

# **Emancipation of Bonded Labour: Still a Far Cry**

**A Field Report from  
Santhal Pargana (Jharkhand)**



**PUBLIC ADVOCACY INITIATIVES FOR RIGHTS AND VALUES IN INDIA**

**(PAIRVI)**

G-30, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Lajpat Nagar-III, New Delhi - 24

Telephone: +91-11-28841266/+91-11-56151897

Email: PAIRVIdelhi@rediffmail.com

Website: [www.PAIRVI.org](http://www.PAIRVI.org)

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### Summary

#### 1. The Bonded Labour Scene : 1990-2009

1.1 In the beginning of 1980s, The Lok Samiti, an off-shoot of the Bihar Movement, had taken up a programme of identification and release of bonded labourers, in terms of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976, in Deoghar, Mohanpur (part) and Saraiyahat Blocks of the Santhal Pargana district. In 1983, with the support of a local NGO; A PIL was filed in the Supreme Court (Civil Misc Writ 13485/1983). After a long-drawn verification process, the SC passed an order to release 2464 of the listed bonded labours, and simultaneously issued directions for implementation of a rehabilitation plan duly appraised and approved by the court.

1.2 This identification even was not total. It was voluntary, essentially a process of self-identification and organization. Lok Samiti was just a fledging organization. There were numerous incidents of intimidation and coercive violence in many villages. Within this limitation, the number of bonded labour identified in one block was around 1100. There were 41 blocks in Santhal Pargana district, as it was constituted then. Accordingly the number of bonded labour in district could be estimated at 50,000 atleast.

1.3 There was no census taken or any legislative action plan by the government to release bonded labour. Beside, this PIL there was no other effort in this direction. As such, should have been a be huge backlog left. A second, even third generation, has cropped up in last 25 years. Nothing changed in the economy to help them to escape the trap.

1.4 Even with, specific reference to the blocks that figured in the above PIL, we cannot say that release/rehabilitation has made any major dent in the system itself. Debt bondage still prevails. At the Block Level, if the identification recently done by their action group is taken as an indication the incidence has definitely declined. But at the village level, we came across several previously released bonded labourers' sons becoming bonded labourers. Those households which escaped the trap would hardly count about 10%.

1.5 The depth of oppression has definitely decreased but there is no economic change to allow the bonded labour to assert their freedom. Agricultural labour households inevitably fall into debt and consequently in bondage.

1.6 It appears as if the bonded labour are waiting to be released. The law is such; a bonded labourer is provided rehabilitation only if he gets released through due process. It was denied to those who had released themselves during the pendency of our PIL also. The foregoing PIL has created expectations. Otherwise, their dependence and alienation (ignorance of how the system oppresses them?), is so complete that while giving their names, they are anxious that no harm come to the 'malik. *The maliks also not unduly concerned because no harm came to them in the past.*

## **2. Rehabilitation Plan Implementation**

**2.1** In this case there was a rehabilitation plan called and approved by the SC after the petitioners' comments/suggestions. The strategy was land-based rehabilitation through cluster formation to those who had cultivated / cultivable land and industrial coop for those who had '0' land. But it was reduced to a routine relief programme and almost abandoned after the SC closed the case, to the extent that the sums deducted as share money for industrial coops, which proved to be non-starters was not returned to them. Not even now after renewed effort of 2 years. The petitioners NGO also neglected its role.

### **3. Child Bonded Labour**

**3.1** Adult (parents) bondage and child bondage cannot be separated. There existed a system inter-generational to bondage and it still prevails. There is not sufficient data to comment on the extent of changes, if any at all. Generally the bigger the bond-master, the larger the animal stock and 'bagali' (cattle grazing) is the children's burden.

### **4. Preparatory to Legal Intervention (PIL)**

4.1 I have an identification list of 475 bonded labourers, done by me in group meeting, and as prepared by the Saraiyahat action group. These lists selectively will be appended to the final report after further scrutiny.

4.2 The actual problem is where to stop? In legal intervention shall be on case to case basis, it will affect only those on whose behalf intervention is sought. It needs much deeper study and deliberation. The law itself is severely flawed. If it is decided to go for a PIL, the court should be approached to review the law itself.

Varanasi :

September, 2009

Prof. B.N. Juyal

### 1. Introduction:

I am at Kothia, a small *hat* by the side of the Deoghar - Godda highway running through the northern periphery of Santhal Pargana. It is situated at the western edge of Saraiyahat block of Dumka district, in what may be called a Santhal dominated area, almost on the eve of the anniversary of the Santhal Hul (1855) on 28<sup>th</sup> June. From the roadside you see Statues of Sidhu-Kanu the two most celebrated heroes of the Hul, at the access of almost every village, very much like Ambedkar statues in the dalit bastis of Uttar Pradesh. There is the Sidhu-Kanu university at Dumka, the divisional headquarter of Santhal Pargana and also the second capital of Jharkhand. Apparently, the Jharkhand State, which was formed to meet the aspiration of the tribals, has done enough to build symbols of the Hul.

At Kothia also there is Sidhu-Kanu memorial that the State government is reported to have helped to raise. The petty shopkeepers who was transforming a bi-weekly *hat* into a bazaar are readying themselves for this festival.

Two years before the first war of Indian Independence (1857), the Santhals had raised a mighty rebellion against their Diku exploiters; the colonial administrators and their minions. It is significant the main demand of the Santhal Hul was abolition of the Kamia system of debt bondage, in which a majority of the Santhal peasants had them entrapped by the outside usurious minions elements, generally called Bhagats (curiously) and working on their own land as bonded labour.

The roots of *Kamia* and *Kimauti* systems among the Santhals go back into history. They were settled here by the British colonizers especially to

reclaim the forest land. They could retain the land as long as they paid rent to the *Zamindar* who either demanded exorbitant rents or disposed them and rack-rented the land cleared by them to the non-tribal settlers in the area. Very often when faced with the threat of eviction, they fell prey to devious money lenders, who got hold of their land through mortgage or sales and reduced them to the status of *kamia* who was bond to repay their debt through personal service. And the debt could never have been repaid as the interest rate ranged upto 500 per cent. *Kimauti*, likewise, required one to do physical labour for repayment of a debt. It may not involve mortgage of land. There were other evil devices like *bhaoh* , *Krishani* and even *Pradhani* evolved for alienating the Santhal peasants of their land. Notwithstanding the various protective laws, that the Santhal Hul had forced the British rulers to introduce, expropriation of the peasantry of their means of production and subsistence continued and continued even after the independence.

As we discuss existing conditions of agricultural labour in the area in a group of about 52 comprising some previously released bonded labourers in 1990 through a PIL in the Supreme Court and the 'new' bonded labourers identified by them, Santhals prominently figure in the list of names, many of them working under a system of family bondage, i.e the man himself, wife and atleast one male child doing bagali (cattle grazing) form the master.

Hul is celebrated annually as a festival by the Santhals mainly, with what is generally termed as 'gay abandon'. Freedom has a fragmented meaning.

## **2. About the Report**

This report is based mainly on a rapid appraisal of the situation with groups labouring. I have had previous contacts with them and it is very largely the released bonded labourers (referred to above) who facilitated the village visits and group discussions. I visited selected villages in the same three blocks that had figured in the identification and release of bonded labour organized during the 1980s with the final order coming in 1990, viz Deoghar and Mohanpur (part) of the present Deoghar district and Saraiyaghat of Dumka district. An identification of bonded labour exercise has been made by the released bonded labour group of Saraiyahat block in their own and , in the adjacent Jarmundi block of Dumla district. This list complete with particulars of the bonded labour and his *malik* (master or owner) was forwarded by me at the end of the year 2008, to the Dy. Commissioner , Dumka along with my letter dated 14.12.2008, suggesting that he may arrange a joint verification by officials appointed by him and the action group members. The list was personally submitted to the District Officer and the group leaders met him a number of times but no action followed. I did not have time to go to the villages in Jarmundi. I could only meet some bonded laborers on the identification list in the meeting organized by the Saraiyahat group.

In Mohanpur, where even in the 1980s, a division was created by a NGO who claimed part of the block as his constituency, the organization Bandhuwa Mukti Sangh, has withered with the demise of the two leading activists; the strangely committed and courageous Bhuvaneshwari and Shaligram. Another (Vakildas) is a schoolteacher now and could not find time to accompany me on the village visits. Still an identification list was prepared but it could not be verified in a peer group. Vakildas had agreed to do this but he might take time.

## **Identification and Caution Needed**

I witness the remarkable change that has come about in the attitude of the bonded labour. If previously they were frightened to come forward and declare that they were bonded to such and such *malik* and indeed quite a significant number of them were cowed down to deny it later. This time I found that they virtually made a beeline to get their names included. However, the change stops here. Since it has happened once, they have come to believe that it can happen again. It sounds like they are waiting to be released. We will go into an analysis of the factors involved later in the report. It is important to note here that this makes the task of verification more difficult and time taking. This is a constraint, which has to be clearly recognized. This is not to doubt the integrity of the bonded labour, indeed in one judgment given by a bench presided over by Mr. Justice P.N. Bhagwati, the Supreme Court had ruled that any wage earner who gets less than the prescribed minimum wage is a bonded labour and on this criterion all agricultural labourers are bonded. But even in class litigation, Courts rely on case to case verification by its own Commissioner (s) , and the reality of the debt bondage to a particular bond master has to be proved. The masters are bound to deny, even though no court has penalized them so far.

## **The Bonded Labour Scene in 1980s**

Debt bondage of agricultural labour has existed for centuries but it was discovered only in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the Indian Republic in the wake of declaration of National Emergency in 1975! A Bonded Labour System

Abolition Ordinance was brought soon after, which was subsequently passed by the Parliament as the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act 1976. Identification and release of bonded labour was included as one of the items of the highly pressurised Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme. There was no total count of the bonded labours and no action plan for their release and rehabilitation. Randomly some bonded labourers might have been released by the District administration, somewhere but this was much too little considering its staggering magnitude.

Post emergency, some NGOs / civil rights groups took up the task of release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers; the apex Court of the country was highly sensitive to the human rights issue and a number of public interests litigation (PILs) by various groups in the 1980s were filed but for some reason the 'public interest' waned by the beginning of the 1990s. The chapter on adult bonded labour in agricultural sector especially was closed. All of them were deemed to have been released and rehabilitated. Subsequently, the law was invoked selectively in the case of migrant bonded child labour in certain industrial activities such as the carpet industry of Mirzapur, Bhadohi in Uttar Pradesh.

In the State of Bihar, of which Santhal Pargana formed a part in the 1980s, hardly any attempt was made accepting a very few PILs by NGO for the release and rehabilitation of bonded labours. The State government agencies drastically underplayed the magnitude of the problem, though the system prevailed massively in its various forms.

The countrywide survey on the incidence of bonded labour conducted by Gandhi Peace Foundation and National Labour Institute (the GPF-NLI Survey) must be accepted as the only major systematic attempt to size up the problem, Santhal Parganas figured in the said survey as a

sample district from Bihar. It was classified as a 'high incidence' district on a six point intensity scale. And the total number of bonded labour in the district were estimated between 10,000 to 20,000 i.e approximately 10% of the agricultural labourers. But GPF - NLI estimate above appeared to be a gross underestimation, in the face of an identification (by no means total) made by the Lok Samiti volunteers in the two and half blocks, out of the 41 blocks in the district (Subsequently split into 6 districts units) and made a Commissionery in itself. Based on this identification i.e 3148 in 2<sup>1/2</sup> blocks, the incidence would be estimated even parsimoniously, at 1100 per block and the total would have easily surpassed 50,000.

The Lok Samiti (an offshoot of the Bihar Movement) volunteers supported by a local NGO, Santhal Pargana Antyodaya Ashram of which the author of report was the Chairman in that period, with training and other logistical inputs, including legal defence against any acts of intimidation or violence, did not carry out any concealed identification, it was a process of and self organization. Even the volunteers come from the same labour class families and they were part of the organization. Thus any bonded labour had to come forward openly to get identified. In some cases the whole village group distanced themselves in others some individuals hesitated initially, and some broke away after joining. The names of only those who remained firm were included in the mass petition. The writ was admitted in December 1983 and the final order passed in February 1990. Thus , it has to be recognized that a backlog would have been left even in the blocks covered at that time.

Moreover, the Court did not take a final view on certain sub categories of bonded labour. The verification process stretched over 5 years. Shri K B Saxena, IAS, was the Commissioner appointed by the Court

and 6 other IAS officers were also deployed to assist him but they shouldered this additional responsibility along with their main charge. All sorts of conflicts and strains grew during this period between the masters and bonded labourers and breached the relation between the two.

As a result, some bonded labourers figuring in the identification list started going out to work and were not present in their village on the day of verification. The verification officer had drawn up a separate list of such labourers under the title : Bonded Earlier But Have Released Themselves (91 in Saraiyahat alone) but recommended that they must also be given rehabilitation assistance. They were not. This gave rise to the issue that if a labour has the freedom to go out looking for work, how could he be termed as 'bonded'? The counter argument was that Santhal Pargana is almost wholly mono-cropped almost entirely dependent upon monsoon rains and it is, therefore, to the advantage of the *malik* to hold bonded labour for one crop season only. There is very little Rabi cultivation that too in small patches and there is no summer crop at all and the bonded labour have to go out to seek work during the peak summer months.

All these points raise a substantial issue with regard to the interpretation of bonded labour law. But these could not be settled at that time. These are still valid, and deserve to be brought up again.

I revisited the scene about 5 years after on an urgent tasks of gathering evidences on the current status of bonded labour in connection with another PIL in the Supreme Court (the call had come from Bonded Liberation Front). I decided to select some of those villages who I knew had not joined the self - identification / organization effort in the 1980s. I found that they remained bonded as before and there was no effort by the

administration or and NGO for their release / rehabilitation. The circumstances under which I had to leave scene of the action in middle may be interesting. It sheds light on a latent aspect of NGO politics. All managing committee members were locals excepting myself, and also from the khadi/ Sarvodaya institutions. At the same time, at least two more influential among them belonged to a dominant landowning high caste in the district and their was a lot of pressure on them more so as some arrests were also made in cases of atrocities on their bonded labour. One of these gentlemen himself assumed Chairmanship of the organization.

Then the rehabilitation programme for the 2565 bonded labourers released under the Supreme Court order was implemented in a routinely haphazard manner by the district administration. It was treated like any other relief programme. Certain innovative measures included in the rehab plan, approved by the Supreme Court, eg, formation of clusters of bonded labour households for land- based development through inputs like land improvement irrigation wells, bunding etc; organization of industrial cooperatives for activities like brick making, rice milling, forest produce processing never started, though sum of Rs. 2000-3000 had been kept apart from the statutory rehabilitation assistance as share money.

In several cases a matter as simple as determination of the legal heir(s) of the released bonded labourers who had died during the pendency of the litigation was not decided for years.

In conclusion of the reappraisal of the outcome of the socio-legal action of the 1980s, objectively speaking, it cannot be said that even in the target blocks all existing bonded labourers had been released. There was a substantial backlog left and nothing happened to them by way of any

deliberate intervention or changes in the agrarian structures or agricultural pattern.

### **A Fresh Appraisal**

As stated above in June (2009) last week I visited some blocks/villages, which were part of the earlier action wellnigh two decades ago for the release/ rehabilitation of bonded labour.

For broad classification Santhal Pargana may be divided into three zones: - the northern part adjoining Bhagalpur-Mongher districts, extending from Deoghar to Godda, the south western periphery adjoining Birbhum and Malda districts of Bengal, and the interiors. Historically the outside settlers also fell into the same pattern. But in later years they penetrated into the interiors also.

As far as the composition of the agricultural labour class and the incidence of bonded labour, a majority of them in Deoghar were from Scheduled Castes, in the interior parts like Saraiyahat a majority of them were from the scheduled tribes mostly, Santhals who anyway constitute the most populous tribe in the State. The OBCs, particularly the most backward, also formed a significant proportion of the bonded labour. Some of the OBCs like Mandals, Yadavs, Khetauri, Sundhi were prominent among the bond masters (*malik*).

### **Village Profiles**

#### **1. Ojha Jamua**

Ojha Jamuwa and Misir Jamua are constituent villages of Sangram Lodia panchayat situated almost on the fringe of Deoghar, the district head

quarter. As the name suggests, the village might have been owned by the Ojha (actually Jha) and Mishra families both originating from Mithila in North Bihar and they would have been in some manner connected with the Deoghar temple of which they are the priests. The Brahmins and Bhumihars are the main landowning castes in these villages.

In the earlier identification of bonded labour, the Jha household of i, Ojha Jamuwa and the Sinha household of Rohini headed by a prominent lawyer in the district court each holding 22 bonded labour were the biggest bond-masters in the locality. Here the Jha household still retains that position.

This shows not much has changed here, although almost all bonded labourers of that generation had been released in the 1990. In the group that has assembled excepting one (Dego Mahra, of Malpur aged about 60 years, all others had incurred the bonded debts in post 1990 period. They were the next generation of the released bonded labourers.

#### **Case No. 1: *Yasin Ansari***

Yasin Ansari aged about 40 years has just returned from Delhi, where he was working in the Metro Rail Project as a construction contractor's labour. An obvious question: Why have you returned? Moreover, the wage rate in Metro should be much higher. His answer: I have to return because I am a bonded labour, before the crop season begins.

Yasin's father Rasool Ansari also was a bonded labour. He was among the released ones. What he did with the rehabilitation assistance? There was no clear answer to the question but roughly it turns out that Rasool Ansari had a large family. Moreover, Yasin was a Blue Baby (born

with a hole in heart) and he could never get complete treatment, but it caused a problem again and again. The four other brothers of Yasin are also bonded to the same master.

Yasin himself had incurred the debt of Rs. 500/- when he separated from his father's household, from the same *malik* to whom his father was bonded. His other four brothers aged between 37 -28 years are also bonded to the same *malik* (Vinay Narayan Jha).

Later, it transpired that the difference between the Delhi wage rate and what one gets here may not be as much as it appears to us. The Rajasthan contractor for whom he worked did not pay him even Rs. 100/- per day in real terms as settled. There was a dalal in between. He deducted something on one count or other. Moreover, he always kept a portion of his wage bill in arrears. He had to buy out his daily needs from a shop fixed by him who dictated his own prices. All in all, 'when one is away from his home the expenses increase'.

Haven't you tried to repay the debt of Rs.500/- in these 20 years or so ? I had saved some money but the *malik* said I have to pay more than Rs. 15,000/-. I will never have this much. Then my illness consumed all I had saved. He has a hole in his heart. There are others like Yasin in the group. The new trend is that generally even the bonded labours migrate towards Delhi etc to work on construction projects during the peak 2-3 summer months after whatever little *Rabi* harvesting there is. Its still vastly a mono cropped area and there is very little *Rabi* cultivation around wells and tanks. The bonded labour has the option to go out in search of work during this period, provided they return by mid- June when the agricultural operations begin with the pre-monsoon rains.

The master has a lien over his indebted labour without any responsibility or liability. They are paid only for the days they are called for work, that too at almost half of the going wage rate for unattached labour. Normally, a bonded labourer's wife also works for the same *Malik* in agricultural activities earmarked for women eg paddy planting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing etc some of them for various domestic chores also.

It is a general practice that a bonded labour shall be paid half the currently prevailing rate for the casual or unattached labour. There may be small variations at the most up to Rs. 10/- depending the pleasure of the *Malik*.

## **2. Case No. 2: *Saryu Das***

Saryu Das, the same age as Yasin is also the son of a former bonded labour, Paltoo Das (deceased) , who was released in 1990. He is employed in a construction company in junior managerial position. He has to work at the project sites away from home. He has come on leave but does not want to resume because he has to arrange for the marriage of the daughter and has other things to do. Then he adds: 'In fact, Sir, I am hurt by the behaviour of the owner of the firm. At times he is abusive and calls names because I am a harijan'. I ask him: how is it that you escaped falling in the trap? As he told: I started going to school, I was good at school. My father was interested that I read and with the money that he received in rehabilitation, he bought me a bicycle. I started reading in a city school in Deoghar. I was fortunate to find a good patron, a marketing officer one, Mr. Mehta, whose child I was giving tuition. He also supported me whenever I needed extra money for books etc. I could live in his house at

Deoghar. I passed my class XII examination from Deoghar. I wished to do B.Sc. I ventured to Patna, I thought I will be able to support myself by giving tuitions. Then Mr Mehta was also posted Mr. Mehta there. I thought I could do it, I was at Patna for a few months. Then my father died and I had to come back. But Sir, how can I forget that my father died without food (*Anaj ke bina mare*).

Evidently, Saryu Das's was a single-minded pursuit. I ask: "How many others like you among you (the sons of released bonded labour), 'hardly 8 or 9: they may not be much better but did not get bonded.

. Among those who have changed their lives, in the locality, they often give the example of Jhasku Das, whose three sons have become government school teachers and who had even pawned a metal pot his former *malik* only to smile him . Jhasku Das tells us, Sir, with the money I bought bicycles and started sending my children to school in Deoghar (town). He was the bold type even when the self - identification was going on. A babu (clerk) in the Deputy Commissioner's Office, had cancelled his old age pension granted as part of the rehabilitation assistance (reportedly) on household income criterion. Jhasku found that the babu was drawing pension in his mother's name. He challenged this and got his pension restored. It was sort of a deal; the clerk also enjoys the benefit (he is also dalit from another village in the same area). The babu has also taken the residential school opened by the government for the children of the mukta-bandua labour to his village. They complain that there is no released bonded labour child in the school. But they have not tried to register any protest. Even Jhasku has not concerned himself about it.

It's each for himself: The dynamics of change stop here some individuals have come out of the groove. Some are more upwardly mobile. Education certainly is the key factor; proximity to the Deoghar the district HQ also is a facilitating factor. Above all, the subjective factor play a great role. Within the village economic structure, there is no scope. A agricultural labour

household is asset less and permanently in deficit. Moreover, he has nothing to pledge than his own family labour. Borrowing from landowner is the only coping up mechanism for the agricultural labour here. Debt bondage has become a family tradition.

One substantial gain of the rehabilitation assistance received was added benefits like housing (Indira Awas Yojana) and social security (old age pension) under the existing scheme. Besides housing, the sanction of Indira Awas in their name conferred the right to the housing site. Otherwise, the *malik* claimed that they are living on their land. Bihar was one State which had passed a law to confer homestead right to the landless agricultural labour. Distribution of *basgit parcha* was an issue taken in a big way by the political parties and NGOs in 1960s and 1970s. But still a huge problem exists and a factor of coercive labour relation. In many cases, the former *malik*, takes *begar* on this account.

### Present Status

In the group meeting we attempt to draw up a list of the bonded labour among those present there. I take the help of Saryu Das (case no. 2). There is quite some commotion, some of those present wanted to give names of those not present there. Lastly we decided to ask them to make a declaration on a form. We listed 89 names. Some of them lived in other hamlets but were bonded to *maliks* in Ojha/Misir Jamuwa

S.No	Name of the <i>dalit</i> Hamlet	No. of Agricultural Households	No. of Bonded labour
1	Ojha Jamuwa	31	41
2	Misir Jamua	24	27
3	Patardih	-	9
4	Others	-	12
	Total		89

Two other lists were given at Deoghar by two old activists. But there was no time to scrutinize them.

### **Saraiyahat**

In this block, the block level organization of the bonded labour. Bandhuwa Mukti Sangh formed in the 1980s in the process of self identification; and it was the strongest among the three unit, still remains intact, at least in one part of the block. Though their major attention has been taken by the pending claims of the released bonded labours, they have also tried to make an identification list of the existing ones not only in Saraiyahat block but in the adjoining Jarmundi blocks also. It was decided to go over the list prepared by them and arrange a group meeting along with a cross section of those who figured in the identification list. The meeting does not come off on 26<sup>th</sup> June as Arjun Das, the President of the organization (informal) and most of the leading cadres had to attend the district Court in connection with a case filed against him on the CO's complaint for disturbing raj-kaj. The case has suddenly opened after about 16 years.

#### **The Case**

##### **Police Hangs Two Dalit Youths!**

Two dalit (Rabidas) youth activists of the Lok Samiti \* had gone to the Anchal Adhikari's (CO's) office at Saraiyahat to obtain permit for kerosene oil for the non-formal school. They had already made numerous attempts. This time they became vehement also charged that the office clerk was demanding a bribe. This shocked the officer belonging to a dominant high caste. He called the police, who dragged the youths to the police station. The SHO ordered his men to hang them (*latka do*) from the tree by the side of the police station. Providentially it was not by neck but by their hands, precisely the thumbs. This was simply to give these upstarts a lesson. The incident was reported in the newspapers. A report (by me) appeared in the New Delhi edition of the Indian

Express. A formal complaint was registered against the SHO but it was killed. The Anchal Adhikari had also made a complaint. The two were arrested and had to be taken out on bail.

\* The Lok Samiti programme was given up by JP (Jayaprakash Naryan) and his followers were ruling the State !

The group here has drawn up identification list for Saraiyahat and adjoining Jarmundi block. The lists (handwritten) are complete with details like name of the bonded labour, social status, village/panchayat, amount of debt, duration (years) under bondage, name of the bond master, his village / panchayat and landholding size. Saraiyahat list contains 325 and Jarmundi list 88 name.

The group members say that the Sariyahat list is nearly complete and prepared after village-to-village census. But the Jarmundi list is incomplete, though it was also done through village visits. Their reach was limited to villages where they had reliable contacts. Then the work had to be stopped in the face of threats by one of the biggest bond masters. As a result the response from the bonded labour was affected.

The Jarmundi list was drawn up about 2 years back. It was sent to the Dy. Commissioner, Dumka with the proposition that he may order a joint verification by an appropriate officer and member of the group. He appeared to be positive about it when the list was submitted to him, but his response ended there.

We could only go over the lists in the group meeting. On cursory calculation the tribals, largely Santhals and Pahariya in a small proportion, constitute about half of the bonded labour force. The SCs about 30%. In a few villages the Muslims (Ansari) substitute for the others.

There was no time to verify the list. It's not a matter of doubting the integrity of those who have put in hard work; and its rather hazardous. But still

it's a bit complex and requires case to case verification; and doing it for 325 + 88 = 413 is a stupendous task.

In the group Bihari Murmu, Rajia Devi (his wife), Maru Marandi, both Santhal and Sudhir Mahto and Tisitu Devi, both OBC are bonded to one Lakshman Mandal who actually owes about 100 acres of land, operates mini buses and has other businesses. Interesting his one daughter-in-law is a Anganwadi sevika and one can't expect her to serve. They grab any opportunity.

All these appear to be cases of inter-generation family bondage. This *malik* has 12 other bonded labourers. Then there are others whose *maliks* are relatively smaller landowners, average around 30 acres, but they have other incomes, they either have government or other regular jobs or trade e.g. construction contractors, transport operators and so on. It is only the agricultural labourers who have no other option, but to incur debt by pledging their own labour or the family. The *maliks* find that rather than any other form of tenancy, like share-cropping engaging labour on bonded terms, is the best option. This is an important dimension. Bonded labour system does not explain itself in the framework of household agriculture alone.

### **Child Bondage**

Around Kothia, in Nawadih panchayat, we make a count of the children below 15 years not going to school. We take two small hamlets closest to the meeting place; both exclusively Santhali. In one hamlet of 18 households 25 children; 18 girls & 7 boys were not going to school; In the second hamlet of 18 households also, 25 children were not going to school. The number of boys and girls separately does not figure out clearly. It appears, actually very few of them ever started going to school. Though their name would appear on the rolls. For one hamlet the participants could identify 4 dropouts only; all early i.e. class II or III. The non-school going children constituted more than 80% of the relevant age-group.

Among these 50 out of school children at least 10 are working under what apparently appears to be a system of family bondages; that is for the same *malik* to whom the parents are bonded, though the children's wage would be, usually half of adult wage, will be calculated separately.

In the villages visited or on the way all over children could be seen cattle grazing during the school hours also. '*Bagali*' as it is called here is an important activity as animal husbandry itself is a vital compound of the agricultural economy, in fact more important than crop cultivation in many villages, where the soil and moisture conditions are poorer, but they have better access to green fodder resources.

'*Bagali*' is common, but its magnitude varies. For example it's more prominent in Sariyahat than Deoghar. Then, the social composition of the masters is no less relevant. In Sariyahat the bond masters most frequently belong to the intermediate (or peasant) castes i.e. OBCs as a welfare category, Mandals (mostly 'Yadav' but some 'Sundhi' traders) Mahto and the bigger bond-master has a larger stock. Thus traditionally a bonded laborer's son generally started as a '*bagali*' and replaced his father. Whereas girls were engaged for domestic service. The other son(s) would also work for the same master or find another. Thus, it was the main mechanism of perpetuating inter-generational bondage.

Like all child labour, there are two types of bagals: the family labours i.e. those grazing their own cattle and the wage labour. Of the first type, some '*bagals*', may also take out the cattle of 2-3 others for grazing on a small charge per cattle. The wage labour among '*bagals*' generally work as part of family bondage. The system still prevails. We have no sufficient basis to comment if it is as strong as in the past. The proportion must be significantly variable, but in a block like Sariyahat, it could be at least 10% in this particular activity.

**The list (identifications) of Bonded Labour**

<b>S.No</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Duration Years Bonded</b>	<b>Name of Bond Master</b>
1.	Yasin Ansari	41	21	Vinay N.Jha
2.	Lukman Ansari	37	19	-do-
3.	Rahman Ansari	35	16	-do-
4.	Hadis Ansari	32	12	-do-
5.	Shahadat Ansari	28	10	-do-
6.	Umesh Das	45	15	-do-
7.	Birju Das	32	12	-do-
8.	PremThakur	45	15	-do-
9.	Ugan Thakur	48	20	-do-
10.	Manker Ram	32	15	-do-
11.	Tankar Ram	30	12	-do-
12.	Anil Ram	35	18	-do-
13.	Prakash Ram	33	17	-do-
14.	Arth Mahato	28	9	-do-
15.	Suresh Ram	31	12	-do-
16.	Mahender Ram	27	10	-do-
17.	Tinku Das	26	8	-do-
18.	Saroj Das	42	18	-do-
19.	Sanjay Das	28	8	-do-
20.	Ramdev Das	32	18	-do-
21.	Pavan Das	28	12	-do-
22.	Chandan Das	30	10	-do-
23.	Parsu Ram Mahato	40	25	-do-
24.	Dingal Mahato	48	13	Rudra Narain Jha
25.	Rohit Mahato	25	7	-do-
26.	Bhim Das	45	25	Munna Kant Jha
27.	Ravi Kumar Das	26	10	-do-
28.	Bal Ram Mahato	35	18	Bhikhari Jha
29.	Samar Mahato	32	18	-do-
30.	Maheshwar Mahato	30	16	-do-
31.	Kanchan Mahato	30	12	Upender Jha
32.	Lal Chand Mahato	32	12	-do-
33.	Bhuvneshwar Mahato	27	10	-do-
34.	Charku Manjhi	44	17	Inder N.Jha
35.	Ghajo Das	45	25	Prakash C.Jha
36.	Bharat Mahato	35	16	Shiv Shankar Jha
37.	Shakti Ram	30	12	Kashi Nath Jha
38.	Sheeban Ram	40	18	-do-

39.	Kelu Ram	28	8	Inder .N.Jha
40.	NareshThakur	35	15	Sita Ram Jha
41.	Thasho Thakur	40	25	Sita Ram Jha
42.	M.Sattar	45	18	Choleshwar Ram
43.	Bodha Manjhi	40	20	Ashok Jha
44.	Huro Manjhi	36	7	-do-
45.	Pavan Manjhi	50	20	Gauri S.Mishra
46.	Pappu Manjhi	25	6	Nav Ratna Mishr
47.	Rajesh Manjhi	35	13	Sanjay Mishra
48.	Rinku Manjhi	27	10	Sajni Mishra
49.	Bhikhan Manjhi	28	10	Binod Mishra
50.	Binod Manjhi	27	6	Harender Mishra
51.	Karu Manjhi	38	16	Abhisekh Mishr
52.	Chuhho Manjhi	30	8	Subhash Mishra
53.	Baleshwar Manjhi	37	12	Baski Singh
54.	Shankar Manjhi	32	14	Anil Singh
55.	Kishori Manjhi	34	12	Karu Singh
56.	Tek Lal Manjhi	46	11	Rajo Rai
57.	Mathan Manjhi	36	12	Adhir Rai
58.	Sobhan Manjhi	37	9	GaneshSingh
59.	Pardeshi Manjhi	32	15	Abdesh Mishra
60.	Chhavi Manjhi	45	18	Ashok Singh
61.	Vigan Manjhi	30	10	Lalan Singh
62.	Pinku Singh	35	15	Bobby Singh
63.	Bhuvneshwar Manjhi	37	12	Jaipal Singh
64.	Mithu Manjhi	36	12	Ravi Singh
65.	Rajender Manjhi	22	6	Ajai Singh
66.	Mudal kManjhi	35	8	Nago Mahoto
67.	Nihar Manjhi	35	18	Ravi Singh
68.	Dirender Manjhi	31	8	Binod Singh
69.	Hiraman Mahara	35	17	Arun Sharma
70.	Sanjay Mahara	35	12	-do-
71.	Pavan Thakur	30	6	ParshuRam Rai
72.	Mahadev Mahara	40	18	Suchit Sharma
73.	Rajesh Mahara	31	8	-do-
74.	Moti Thakur	28	8	Parshu Ram Rai
75.	Horro Thakur	45	20	Sham.S.Chaudhu
76.	Bhim Thakur	35	8	Bhuvan Mahato
77.	Dharam Thakur	36	9	Vinod Yadav
78.	Ganesh Thakur	42	16	Avadh Singh
79.	Basuki Thakur	22	4	-do-
80.	Paltan Thakur	40	12	Ishwari Rai

81.	Vijay Thakur	56	25	Adhir Rai
82.	Suresh Mahato	28	7	Shyam.N.Singh
83.	Murari Mahato	49	35	-do-
84.	Umesh Mahato	25	8	-do-
85.	Ashok Mahato	40	22	-do-
86.	Akku Mahato	30	8	Lalmani Singh
87.	Makoli Mahato	35	10	-do-
88.	Dego Mahato	60	35	Nand.K.Singh
89.	Bhuvdev Das	45	15	Kedar Mahato

