTLE

After an 11-year legal battle, the Sriperumbudur District Munsif cum Judicial Magistrate has shown the way in fighting bonded labour in Tamil Nadu.

The owner of Venketaswara Rice Mill in Sriperumbudur was sentenced to six months imprisonment and charged a fine of Rs. 4000 for confining 12 people in his mill as bonded labourers for 3 years. The case first came to light on 26th August, 2004, when the Kanchipuram district officials led the rescue of 12 people.

During the trial, the prosecutor argued that the labourers had been denied basic human rights. They had not been allowed to leave the worksite and they had been receiving a paltry sum of Rs. 40 for three days of hard labour, far below the State-prescribed Minimum Wage. The victims had attempted to escape from the worksite several

times. In each instance, they had been tracked and brought back. They had also been subjected to physical abuse at the hands of the supervisor and owner.

“This conviction is a landmark victory in the fight against trafficking and bonded labour,” says Richard Ebenezzer of International Justice Mission. “Such a forceful conviction will deter offenders as it drives home the fact that bonded labour is not a cost-cutting measure but a serious human rights crime.”

The accused was sentenced by the District Munsif cum Judicial Magistrate, Sriperumbudur, under Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, Section 374 of the Indian Penal Code Section.

GOVERNMENT SPOTLIGHT



“Training is indispensable for success in addressing Bonded Labour” – Rahul Nadh, I.A.S.



Having led the landmark rescue of 333 bonded labourers, Sub-Collector Rahul Nadh of Thiruvallur speaks to Nyaya Patrika.

1. What were the unique factors of the recent rescue?

We received a call from a labourer in a brick chamber as his sick wife had been denied medication. He was unable to tell us the location where he was trapped but we were able to find out more with the help of the police. We rushed to the spot and found 333 bonded labourers working there.

All labourers were from Odisha, and had been working for over three months. They had taken advance amounts ranging up to Rs. 16000 and were paid only Rs. 100-200 per week. They worked for over 12 hours, had no access to basic amenities like toilets, were not allowed to consult a doctor and were forced to work, even though they were unwell. Many of them had also been subjected to physical torture.

2. Did trainings for the District Administration officials play a significant role in your rescue?

Definitely; training of officials is indispensable to successfully implement the act as it sensitises them on the issue and makes them aware of all the provisions of the act. We have found that periodical training has improved the rescue and rehabilitation measures within our district.

3. What specific steps are being taken by the District Administration to address bonded labour?

Due to the high density of brick chambers, rice mills and other manufacturing industries, Thiruvallur is highly prone to bonded labour. To tackle the menace, we have taken a few steps:

- We conduct training for all our staff and ensure that Tahsildars, RIs and VAOs conduct periodic ‘surprise’ visits to worksites.
- Vigilance Committee meetings are held regularly at both District and Sub-Divisional levels.
- We coordinate with the Revenue, Police and Legal departments to prosecute owners.
- To ensure rehabilitation, we have enrolled over 3000 children below 15 years in schools through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and we partner with other government departments and NGOs to support rescued victims.

PHOTO SERIES

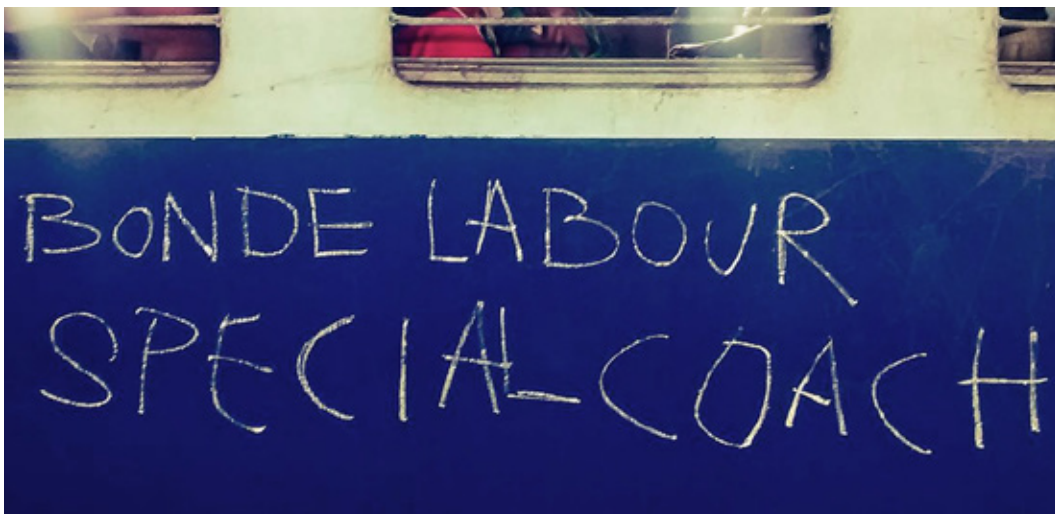
A total of 333 people were rescued from a brick kiln at Thiruvallur on 11th February 2015. The labourers were migrants from the districts of Bargarh, Nuapada, Balangir and Kalahandi in Odisha.



The District Collector, Mr. K. Veera Raghava Rao, held a press conference where he spoke on the issue of Bonded Labour. He also called for a meeting with all the Brick Kiln Associations to ensure minimum wages were being paid.



Bonded labourers pack all their belongings and get aboard a truck arranged by the Sub Collector, Mr. A. R. Rahul Nadh.



The government officials showed proactive leadership throughout the whole process of identifying and releasing the bonded labourers. Various departments, such as Police, Civil Supplies, District Administration and Transportation coordinated well with each other. Here, we see the train that the District Administration arranged to transport the labourers back to Odisha.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRAINING AT TAMIL NADU POLICE ACADEMY

On 25th and 26th February, 2015, IJM was invited to conduct a training workshop on Human Trafficking and Bonded Labour at the Tamil Nadu Police Academy (TNPA), Vandalur. Inspector (Training), Judy Abigail has worked closely with IJM for the last 2 years and has continued to make Bonded Labour an integral part of TNPA's Capsule Courses. This programme organises workshops on various key topics throughout the year.

The 25 Inspectors and Sub-inspectors who attended came from various districts across Tamil Nadu. The interactive sessions provided an enthusiastic and attentive police force with practical skill sets on addressing these crimes in the field.

IJM has received incredible support from leadership within the TNPA. In the

commencement ceremony on Wednesday, Superintendent of Police, Lalitha Lakshmi I.P.S. commended the work and expertise of IJM's resource persons, and encouraged attendees to utilise the training materials provided by IJM. She also noted that Human Trafficking and Bonded Labour are issues that, if identified at a grassroots level, can be prevented.

"The fact that the TNPA recognises bonded labour and trafficking as being a crime that requires immediate response is in itself very encouraging," says Hephzibah Sundar, a Director at IJM. "The involvement of the participants and the commitment demonstrated by the higher officials who organised the training, gives us hope that we at Tamil Nadu can definitely end bonded labour in our lifetime."



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