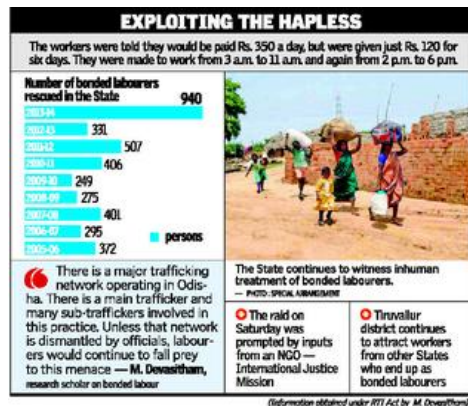


Bonded workers rescued from brick kiln

• [Dennis S. Jesudasan](#)

89 children among the 329 workers rescued by a team led by the RDO



“I was kicked and beaten with a slipper when I said I could not work as I was pregnant,” complains four-month-pregnant Savita (name changed) in Odia as her husband stands next to her.

The couple from Bolangir district of Odisha had come to a brick kiln here on a promise her husband would be paid Rs. 350 a day. But what he ended up getting was a shocking Rs. 20 per day.

“I pleaded with him [brick kiln owner] that I would work instead of her, and asked him to excuse my wife but he just would not listen,” says her husband, who is one of the 329 persons rescued from a brick kiln at Pudhukuppam near here by a team of district administration officials led by Revenue Divisional Officer S. Jayachandran on Saturday. There were 89 children among them.

Numerous incidents

Oblivious to the searing sun that heats up the dusty vicinity, relieved only by a few trees, labourers who gather around the officials have numerous incidents to convince them that they were indeed bonded labourers.

“I was told we have to work from 8 a.m. But, after coming here, we are made to work from 3 a.m. to 11 a.m. and again from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. They have been giving us Rs. 120 for six days against the promised Rs. 350 a day,” alleges Kashiram Kyal, a native of Naupada district. The raid on Saturday, prompted by inputs from an NGO — International Justice Mission — has reiterated that Tiruvallur district continues to attract workers from other States who end up as bonded labourers, after their employers go back on the promise of decent wages.

Habitual offender

The owner, who had absconded by the time the rescue team reached the spot, had reportedly been involved in a similar incident last year too. “We got to know that he had obtained anticipatory bail in that case. He is now absconding but we are taking all steps to nab him,” the officials said.

Though all the labourers in this kiln are from various districts of Odisha, they have come in different batches through agents, one of whom they identify as ‘Bablu Khan.’

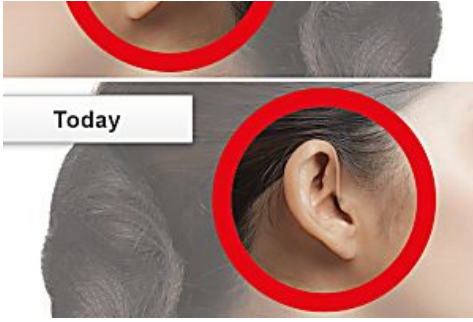
“Last time we came to Tamil Nadu, we went to a good owner but we are being tortured this time. So we want to go back,” Mr. Kyal says.

Mr. Jayachandran said the condition of the labourers proved that they were being made to work under bondage. “We will give Rs. 1,000 to all adults, apart from release certificates, and arrange for their travel back to native places.”

An FIR has been registered against six persons in connection with the case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976.

The brick kiln owner, who is absconding, was reportedly involved in a similar case last year

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