

Child labour in the Indian textile industry

Rescue of Sumangali Girls

Poverty stuck families where agriculture no longer wins them bread, send their daughters to jobs in textile mills under Sumangali scheme, also as a way for getting the girls married because they can earn their dowry in the factories. At least that is one part of the story.

The Indian organization SAVE writes: "Once the girls land into the industry, the core reality hits hard on them. The worst form of exploitation by the management make the workers exhausted and most of the bitter experiences remain unsaid inside the hearts of many girls. Away from home, with no one to support them, these girls languish inside the textile/garment units. Money and political power buries most of the atrocities inside walls of the industries. There are many incidents to prove the hazardous and unsafe conditions where girls are being employed in textile/garment industries. Though the employers vehemently deny the existence of Sumangali scheme, incidents where Sumangali girls [and some boys] are being rescued continues at regular intervals."

SAVE plays a crucial role in rescue and rehabilitation of the Sumangali workers employed as camp labours. SAVE conducts surprise raids with the cooperation of Factory Inspectorate and labour department. On February 6, 2013, a surprise raid was conducted at Maheskumar Spinning Mills located in Cheyur in Tirupur District. Six girls and two boys in the age group of 13 – 16 years were rescued who were employed under Sumangali scheme and were reintegrated with their family.



Devayani, aged 13 years now, had joined the mill when she was younger. She had studied in a preliminary school and due to poverty she was forced to leave her native village Karuthapillaiyoor in Tirunelveli district and joined the mill

What is Sumangali?

Sumangali is a form of bonded or forced labour. They are recruited within as well outside of the state of Tamil Nadu. The majority of the workers are Dalit (outcaste) girls under 18 coming from poor families, who are lured with promises of a decent wage, comfortable accommodation and, in some cases, a sum of money upon completion of the contract that may be used for their dowry.

These recruitment and employment practices are often referred to as 'Sumangali scheme'. Labour migrants often live in strictly supervised factory-owned hostels where they have little opportunity for contact with their families, let alone with trade unions or labour advocates. Workers make long hours, including forced overtime, in some cases even up to 24 hours on end, for low wages, and under unhealthy conditions. Verbal and physical abuse is frequently reported. Often, completing the contract period is a condition to receive the lump sum amount, which is not a bonus but made up of withheld wages. Even if the women manage to finish the term, they often do not receive the promised amount.

with a hope that her earning would support the family. She worked for more than 12 hours a day and was not allowed to avail holidays/weekly off.

Bommi was from Theni district and she was 14 years when got employed under the Sumangali scheme. She studied up to 5th standard and with a hope of getting the lump sum money which was promised by the labour agent, she got employed. Both the girls were paid a monthly salary of Rs.1500/- (€21,50) which is much lesser than the minimum age prescribed by the Tamil Nadu government.

Devayani and Bommi expressed their gratitude for rescuing them as they could not withstand the work pressure and mental torture by the mill management. The parents of rescued girls requested SAVE to lobby with the management to get the lump sum money in proportion to their work period.

List of girls / boys rescued:

| Sl.No | Name | Age | Sex | Father's name | Native place |
|-------|--------------|-----|-----|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | Sanjitha | 15 | F | Neerakar | Orissa |
| 2. | Devayani | 13 | F | Gnanaprakasam | Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu |
| 3 | Rasmita | 13 | F | Kaalanthi | Orissa |
| 4. | Bommi | 15 | F | Nagaraj | Theni, Tamil Nadu |
| 5. | Alifa | 14 | F | Sathyapratha | Orissa |
| 6. | Lourdu Regin | 13 | M | Arokiyasamy | Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu |
| 7. | Kadamini | 15 | F | Mathusoodan | Orissa |
| 8 | Rajkumar | 13 | M | Chinnasamy | Salem, Tamil Nadu |

For more information on the Sumangali Scheme, see: http://www.indianet.nl/sumangali_e.html