

CEC Working Paper

Report On Bonded Labour in Tamil Nadu

*Analysing the Effectiveness of the Programmes for the Eradication
of the Bonded Labour System*

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PREFACE

Although policy makers, administrators, academics, trade unions and NGOs may differ on the concept, approach and extent of bonded labour in India, one point, which all of them currently agree about is, "Labour bondage still persists!" A country poised to emerge as the next economic superpower still faces the challenge of liberating millions from the scourge of bondage into which they have been pushed by poverty, hunger and social exclusion. Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that the process of globalisation, kick started by economic reforms, far from reducing the magnitude of bondage has reinforced it further through the process of informalisation.

The Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976, which reflected the commitment towards 'Liberty' made in Article 23 of the Indian Constitution, surely brought a ray of hope for many toiling under this inhuman practice for mere survival. Yet, our experiences in the past 30 years of intervention suggest that this progressive tool has inherent constraints in eradicating the bonded labour system.

Against this backdrop, in 2004, the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) and Anti Slavery International (ASI) decided to initiate action research in selected states and sectors to assess whether the programmes initiated by the government, international organisations and NGOs have been effective in eradicating the bonded labour system and, if not, why these have not been effective.

The Indian project was part of a South Asia regional project on bonded labour, coordinated by the Anti Slavery International. The Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) coordinated the project in Pakistan and the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) coordinated the project in Nepal.

In India, the states covered in three years were Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh in sectors ranging from traditional agriculture to the export-oriented garment industry. The series of working papers is an outcome of these studies, which we hope, will serve as a tool for policy framers as well as grass-root activists to understand the changing dynamics of labour bondage in India in the present context.

The desk research and field studies in Chhattisgarh and Orissa were done by Mr. Abhay Xaxa; field research in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Delhi was carried out by Dr. R.S. Gautam, Ms Gauramma, Prof. Manjit Singh, Ms Anjali Deshpande, Dr Mohanasundaram and Ms Sujata Madhok, respectively. Initially Prof. Gopal Iyer and then Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka provided valuable guidance and intellectual leadership to the researchers throughout the study.

I gratefully acknowledge the support, encouragement and guidance provided by the Advisory Board of the Project, constituted by Prof. D.N. Dhanagare, Com. Suneet Chopra, Ms Manjari Dingwaney, Com. Amarjeet Kaur and Mr. K. Chandrasekar. We also acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the Regional Consultant Prof. Jan Bremen in the formulation of the research, the field studies and in the writing of the reports. We recognise the encouragement provided by Anti Slavery International, in particular, Krishna Upadhyay at all stages of the project. The studies would not have been possible but for the effective coordination provided by my colleagues Bansari Nag and Abhay Xaxa.

J. John
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July 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, BLSAA, 1976, made unlawful the practice of binding labour through the mechanism of debt. The practice of coercing workers through debt was institutionalised in most parts of the Indian subcontinent over a long period of time under different local names. However, the system worked in a similar manner everywhere. It bound the worker with the creditor-employer until the outstanding debt was cleared. Given the abject state of poverty of those who entered the arrangement and the social disabilities imposed on them by the order of caste hierarchy, very few could get out of the arrangement. Those who worked in such arrangements invariably came from the 'depressed' caste groups. In the given state of affairs being tied to a specific employer became a fact of life and beyond for those belonging to the labouring classes in the subcontinent. Poverty and marginal status kept the workers perpetually indebted. The debts were transferred from one generation to another. This form of slavery came to be known as 'bonded-labour'.

The legal abolition of 'bonded labour' in 1976 was a progressive legislation and an important landmark in the history of contemporary India. It offered a ray of hope to India's most deprived and marginalised citizens. More importantly, it recognised that Independence and the introduction of democracy had not necessarily brought freedom to all. Even industrialisation and the introduction of new technology in the agrarian sector, which led to the growth of the market economy, and the development of capitalist agriculture, did not release labour from the traditional modes of bondage and patron-client relations everywhere.

The passing of the 1976 legislation straightaway meant that workers bound by an outstanding debt no longer needed to keep working with the creditor-employer. It made the binding of labour against a debt a legal offence. It also made it legally binding on state governments to identify all the bonded labourers in their states, organise their release from the wily employers and provide them with a viable rehabilitation package. To accomplish this, the state governments initiated several measures and instituted new administrative set-ups. Official surveys enumerated the incidents of bonded labour and special commissions were set up to formulate strategies for the eradication of the system.

Much has changed in India since the legislation was enacted more than three decades back. Though agriculture continues to employ a large proportion of active workers, its place in India's economy is not predominant. While the impact of legislation and state action against bonded labour has been limited, the social relations of production on the ground have undergone many changes. The opening up of labour markets, the increasing linkages with towns and the growing political consciousness have made it difficult for employers to bind labour for generations. In some instances, employers, in order to circumvent the law, have found other ways of subjugating labour.

Besides state interventions, the different regions of India have been witness to social movements and civil society interventions supporting bonded labourers and favouring their release. Several non governmental organisations (NGOs) used the available legal provisions to support individual labourers in their struggle against their powerful employers. As a consequence of all these measures, the old system of generational bondage has slowly declined almost everywhere in India.

The decline of the old system, however, did not translate into any kind of substantive empowerment of the labour class. In some cases, it just meant a greater degree of casualisation, or simply, unemployment. However, this is not to suggest that the traditional relations of patronage and clientele were better for the poor labourer. Freedom without economic security means little and brings other forms of vulnerabilities. Today, labour has to struggle to find employment despite being much more mobile. Travelling and sustaining themselves in an alien setting is difficult. Migrations of the poor invariably occur through

intermediaries of different kinds. Such migrations, sometimes, also involve the payment of some advance to the labourers or their families, which, in turn, leads to the institutionalisation of newer forms of relations based upon dependency. This has been found to be a pattern in many industries. Dependencies institutionalised through debt have also continued, albeit in newer forms in the agricultural and several other sectors of employment. The payment of an advance to secure labour supply at depressed wages is commonplace in many sectors. The liberalisation or globalisation of the Indian economy has further reinforced this process.

Though bondage relations mediated through debt continue to be practiced very widely, they no longer work within the older frames of permanent relations between workers and employers. The generational and family bondage has given way to more individualised and relatively temporary, or sometimes, seasonal bondages. While things have changed on the ground, state policies have not. The old framework of identification, release and rehabilitation no longer seems meaningful. In fact, official surveys no longer report the existence of bondage in most parts of India and the official machinery no longer feels obliged to do anything for the poor labourer.

We are at a stage where we need to make a concerted effort to understand and conceptualise the newer, and increasingly elusive, forms of bondage relations. The studies being conducted by Centre for Education and Communication in collaboration with Anti-Slavery International are an attempt in this direction. It is only through participation and dialogue with the organisations of civil society that we can hope to initiate the process of formulating new legislations that can truly empower the poor labourers and bring them dignity and citizenship rights.

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July 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When an assignment was given to comprehend the modern manifestation of bonded labour, the huge and evolving (evolved!) phenomenon in the form of the 'Camp Coolie System' and 'Sumangali System' in the so called "Manchester of South India" region, it was 'excitement at the first encounter'. What one learned from the long articles on bonded labour system in agriculture, quarries, brick-kilns and so on; International Labour Organisation (ILO)'S definitions and actions as well as India's ratification of ILO Conventions; and newspaper reports on release of bonded labour and their rehabilitation; were of no use when the research / survey progresses in Coimbatore district in general and the Avinashi – Tirupur – Palladam belt in particular.

A time bound, small budget project of this kind could not have done without the support of many people. Mentioning their names and designations will result in yet another report. Significant contributions made by the persons alone are mentioned here. The first person to receive acknowledgement in abundance is Mr V Anandan MBE. He worked under me for two months and visited the interior villages of southern districts of Tamil Nadu – Madurai, Theni, Sivaganga and Pudukkottai to interview the brokers, parents of girls who are working under the Sumangali System, the girls who received assistance for marriage under the Sumangali System and also the unfortunate ones who have not received any money. He covered many spinning mills – both big and small, and garment units. He took many 'avatars' to gain entry, wherever it was denied, into the spinning units and garment factories, but for his field notes, minute observations and quite good contacts with workers, this report would have missed out on a large number of case studies.

Mrs V Vasanta Kokilam., M.A., B.Ed., worked for a month on this project, by visiting spinning mills, conducting enquiries and interviews and observing the girls of the Sumangali System in action at the markets where they had been escorted by the 'supervisor'.

Apart from discussions with workers / labourers, a host of interviews were conducted with the owners of spinning mills, garment units, government officials (from RDO to policemen), retired textile mill workers, who had taken VRS, and those who work in the offices of selected units like managers, accountants, clerks, drivers and watchmen to get detailed information. All of them deserve our wholehearted thanks.

Special mention may be made about the help, suggestions and cooperation given by Thiru C Nambi, Director, CSED, Avinashi. He not only gave a report about the Sumangali System, but also shared information about the system. I thank him sincerely. I also thank Development and Education for Workers (DEW), Trichy, Tamil Nadu and Dr P Jegadish Gandhi, Director, Vellore Institute of Development Studies (VIDS), Vellore, Tamil Nadu, for their support and guidance.

Trade union activists (both from CITU and AITUC), who were in the forefront, from veterans to ordinary party workers, in opposing the Camp Coolie System and Sumangali System, gave a lot of information by spending their valuable time with us. Our sincere thanks are due to them.

Special thanks are due to the respondents comprising girls under the Sumangali System, girls and boys under the Camp Coolie System and men and women workers of spinning mills and garment units, parents and family members of the workers, brokers and other knowledgeable persons, as they are the true witnesses of this exploitative system.

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Concept of Development

Development, the very often used word, in the present context, implies only economic development. This obsession with economic development, in the process, results in over exploitation of natural resources (causing pollution) and the under-using of human resources i.e., labour (creating inequalities).

Concept of Growth and Development

Two interchangeably used phrases in economic literature are economic growth and economic development. Though they are considered similar, many distinctions exist between the two. The former, i.e., economic growth looks from the point of view of production (increase in output, employment, export, etc.) and the latter, economic development, concerns not only increase in production, but also a fair distribution of the created wealth and income among the factors of production. This can be achieved by resorting to appropriate structural, institutional and technological changes in the politico-economic social system.

By keeping in mind income (Gross National Income – GNI, Per Capita Income - PCI) as an indicator of economic development, the countries of the world are divided into developed, developing and underdeveloped. This classification gives more prominence to the outcome (income) and not to the process (utilisation of resources of all kinds). In the current phase of globalisation, the outcome, it seems, justifies the means, i.e., development at the cost of inequalities, poverty and marginalisation of some sections of the people.

Labour as a Factor of Production

Among the four factors of production namely, land, labour, capital and organisation, it is labour that transforms the 'raw' into usable, utility oriented commodities and services. Hence, this factor has to be paid according to. In this context, a large number of theories, propositions, and explanations originated and till today, the controversy continues. Among the plethora of propositions, the following can be mentioned.

- i. Payment of wages that are enough for the existence of labour - Subsistence Theory of Wages
- ii. Fair Wages – to maintain the family – Living Wages
- iii. Collective Bargaining – Demanding a respectable share in the profit of the organisation – Marxian Theory
- iv. Minimum Wages
- v. Wages according to Productivity - Marginal Productivity Theory
- vi. Wage according to Efficiency - The Efficiency Wage Theory

The traditional or classical version has been that it is enough that the labour is paid to meet their basic needs. During the next stage came the argument that the wages paid to the labour should be fair and should be enough to maintain his family (at that time nobody thought of women's contribution – no gender based analysis). After a while, the Marxian Theory of Surplus Value had its impact on intellectual exercises and thus came the idea of collective bargaining. The militancy and revolutionary character of labour movements impacted significant changes in the condition of work, wage, and welfare measures. At the same time, to reduce this type of militancy and to pre-empt revolutionary thirst came the concept of Minimum Wages. It is a statutory minimum, which has been fixed by the state (at least notionally). In India it came in the form of the Minimum Wages Act, more specific to the agricultural sector.

The idea of determining wages according to the marginal (additional) productivity of labour was found to be an objective method. However, the combination or extent of capital (in the

form of money capital as well as physical capital like machines and technology) determines the productivity of labour and naturally the share of capital (as it is superior) has been more than what reached the labour.

In the modern era, the efficiency wage is doing rounds as it has been successfully adopted by the Ford Company in the USA from 1914 onwards. Now the mantra is on one 'e', namely 'efficiency', and not on the other 'e', equity and in the melee, the one important 'e', exploitation, is forgotten.

Labour as Factor of Exploitation

Among the various forms of exploitation of labour, the most inhuman one is bonded labour. As it is not possible to save anything from factors like raw material, capital, power and other inputs in the production process, the only one source of surplus generation is labour. Hence, the capitalists, the dominant class resort to the exploitation of labour.

Bonded Labour in India

Bonded labour has existed in India for centuries. As it is a vast country with much diversity in occupation and production systems, the form of / nature of the bonded labour system has also varied widely. Earlier, it has been an agrarian economy, and the bondedness related mostly to the labourers who used to borrow money from the money lenders and the farmers under whom they were employed. Those agricultural labourers who have nothing to pledge, put themselves in bondage. Once in bondage, as their incomes were low (as the bonded labourer has been paid low wages, than the prevailing wages) not only these labourers, but also their families and descendants were doomed to perpetual slavery.

Regarding the extent of bonded labour in India, though it existed for centuries, reliable estimates are not forthcoming. The studies by the National Labour Institute, Gandhi Peace Foundation, give one type of estimate. The Government of India (GoI) has its own estimates and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), on the basis of surveys by independent agencies puts the figure at 150 lakhs, out of which 50 lakhs are children. Contrary to this, GoI, on the basis of NSS data, estimated bonded labour to be of the order of 3.53 lakhs. Despite this wide gap in estimates, all the surveys by independent researchers, institutes, NGOs, NSS, and ILO agree on one thing: the bonded labour system is prevalent in agriculture, mining and quarrying, carpet weaving and in brick kilns.

Bonded Labour in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu too, the bonded labour system was in place till the early seventies, mostly in agriculture. Probably due to the inaction by administrative machinery it is still prevalent in brick kilns and quarrying. Due to the industrial development in the state, the nature and form of the bonded labour system have undergone tremendous changes.

Bonded Labour in Coimbatore Region

The widely known bonded labour system in agriculture, in this part of the state, is the 'Pannayal' System. Agricultural labourer is given an advance by the landlord and the unwritten contract is for one year. The contract is about wage payments, the conditions of leave and of course the interest charged for the advance payment. Many instances of bonded labour being paid low wages and compelled to work for long hours are reported.

Occupation wise Bonded Labour in Tamil Nadu

As given in the table, the bonded labour system is wide spread in the state. This information has been compiled and provided by the Development and Education for Workers, Trichy, Tamil Nadu

LIST OF DISTRICTS AND OCCUPATIONS WHERE BONDED LABOUR EXISTS

S. No	District	Occupations
1.	Kancheepuram	Silk Looms, Cotton Weaving, Agriculture, Quarries, Rice Mills, Salt Panning, Fisheries
2.	Coimbatore	Silk Reeling, Power Looms, Agriculture, Quarries, Small Spinning Units
3.	Dharmapuri	Silk Reeling, Weaving, Agriculture, Quarries
4.	Dhindigul	Forest Work, Quarries, Brick Kilns
5.	Viruthunagar	Weaving, Match and Fire Works, Quarries
6.	Kanyakumari	Fisheries, Brick Kilns, Cardamom Plantations, Cashew, Coir and Palmvrah.
7.	Madurai	Quarries, Horticulture, Agriculture
8.	Theni	Tea and Cardamom Estates, Brick Kilns
9.	Nagai	Agriculture, Salt Panning, Fisheries, Shrimp Farming
10.	Thiruvarur	Agriculture
11.	Nilgiris	Tea Estates
12.	Vellore	Agriculture, Quarries, Beedi, Matches
13.	Sivagangai	Quarries, Brick Kilns
14.	Erode	Gem Cutting, Power Looms, Brick Kilns, Weaving, Quarries
15.	Pudukottai	Quarries, Fisheries, Gem Cutting, Brick Kilns
16.	Ramanathapuram	Agriculture, Fisheries, Salt Pans
17.	Salem	Silk Twisting, Agriculture, Silk Works, Brick Kilns, Sago Industry
18.	Namakkal	Silk Twisting, Agriculture, Quarries, Power Looms
19.	Cuddalore	Weaving, Agriculture, Fisheries, Dyeing, Brick Kilns.
20.	Thanjavur	Silk Weaving, Agriculture, Mat Weaving, Fisheries
21.	Tiruchirappalli	Power & Hand Looms, Quarries, Gem Cutting, Coir
22.	Karur	Power & Hand Looms, Quarries, Gem Cutting, Dyeing
23.	Perambalur	Quarries, Coir, Power & Hand Looms
24.	Thirunelveli	Agriculture, Quarries, Brick Kilns, Beedi
25.	Thiruvannamalai	Agriculture, Quarries, Brick Kilns, Beedi.
26.	Tuticorin	Salt Panning, Fisheries, Match Works.
27.	Villupuram	Hand Loom Weaving, Agriculture, Quarries, Brick Kilns
28.	Thiruvallur	Quarries, Rice Mills, Brick Kilns

Modern Version of Bonded Labour

The Camp Coolie System (CCS) and Sumangali System (SS) are two prominent forms of bondage in the textile and garment units in the Coimbatore region.

Before the intricacies and modus operandi of the bonded labour system in Tamil Nadu are brought to light, it is important to understand the social and economic background of the state.

Background of the State - Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu, the land of Tamil, is the southern most state of India. Tamil Nadu has a very ancient history that goes back to the pre Sangam age i.e., fourth century BC. The state's proximity to the sea, established the Tamil country on the maritime map of the world, even before the dawn of the Christian era.

Tamil Nadu State

Tamil Nadu is the successor to the old Madras Presidency, which in the early years of the twentieth century covered the bulk of the southern peninsula. At the time of Independence in 1947, the old Madras province, comprising Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and part of Kerala, continued as Tamil Nadu state. When the bifurcation took place in 1953, the Tamil-

speaking areas became constituent units of the Madras state with Madras as the capital. The composite Madras state was reorganised and the present Tamil Nadu was formed. The one consideration uppermost in the minds of the administrators is geographical continuity for administrative convenience. Tamil Nadu is one of the 15 states (22 including the Union Territories) of India when the reorganisation of the states took place on November 01, 1956. On January 14, 1969, Madras state was renamed Tamil Nadu. The capital Madras got its new name Chennai in 1996. As on November 01, 2005, there are 30 districts in Tamil Nadu.

Table 1: Select Socio Economic Indicators of Tamil Nadu and India

S No.	Economic Indicators	Tamil Nadu	India
1.	Area ('000' sq. kms) (2001 Census)	130	3287
2.	Population (in Million) (2001 Census)	62.4	1029
	Rural	34.9	742.7
	Urban	27.5	286.1
	Projected		
	2006	65.1	1094.1
	2011	67.4	1178.9
	2016	69.3	1263.5
3.	Density (Population per sq.kms)	480	325
4.	Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males) (2001 Census)	987	933
5.	Urban Population Percentage (2001 Census)	44.00	27.78
6.	Scheduled Caste Population as Percentage of Total Population 2001	19.0	16.2
7.	Scheduled Tribe Population as Percentage of Total Population 2001	1.0	8.2
8.	Birth Rate – 2004	18.3	24.8
9.	Death rate – 2004	7.5	7.5
10.	Infant Mortality Rate – 2004	41	60
11.	Literacy Rate - 2001		
	Persons	73.5	64.8
	Male	82.4	75.3
	Female	64.4	53.7
12.	Total Applicants on Live Register-2001('000 Nos)	4925.5	41995.9
13.	Per capita Consumption of Electricity (KWH.) – 2003-04	677.4	390
14.	Rural Electrification - As on 31.03.2003		
	Villages Electrified (Percentage)	100.00	84.3
	Pump sets Energised (in '000)	1676	13792
15.	No. of Students in Primary and Secondary Schools per 1000 Population (30-9-2000)	175	172
16.	Total No. of Motor Vehicles Registered–2002-03	8004942	67033032
17.	No. of Bank Offices of Scheduled Commercial Banks – 2003-04	4880	68681
	Deposit (Rs in Cr)	110,329	1753,174
	Credit (Rs in Cr)	108,605	1157,807
	Credit – Deposit Ratio (%)	98.4	66.0
18.	Foreign Direct Investment Approved (2003-04)		
	Projects (Nos)	261	1929
	Investment (Rs in Cr)	1415.18	6833.38
	% Share to Total Investment	13.53	100.00
19.	No. of Policemen per100 sq. km of Area – 2003	61.7	41.4

20.	No. of Policemen per '000' of Population –2003	1.3	1.2
21.	No. of Newspapers and Periodicals – 2003-04	3303	58469
22.	T.V. Coverage Area (Percentage – March 2003)	93.6	78.2

The total number of households is 14665983 and the total population is 62405679 (2001 census), the average family size comes to 4.3. What is worrying is the population projection made for the next decade. The sex ratio of this state is better than the all India sex ratio. Similarly the state is better placed in terms of literacy rate, birth rate, death rate and IMR.

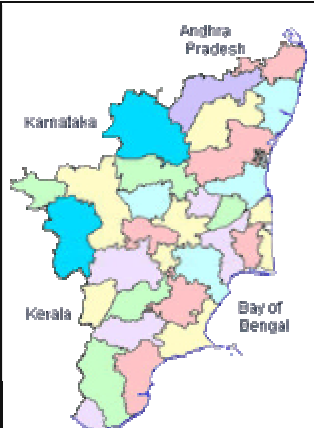
Table 2: Working Population of Tamil Nadu

Workers	
Total Workers	27878282
Male	18100397
Female	9777885
Rural	17559768
Urban	10318514
Main Workers	23757783
Marginal Workers	4120499
Categories of Workers	
Cultivators	5116039
Agricultural Labourers	8637630
Household Industry	1499761
Other Workers	12624852
Non-Workers	34527397

Source: Census 2001

Regarding workers, as per the 2001 census, there were 2.38 crore main workers and 41 lakh marginal workers. By category, 51 lakh cultivators, 86 lakh agricultural labourers, 15 lakhs working in household industry, 1.26 crore working in all other activities and finally 3.4 crore of them were non-workers (Table 2).

Tamil Nadu at a Glance

	Number of	1991	2001
	Districts		21
Taluks		167	201
Blocks		385	385
Towns		469	111
UAs		34	27
Villages		16780	16317
Uninhabited Villages		958	917

Tamil Nadu is emerging as one of the leading industrial states in India. It is the hub of the Indian automobiles industry. Several automobile and automobile ancillary units are located in Tamil Nadu. The state is also famous for its garments industry. This is located in Tirupur, Coimbatore and Chennai, the capital.

Tamil Nadu has been an aggressive and successful promoter of industries and is attracting huge investments. The state ranks third in terms of FDI and fresh investments.

Tamil Nadu is one of the most urbanised states in the country. The rate of urbanisation rose from 27 per cent in 1961 to 44 per cent in 2001. In terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), the state moved from seventh position in 1981 to third position in 2001.

The major industries in Tamil Nadu are:

- Mineral Based Industry
- Leather Industry
- Engineering Industry
- Pharmaceuticals Industry
- Cotton Textile And Hosiery
- Readymade Garments Industries
- Wood Products Industry
- Agro Based Industry
- Chemical And Petrochemical Industry

The contribution to the state domestic product from the agricultural sector is 21 per cent, manufacturing sector is 34 per cent and services sector is 45 per cent.

The rural development programmes are implemented in this state. All of its villages are electrified (100%).

Growth of Textile Industry in Tamil Nadu

The pre as well as post-reform period saw an increase in the number of textile mills, garment units, sizing mills, power looms, waster cotton units and the ancillary and supporting units connected with the textile sector. The data given in Table 3 gives an idea about the growth of the textile industry in Tamil Nadu and the detailed version is given in Appendix – A.

Table 3: Growth of Textile Industry in Tamil Nadu

S No.		Unit	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05 (P)	December 2006	Projection December 2007
1	Textile mills	No	844	850	858	834	834	—	—
2	Spinning mills (Non-SSI)	No	821	827	838	814	812	805	—
3	Composite mills (Non-SSI)	No	23	23	20	202	22	—	—
4	Power loom units	No	792	828	904	884	900	977	1221
5	Workers on roll Spinning mills & Composite mills (Non-SSI)	No	192457	193051	199353	194903	192917.23 1	—	—
6	Average No. of workers per (Non-SSI) Spinning mills (SSI)	No	24930	26066	29323	29872	31079	—	—
7	Average No. of workers per sm (SSI)	No					35		

From the data in Table 3, it can be inferred that:

- i. There is a continuous decline in the number of spinning mills under the Non-SSI category.
- ii. There is a continuous increase in the number of spinning mills under the SSI category – from 792 in 2000-01 to 977 as on December 2006 and projected to reach 1221 by December 2007.
- iii. Workers on roll remained almost the same in the Non-SSI sector during the six-year period.
- iv. The average number of workers calculated i.e., number of workers on roll in a unit – under the Non-SSI category is 231 (2004-05) and it is 35 for the spinning mills in the SSI category. What is not captured by the statistics is – both the number of workers and the members of SSI units are grossly underreported (implying more labour without their names (workers) on the rolls.

From Table 4, it can be observed that:

- i. The number of mills that closed down increased in the Non-SSI sector, over the years.
- ii. The number of workers affected due to such closures also increased significantly.
- iii. The number of applications received under Technology Up gradation Fund Scheme (TUFS) increased three fold and the amount disbursed also increased three fold - sadly the impact has not yet been reported.
- iv. Personal visits to the office of the Small Scale Spinning Mills (SISPA) Association, Coimbatore and enquires made there revealed that they do not have any directory with information about the number of SSI – textile mills in the district. From observation, one can confidently say that the number of units not registered (thanks to liberalisation) may definitely be very high in the district.

Table 4: Closure of Cotton / Man – Made Fibre Textile Mills

S No.	Year /Month End	Number of Mills			Employees on Roll ('000s)
		Spinning	Composite	Total	
1	1997-98	127	93	220	260
2	1998-99	207	106	313	311
3	1999-00	240	109	349	334
4	2000-01	264	121	383	344
5	2001-02	295	126	421	362
6	2002-03	349	134	483	390
7	2003-04	374	94	468	329
8	2004-05	376	99	475	335
9	December (2005)	387	102	489	345

Table 5: Textile Mills Non-SSI Category Coimbatore Perspective

S No.	Region	No. of Spinning Mills	Composite Mills	Total
1	India	387	102	489
2	Tamil Nadu	118	6	124
3	Ahmedabad	6	21	27
4	Mumbai	5	17	22

5	Coimbatore	43	4	47
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The data in Table 5 reflects Tamil Nadu's strong position vis-à-vis other states in terms of the number of spinning mills (30%). Coimbatore has a substantial share of Tamil Nadu's spinning mills (36%) and composite mills (67%).

In the coming section a brief exposition of the methodology adopted to carry out the study is given.

Methodology

In the absence of detailed data on the number of spinning mills / garment units employing camp coolies/ girls under the Sumangali System, it became difficult to devise a scientific sampling method to select the mills / garment units. Further, classified data with respect to permanent workers and casual workers, especially by gender, were not available. Moreover, it is not easy to identify the bonded labour in the conventional sense, i.e., like in agriculture, quarries or in brick kilns. Hence, a large number of people who are aware of the existence of the camp coolie and Sumangali system were consulted; issues were raised and discussed with the trade union activists and an NGO. The familiarity of the researchers to the area and the textile sector on the one hand, and the friends and relatives (some of them were owners of the spinning mills, many of them are working in the spinning mills in various capacities) and old students of the Principal Investigator on the other, helped to gauge the situation in a proper perspective. Frequent visits to Avinashi, Tirupur and Palladam areas, interaction with workers and employers helped to identify a few of the spinning mills where unmarried girls were employed on a large scale under the Sumangali System. Normally, the spinning mills were classified into two categories: small-scale and large-scale mills, on the basis of the number of spindles. Here also a practical problem arose, that is, many owners split their establishments and located them in different places (for example, KPR Mills in the spinning sector and SP Exports / SP Apparels in the garment sector). For the purpose of the present survey, the spinning units having up to 12,000 spindles were put under the small scale category and those units having more than 12,000 spindles and also located at two or three locations were brought under the large scale category. Accordingly, 15 spinning mills came under small scale units and all the 15 were contacted, observed and information was gathered. Along with this, ten large scale spinning mills (15+10=25 mills were selected in Coimbatore district) were also selected on the basis of reliable information through contacts that these spinning mills were employing girls under the Sumangali System as well as following the CCS.

Similarly, 18 garment units were also identified to collect information. Those units employing less than 200 workers were considered small and other units big for convenience, in the absence of data on turnover / production.

The tough task was contacting and interviewing the brokers. Though many of them were identified at Palladam and Karumathampatty (main contact), nobody wanted to reveal the real picture. Their movements were observed and it was established that they have a network, not only in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, but also in Kerala. A few of them also brought girls to be put under the Sumangali System from the northern districts of Tamil Nadu like Dharmapuri. After getting their background addresses from five brokers, they were contacted at their convenience, i.e., in the native village.

The brokers who gave detailed information were:

- i. Ayyanar
- ii. Nalliya

- iii. Solamalai
- iv. Palaniyammal (F)

The information received from the brokers, employers and the girls who are currently working in the spinning mills helped to locate the villages from where the girls had come.

List of Brokers Interviewed

S_No	Name of the Broker	Place	Number of Persons sent to the Job
1.	Ayyanar	Kuppanasaripatti	80
2.	Nalliya	Devakottai	15
3.	Solamalai	Marayur	20
4.	Palaniyammal	Chokadevanpatti	10

List of People Interviewed in the Garment Sector

S. No	Name	Designation
1.	Shanmugam	Manager
2.	Manikanadan	Cutting Master
3.	Abuthakir	Cutting In charge
4.	Asath	Assistant Manager
5.	Kathirvel N	Chief Executive
6.	Senthil Nathan	Manager
7.	Marrish wife	Account Section
8.	Shanmugham	Marketing Executive
9.	Kalidas	Factory Manager
10.	Ragu	Cutting In-charge
11.	Time Keeper	Tripur Railway Station
12.	Coolie Team	Tripur Railway Station
13.	Kuppusamy	HRD
14.	Ravi	HRD
15.	Balaji	Tailor
16.	Manju	Banurekha Knitting
17.	Rekha	SAMRAT Hosieries
18.	Murugesh	Tailor, Agathian Knit Garment
19.	Latha`	Best Knitting
20.	Usha	Armstrong Garments

List of Trade Union Leaders met

S. No	Name	Designation	Trade Union	Place
1.	Senthil	Joint Secretary	CITU	Palladam
2.	Senthil Raj	Secretary	CITU	Palladam
3.	Murugesh	Union Leader	CITU	Tirupur
4.	Arumugam	Ex MLA	AITUC	Coimbatore
5.	Sathyamoorthy	Councillor	CPM	Palladam

CHAPTER – II

SUMANGALI SYSTEM

This system is known by various names:

- a) Sumangali System
- b) Thirumagal Thirumana System
- c) Kangani System
- d) Marriage Assistance Scheme

Sumangali, in Tamil, literally means an unmarried girl becoming a respectable woman / person by entering into wedlock. Thirumagal means 'the Goddess of Wealth'. At the time of marriage, ordinary girls become the goddess of wealth on two grounds;

- the in-laws call her Mahalakshmi and attach much importance to the auspicious time of her entering into her house;
- Literally, she brings along with her more wealth in the form of dowry.

The name Kangani system is attached to the same Marriage Assistance Scheme. It involves the dominance of the broker (in recruitment, in getting the monetary benefit / wages, settlement of final amount) and the ignorance of the girl's parents (about the overtime work, conditions in which they are housed and working) becomes the brokers' bliss. Actually, the Kangani system is famous in areas where plantation crops (especially tea) are grown. That is in large tea gardens / estates the workers / coolies are undergo a lot of suffering by the Kanganis. Here the word 'Kangani' is used, mostly by those who look upon this form of labour, with contempt. The word doing the rounds, to denote this famous system, is the 'Sumangali Scheme'. The owners used to say that they are employing girls under the 'scheme'. This implies the contract where unmarried girls are entitled to get a lump sum amount after three years. This word is uttered with a sense of 'pride' [implying they (the owners) are doing them a great favour].

The modus-operandi is very simple: the parents of unmarried girls are lured from the villages with the promise that their daughters will get a huge amount at the end of the contract period, mostly three years, which will help them to arrange the daughters' marriage without any hurdle. During the field work carried out in the remote villages (literally, no bus services) of the districts of Sivaganga, Pudukottai, Madurai and Theni, in southern Tamil Nadu, it has been found that response to this scheme is overwhelming! That is, the parents are very happy to say that their daughters are working in 'Coimbatore' (even if they are employed in Dindugal, Tirupur, Palladam, Pollachi, Avinashi and Karamadi areas) and proud that she will bring a 'huge' amount (between Rs 30000/- and Rs40000/-) after three years.

The factors facilitating the increasingly famous Sumangali System are:

- i. The poverty and illiteracy of the parents (villagers).
- ii. The tactics of brokers.
- iii. The owners / managers themselves visiting the villages in cars, especially imported cars and assuring the parents that they will take care of their wards in a better way.
- iv. The dominance of the age old concept that for a girl marriage is the ultimate.
- v. Low wages, less number of days of work in the villages.
- vi. The 'city lights' syndrome.

- vii. The work in spinning mills is considered very easy (under a roof, no scorching sun).
- viii. If the girls stay in the villages, they just engage in gossiping, go for movies, and sometimes run away with their lovers. So it is better to put them under the scheme (version of many parents).
- ix. The girls are not only quick in adjusting to the conditions of the management, restrictions on their visit to native places, overtime work, but also never know how much is paid or decided as monthly wages / deductions.
- x. Luring the parents as well as girls with the promise of safety and security, hostel (facilities like TV, swimming pool, playground, rest room) trips to temples and mess (read good food) facilities.
- xi. Promising them tuition facilities to study further (for example, it is happening in all the three units of KPR Textiles).
- xii. The spread of the news, like forest fire, that so and so has brought with her a 'huge amount' after working in Coimbatore.

Origin of the Sumangali System

Regarding the origin of the Sumangali System, it is very difficult to put an exact date / month / year, on which it started. According to the AITUC leader Mr Arumugham, this came into being in the year 1998. During the survey two retired school teachers - Mr Senthil, of Muthandipalayam, Palladam and Mr K P Ramaswamy (retired HM of Kethanur High School) provided a lot of information. Mr K P Ramaswamy especially, knew about the agreements prepared on behalf of textile mills situated in Dindugal District, though the owners are from Coimbatore District.

According to Mr Senthil, this system became very famous during the late 80s in his area (Palladam belt) where the competition between the three sectors of the area namely agriculture, power loom and poultry, to get labour became more intense. When the local labour force was found insufficient, they resorted to methods of getting labour from 'outside'. However, the dominant factor favouring outside labour is not just insufficient labour alone, but the problem of 'inconsistent labour'. That is, the poultry and power loom industry required 24 hours work, and the owners don't want to take risks by employing local labour who were not amenable.

The power loom units were very successful in getting labourers from the Madurai area (Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu) and provided housing facilities (even today one finds a large number of housing facilities provided by power loom and sizing mills). Another attraction for the labourers is the fact that power looms provided employment not only to the male members, but also to their wives, sons and daughters.

The discussions, observations and interaction with people from all walks of life, especially for the last four months made us write the following: of course, subject to correction when more authentic information than what is provided here, comes through.

Significance of the Sumangali System

Provision of marriage assistance (in any form – money, jewellery, clothing, gold for mangal sutra, utensils) is cultural specific. People in this part of Tamil Nadu hold the view that one must help the marriage of a girl as it is 'crop of 1000 years'. Moreover, as the unmarried girl is considered as 'cursed' and the married one as 'blessed', the parents never hesitate to accept such assistance / gifts, which otherwise, in normal circumstances, are not acceptable to their standing in the village / prestige. Nobody wants to let down a family at the time of marriage.

Marriage assistance is religion specific. In Hindu tradition helping the family / parents to conduct the marriage of their daughter(s) is considered as *Punniya* (good act). It is a good '*Parikara*' – to get boons, to solve the problems of bad times. The astrologers suggest (especially to the rich and wealthy) that they conduct / organise marriages of the poor so as to relieve the torture / difficulties they are subjected to by the bad star positions (planets).

When the traditional and closed village society gets transformed into a modern society, with industrialisation and urbanisation along with growth in transport and communication facilities, the marriage assistance became economic specific. That is, at the time of marriage giving an advance / loan (especially loan without interest, because it is an auspicious occasion) to the family of the labour becomes the order of the day. Sometimes the labourers used to leave / save money with their employer stating that at the time of their daughter's marriage they will take their savings. Many times the employers returned the money promptly, not only the amount saved by the worker, but also an extra amount along with it. This kind of help not only improved the employer's standing, but also indirectly ensured the continuous supply of labour. Also, at the time of marriage of their (owner / employer's) son / daughter they are assured of 'free labour' / 'voluntary labour', which help them successfully conduct the occasion in a grand manner.

The economic overtones of marriage assistance became more prominent due to the fact that nowadays, marriages have become costly affairs. For an ordinary worker it is a Himalayan task, so this is capitalised upon by the owners / managements of textile units and garment units. This paved the way for marriage assistance becoming a major source of exploitation of cheap labour. Though the demand for labour is very high in this region, labour shortage is expressed as a major problem of industrial growth (be it the coir industry, brick industry, sugar industry) the wages never increased along with an increase in the demand for labour. The exception being the seasonal wage increases in the agricultural sector. Thus, a common cultural and social practice of helping a girl's marriage has now turned into an economic bonanza for the owners of machines.

According to Mr A P Ramasamy, during the initial stages (early 1990s) the agreements were for three years and at the end of the period the girls were given Rs 70000/-. However, over the years, a progressive reduction in this amount was observed and it now ranges between Rs 30000/- and Rs 40000/-. The cross examination of the girls who received the amount, their parents and brokers confirms this. At the same time, as a very clever step, the mill managements are not signing any agreements with the girls. The worst part of it is that the parents are at the mercy of the brokers and they have no say either in deciding about the work place or in deciding about the monthly payment and the maturity amount. There is no checking at any level to know about the payments, increments and so on.

The poor parents are trying to be relieved from the **stress** of their daughter's marriage unmindful of their daughter's **distress**. Owners are succeeding in the accumulation of **profit** at the cost of the cumulative **loss** of their workers' physical and mental health.

Analysis of Data and Interpretation

To examine the issues involved in the Sumangali System further, the information and data gathered by covering three groups are used. The first group is the girls who have completed the required period (three years) and are back at home; the second group is the girls who are presently working in spinning mills and garment units, under the Sumangali System and the third group consisted of the parents (of both the currently working girls and those who have completed their term), brokers, knowledgeable persons at the villages / native places of the girls

on the one hand and the owners, managers, supervisors, workers and others involved in the studied spinning mills / garment units. Apart from the sources, information was also elicited from relatives, brothers / sisters of the girls who have finished working as well as those working under the Sumangali System, because these people used to accompany the parents to receive the advance, monthly wages, and the final amount from the owners.

The results are presented here in two parts. Part I covers the details of girls who have completed their contract and Part II gives the facts and figures related to the girls currently working in the spinning mills and garment units.

Part I

In the case of married girls, their parents and brothers were interviewed at the time of the survey. Altogether, 43 girls who had previously worked under the Sumangali System were contacted. Out of this, 34 were married (and some of them got married within the village and nearby villages and were contacted and interviewed directly (the list enclosed). Brokers like Ayyanar (see case study) gave a lot of particulars about the girls, i.e., their family background, wages, etc.

The next stage is the most difficult one, i.e., consolidation of data and information, as so much variation was found. Luckily, authentic sources like copies of signed agreements, copies of cases filed in the Labour Court were made available. Efforts were taken to get complete details and wherever possible, they were cross-checked. The details are given in a tabular form.

Table 2.1: Data and information of Married Women Workers

Sl. No.	Variable / Issue	Number	Percent
1.	Age at the time of recruitment		
	Below 14 years	10	23
	14-15 years	18	42
	Above 15 years but below 17 years	15	35
2.	From the families of agricultural labourers	36	84
	From the families of marginal farmers	4	9
	From the families of small farmers	3	7
	From southern districts of Tamil Nadu	43	
	From Kerala	Nil	
3.	Caste		
	SC	25	58
	MBC	15	35
	BC	3	7
4.	Parents received advance	43	100
5.	Parents accompanied their daughters	12	28
6.	Parents who have known complete details about the work / working place at the time of recruitment	06	14
7.	Commission paid to the brokers		
	a. By the parents	3	7
	b. By the company / mill but deducted from the wages	40	93
8.	Girls left in between	Nil	
9.	Girls continued / rejoined after the contract period	1	2
10.	For most part of their stay		

	a. girls worked only one shift b. girls worked 1 ½ shifts c. worked in night shifts	Nil 43 41	100 95
11.	Girls who also did household work (of managers / owners) a. For most of the days b. Occasionally	5 38	12 88
12.	Room facilities a. Good b. OK c. Bad	6 31 6	14 72 14
13.	Quality of food a. Good b. Average c. Bad	14 25 4	33 58 9
14.	Bath room and Toilet facilities a. Good b. Bad c. Very Bad	5 10 28	12 23 65
15.	Medical facilities offered a. Satisfied b. Not satisfied	9 34	21 79
16.	Felt health problems / got health disturbances due to night shifts a. Initially, Yes No b. Adjusted over the years Yes No	41 2 35 6	95 5
17.	For most of the days provided with tea	30	70
18.	For most of the days provided with tea and snacks	13	30
19.	Visited native place a. Not at all b. After two years c. Once in a year d. Twice in a year (Deepavali and Pongal – harvest festival)	3 7 20 13	7 16 47 30
20.	Parents / brothers allowed to visit	43	
21.	Signed the bond / agreement	43	
22.	Literates a. Parents / father b. Girls	4 19	
23.	Monthly wages paid in I Year a. Rs 400 b. Rs 450 c. Rs 600	3 39 1	7 91 2
	Monthly wages paid in II Year a. Rs 600 b. Rs 650	29 14	67 33

	Monthly wages paid in III Year a. Rs 700 b. Rs 800 c. Rs 850 d. Rs 900	4 31 7 1	9 72 16 2
24.	Reported the existence of child labour (below 14 years) where they worked	38	
25.	Treatment meted out – during the stay a. Good b. Orally abused c. Physically / beaten up	11 27 5	26 63 12
26.	Any knowledge about the suicides where they worked - No	43	
27.	Taken out to temples Taken out to market a. Weekly b. Monthly c. Rarely	Nil Nil 9 34	 21 79
28.	Amount received after three years a. Rs 30000 b. Rs 35000 c. Rs 40000 d. Rs 42000 e. Rs 63000 (3 ½ years)	31 7 2 2 1	72 16 5 5 2

Age

At the time of recruitment the age of 10 girls (23%) was below 14 years (clear case of child labour), 18 were aged 15 years and the age of the remaining 15 girls was above 15 years, but below 17 years.

Economic Background

A majority of the girls belonged to agricultural labour households (36 out of 43) followed by marginal and small farmer households. All of them were from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu as the survey was not conducted in Kerala.

Caste

Out of 43 girls 25 (58%) were from the Scheduled Castes (SC), 15 (35%) from the Most Backward Caste (MBC) and only three were from the Backward Caste (BC).

Advance

Though many parents, on the advice of brokers / owners, at the first instance denied that they had received any advance towards the employment of their daughters, it was confirmed during the discussions that they had received an advance. This money was mostly used for the confirmation of employment, transport, incidental expenses and for the girls to buy clothes and other items to stay at the camps. At the same time, only parents of 12 girls accompanied their daughters to the work place. The remaining girls were jointly brought by the brokers. At the

time of recruitment, except for six parents, all others had no clear idea about the address of the spinning mill where their daughters were going to be employed.

Commission

All of them paid a commission to the brokers, mostly Rs 500 per girl recruited under the Sumangali System. This payment was directly paid by the parents in the case of three girls and in the case of 40 girls the company (they use only this word) paid the commission, but it was deducted from their wages. Nobody left in between and only one girl said that she returned to the same mill for a job after the completion of the contract. This time she was paid only daily wages and no bond / agreement was signed.

Working hours

Though, at the time of recruitment, the girls (read parents) were told (and the agreements were signed without giving a copy to the girl / parent) that they would be paid monthly wages and would get the marriage assistance amount at the end of three years, they were under the impression that it is all was for one shift of eight hours. Yet, the present study shows that they always worked more than one shift: All the 43 revealed that they worked one and half shifts i.e., 12 hours. That too, they mostly worked in night shifts. This implies that during the day shift, other workers were employed.

At the same time they were also compelled to work in the owners / managers' houses located inside the premises of the spinning units. Five girls said that they did it most days and 38 said that they did it occasionally.

Facilities

They were all provided with room / shed facilities to live in. Many (31 out of 43) considered it all right (okay) while six rated it as good; another six termed it bad.

About the quality of the food, the majority (58%) felt it was only average, 14 (33%) said it was good. And only four considered it bad.

The most important requirement for girls was privacy and hygiene. On this count the spinning mills failed miserably. The majority, 28 out of 43 (65%) girls, said the bathroom and toilet facilities were very bad. Ten said it was bad and only five said it was good.

Regarding medical facilities (medical help, medical attention, medical aid are a few terms used by these girls) offered at the work site, these girls were not at all satisfied.

Initially, almost all the girls suffered a lot in adjusting to the night shift and its related health consequences (mostly they spoke about head-aches, vomiting, loss of weight, sleeplessness and loss of appetite). At the same time, they said that they adjusted over a period of time. However, six said that they could not cope with the situation even after three years.

Most of the days these girls were supplied with tea and 13 girls said that they were also given snacks (vada-local name) along with tea during the 15 minutes break i.e., after six hours of work.

Extent of Confinement

The most disturbing fact of the Sumangali System was the confinement of unmarried girls in the 'camps'. It was found that three girls did not visit their village even once during the contract period of three years. Some girls said that they visited their village after two years; 20 girls

visited once a year and only 13 girls said that they visited their villages twice in a year i.e., during Deepavali and Pongal, the festival of harvest. Most of the time, it was a break for a week. Further, they were never taken out to temples or for festivals outside the premises. Very rarely were they taken to markets. The only relief was the visit of their parents or brothers; in this case they were not exactly allowed to see them, but met them because they came to get the monthly wages.

Knowledge about Agreement

All the 43 said that they had signed / put their thumb impression on the agreements. Yet, no one seemed to have a copy of the same. Even after special efforts were made by the field investigators no such agreement copies could be obtained. The harsh reality was that the parents were illiterate and the girls had put signatures or thumbprints on blank papers. Also, many of the girls were illiterate (53%).

Monthly Wages

During the first year, the monthly wages were mostly Rs 400-450, and in the second year Rs 600 and during the final year it was Rs 800. There were slight variations in these amounts paid by the mills. An important observation was that though variations were found in the amount paid as monthly wages by the spinning mills there were no differences found between small scale spinning mills and the larger ones in the payment of monthly wages (also in the case of final amount). That is, the size of the mill (expressed in number of spindles frames) had nothing to do with 'camp wages'.

Child Labour

What was most disturbing was the fact that these girls confirmed the prevalence of child labour in the premises where they worked under contract. Though exact quantification was difficult, it was certain that some operations were done by girls / boys aged below 14 years, in the spinning units.

Treatment

On the treatment they received, in the work place, most of them (63%) said they suffered oral abuse and some five (12%) were even beaten up for non-compliance. Only eleven (26%) said they got good treatment from their employers. About girls committing suicides, all of them opined that they had no knowledge about such things happening in their work premises during their stay.

Marriage Assistance Amount

For the three years of heavy work, that too without adequate rest and in confinement, the final amount received makes/gives the girls some solace. From their accounts, it was found that 31 out of 43 (72%) received Rs 30,000, seven got Rs.35,000 and two got Rs 40,000 and Rs.42,000 each after three years. Gomathi, who worked at Premier Mills, Othakkal Mandapam, near Pollachi in Coimbatore district, received Rs63,000 after the contract period of three and a half years, and she also worked under the Sumangali System. She said that Rs50,000 was marriage assistance and Rs13,000 was the Provident Fund amount. She further revealed that, in this particular mill the agreement was mostly for three and a half years and the minimum educational qualification for a girl to be recruited was 10th standard.

Case of Failure – The black spot

One pathetic situation was where about 45 girls who worked under the Sumangali System at KTN Mills, Palani Road, Udumalpet, Coimbatore district were denied the final amount, Rs.25,000 as per the agreement. That is, after two and a half years the mill was closed due to

labour unrest (see case study) and at the time of closure these girls were paid Rs 700 as monthly wages. These details were given by Mrs Abirami, Marayanur Colony, Marayanur, Theni district.

There were similar cases of final amount being denied going around, but these require detailed investigations to confirm them.

Part II

The data and information collected and recorded from the girls who currently work under the Sumagali System in the spinning mills and garment units were analysed and the results are presented in this part. Girls were interviewed on the premises and some of the parents of these girls were also interviewed in their native villages. Here again, the brokers played an important role and they were also interviewed. Of course, the interviews with parents were conducted only in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, though the sample study also included girls from the state of Kerala. The narration of these people (respondents) along with observations made by the investigators helped to prepare this note.

A large number of spinning mills (25) and garment units (18) were visited and observed. However, the number of spinning mills (both small and big) and garment units (big, medium and small), which provided access to interview the managers; supervisors and workers were only 15 and 12 respectively. In the case of other mills and garment units, other methods were successfully followed, and a good insider view was obtained. By persistent moves and by personal contacts, the field survey was made possible and the best efforts yielded in getting information about 54 unmarried girls. Out of this, 29 were working in spinning mills and 25 were in garment units. To avoid embarrassment and to safeguard the interests of the girls, the names have not been revealed here. Similarly, the names of many persons who helped a lot, in good spirit, have also not been mentioned here, to protect their identity (this includes a few government officials and police personnel). At the same time, the names of those mills, garment units and the persons concerned, who had no objection to their names being mentioned, have been given here.

Scheme of Analysis and Presentation

As the differences between the spinning mills and garment units in the monthly wage payment, treatment (shed / rooms, mess / canteen, strict vigilance, degree of confinement) and the payment of the final amount in the form of marriage assistance, were not much, the results were presented for all the 54 girls together. Of course, wherever it was warranted, separate analysis was done. Similarly, not much difference was found between small and big units, except a few variables. Hence, scope for a classified analysis (since the sample size was also small) was found limited and the results were put in a general framework to draw inferences.

The garment units were very cautious in giving information as various forms of labourers, multiplicity of operations and different types of wage / salary payments were followed by them. At the same time, most of them were located in the midst of industrial activity. The majority of them was found to be located in distant places, i.e., on the outskirts of small towns and cities – literally in remote villages. The management represented by owners, managers and supervisors, were extra cautious in providing information. Sometimes, the situation looked very odd and mysterious. Nine girls, all between 14-15 years of age, from a remote village in Trivandrum district of Kerala, were found in a small spinning unit at Kaniyur village, in Palladam taluk of Coimbatore district. At the time of the interview (January 2007), they said that they had joined just 15 days back, and found it very difficult to express themselves in Tamil. They are staying in a small hostel inside the unit. The watchmen are from Nepal. The girls have to learn

to work better, have to cook and wash their clothes, i.e., they have to look after themselves in the midst of camp coolies, consisting of both boys and girls. They are reluctant to speak to 'others'.

The following were the details arrived at the end of the survey. In some places, the exact number of respondents reported about / on a particular variable or issue was not given. The responses grouped under the various categories are indicative in nature.

Table 2.2 Information about girls under Sumangali System

Sl. No.	Variable / Issue	Number	Per cent
1.	Age at the time of recruitment		
	Below 14 years	20	37
	14-15 years	26	48
	Above 15 years but below 17 years	8	15
2.	From the families of		
	a. Agricultural labourers	42	78
	b. Marginal farmers	8	15
	c. Small farmers	3	5
	d. Big farmers	1	2
	From southern districts of Tamil Nadu	37	69
	From Kerala	17	31
3.	Caste		
	SC	40	74
	MBC	11	20
	BC	3	6
4.	Parents received advance	54	100
5.	Parents accompanied their daughters	21	39
6.	Parents who have known complete details about the work / working place at the time of recruitment	11	20
7.	Commission paid to the brokers		
	c. By the parents	Nil	
	d. By the company / mill but deducted from the wages	54	100
8.	For most part of their stay		
	d. Girls worked only one shift	Nil	
	e. Girls worked 1 ½ shifts	54	100
	f. Worked in night shifts	54	100
9.	Girls who also did households works (of managers / owners)		
	c. For most of the days	3	
	d. Occasionally	31	
10.	Room facilities		
	d. Good	8	15
	e. OK	34	63
	f. Bad	12	22
	g. TV in the hostel / shed	37	69
11.	Quality of food		
	c. Good	12	22

	d. Average	37	69
	c. Bad	5	9
12.	Bath room and toilet facilities		
	c. Good	5	9
	d. Bad	23	43
	c. Very Bad	26	48
13.	Medical facilities offered		
	c. Satisfied	29	54
	d. Not satisfied	25	46
14.	For most of the days provided with		
	a. Tea	13	24
	b. Tea and snacks	41	76
15.	Visited native place		
	e. Not at all	45	83
	f. Once in a year	9	17
16.	Parents / brothers allowed to visit	54	100
17.	a. Signed the bond / agreement	54	
	b. Having copy	Nil	
	c. Signed on white papers	19	
18.	Literates		
	c. Parents / father	17	
	d. Girls	41	

Age

It was found that, at the time of their joining the spinning mills, a significant number of girls were below 14 years of age (20 out of 54) and came under the category of child labour. After their entry into the spinning mills / garment units they were put under training. Within a few months they used to learn the work in different sections of a spinning mill, for example, in cone winding and in simplex. A larger number of adolescent girls (26 out of 54) between 14 year and 15 years were recruited through the brokers.

Economic Background

More than 77 per cent of the respondents were from poor agricultural labour families. In one case, a girl belonging to a wealthy farmer's family was employed and while interviewing her parents in a village in Theni district, it was found that even girls from some big families were recruited and were currently working in spinning mills in the Coimbatore area. The remaining girls were from small and marginal farmer households. A significant number of girls (17 out of 54) in the sample were from Kerala.

More than 74 per cent of the girls working under the Sumangali System were found to belong to scheduled castes, followed by Most Backward Communities and Backward Communities.

Advance and Commission

Though it was difficult to ascertain the exact amount paid as advance and the girls themselves denied it at the time of interview, discussions and cross verification confirmed that all the parents did receive advance payments to send their girls to work under the Sumangali System.

Parents' knowledge about the nature of the work, work place and working environment was found to be limited (only 11 out of 54 knew). The discussions held with people in villages, i.e.

including those who have not sent their girls, but are eager to know about the Sumangali System, revealed that their knowledge on work details was limited. Here, the numbers indicated the trend which has been more than a satisfied inference. Some parents, 11 in number, said that they accompanied their daughters. At the work place, the girls revealed that they came along with brokers, some by bus and others by van.

In all the cases, the payment of commission to the brokers (Rs 500/-) was made by the company (all use the word Company when it comes to advance / commission paid) and the same was deducted from the wages of girls.

Working Hours

The exploitation takes place in the form of long working hours. Though they were told / believed, at the initial stages, that the shift means eight hours, practically all of them were put under one and a half shifts (in the case of power looms - 12 hours shift – but the workers are boys and adult men). They were also put on night shifts. Occasionally, apart from cleaning the floor and machines and oiling the machines, they were also asked to do some household works. It was learnt that this was done on a rotation basis.

Stay and Food

For a majority of the sample respondents (34) the room facilities offered were tolerable i.e., okay, however, 12 labourers said they were bad. Six to eight girls were accommodated in one room. One attraction in these sheds / hostels was the television. Psychologically it gives the impression that the girls had good recreation facilities in the form of television sets in the hostel premises and they were enjoying their stay, something which an ordinary worker can't imagine. What was pathetic was that no one worried about the time these girls had at their disposal to enjoy such facilities.

The majority opined that the food provided in the hostel mess was average and five girls called it bad.

The kind of importance / attention given to the health and hygiene of girls can be inferred from the facilities like bathrooms, toilets and medical help in times of sickness. Apart from the respondents' revelations, personal observations indicated the very bad condition of bathrooms and toilets. Regarding medical facilities, it was only based on opinions as the scope of collecting specific details was found limited. At the same time it was established that minor ailments were treated with the help of local doctors.

Offering tea during night shifts was found to be a common practice in all the spinning mills. In many places they were given snacks (vada) along with tea.

Degree of Confinement

The most disturbing thing in the whole process of the Sumangali System, in this region, has been the confinement of girls in camps. The girls were not allowed to visit their native place / villages, even after a year or two years or three years. These girls were allowed to visit their villages only at the time of a sibling's marriage or the death of a close relative,. Otherwise, it was found to be a rare occurrence. The psychological i.e., emotional aspects of these girls in confinement, definitely, will be pathetic and require specific studies to bring out the truth.

The only solace was that their parents or brothers were allowed to visit them when they came to collect the wages.

In many places the security personnel were women and they also acted as escorts when the girls were taken (if at all) to the market for purchases.

All of them signed agreements, in the name of training – i.e., the training period was three years (!) but no one has kept a copy. The company insists that they should not keep any copy because it is for the record of the company. Another significant point was that some (19 out of 54) of them have signed blank papers. Though the girls were mostly literate (76%) they had no idea about the details of the agreements and the rules and regulations.

Wages and Marriage Assistance

The monthly wages varied from Rs 600 to Rs 900 in the spinning mills and from Rs 900 to Rs 1000 in garment units. The irony was that within the same premises different types of payments were in vogue. That is, the system of payment was different for those who came under the Sumangali System, different for those who worked under the CCS and those who came as casual labourers.

Another disturbing trend was with respect to the final amount i.e., the money given as marriage assistance after a period of three years. A visible, progressive reduction of this amount was found. That is, it now varies between Rs 25000 and Rs 30000 only. This is yet another puzzle in the sense that the demand for labour is very high, the industries especially, the garment industry cry about labour shortage (in the Coimbatore area), but there is no perceptible increase in wages and the amount assured for those who come under the scheme. This again reinforces the point that the rate of labour exploitation has been on the increase.

To sum up

This brief report, based on extensive field work and intensive discussion and observations is summed up here, with the following words of revelation of Mrs E Gandhimathi B.Sc.

She was in the accounts section of a leading garment unit in Coimbatore District (SP Apparels) for two years entrusted with the work of preparing pay bills (with details of wage, PF, deductions, Medical Aid, and settlement of final amount). This unit is very famous for it provides excellent facilities to its workers, all girls in camps. Yet, as a person, for two years she closely observed the pathetic situation of low wages and over work. She termed it 'atrocious'.

Further, she now has got a job in KPR Mills, the largest textile (spinning sector) group in Tamil Nadu, and has the largest number of girls under the 'scheme'. She summed up the situation of girls working there as: 'Parrots in Golden Cage'. However, in reality, they are 'Parrots in Iron Cage'.

CHAPTER III

CAMP COOLIE SYSTEM

Everybody agrees that the 'Camp Coolie System' is highly exploitative and inhuman. And in the same tone, everybody endorses the view that nothing can be done about it in the present circumstances. The most dangerous part of the whole issue is its spread, geographical and sectoral. This huge phenomenon has evolved over a period of 10 to 15 years, has come to stay; and it is feared that soon it will engulf all the sectors – starting from textiles to garments to foundries to sizing mills to power looms.

Evolution of Camp Coolie System (CCS)

A brief note on the evolution of the camp coolie system is presented here. A large section of people interviewed like trade union leaders, workers, proprietors of mills and the literature reviewed, helped us to prepare this note. A special word of thanks goes to Mr Arumugam, Ex MLA and a veteran trade union leader of AITUC (who was a mill worker too) for sharing a lot of information with us.

- ❖ The first ginning mill in Coimbatore was Stanes Mill, started in 1886.
 - ❖ Lakshmi Mill was started in 1910
 - ❖ The working time was 12 to 16 hours / day
 - ❖ In the beginning not much resistance came from the workers either on working hours or on wages paid.
 - ❖ Due to the efforts of trade union leaders like Jeevanatham and N G Ramasamy, awareness was created among workers.
 - ❖ The workers felt that they were all treated like slaves.
 - ❖ During the early 40s the workers started demanding higher wages and Dearness Allowance (DA).
 - ❖ In 1946, the workers were successful in getting the DA along with the wages.
- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| 1948 | - | First Wage Board |
| 1956 | - | Agreement between South Indian Mill Owners Association (SIMA) and Labour Unions |
| 1960 | - | Second Wage Board |
| 1986 | - | Varadhan Award |
| 1996 | - | VRS – Compulsory (!) VRS |

The first person to introduce the CCS was Mr Jagadeesh Chandran, a prominent person in the textile sector (owner of three big mills) in the year 1993. The first three mills, which adopted this method of employing labourers, were located at Kanjikode in Kerala, and Othakkal Mandapam and Poolankinaru in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

Thiru K.V. VARADHAN B.A., B.L.,
Special Industrial Tribunal
Madras – 6

Varadhan Award 23.02.1987

Notifications by Tamil Nadu Gazette 18.03.1987

Group	Spindles	Frame	Apprenticeship	Occupation Wage	Remarks
A	Up to 2200	5	First 6 months Rs.8 per day Second 6 months Rs.9 per day Third 6 months Rs11 per day	Unskilled Rs.13 per day Skilled Rs.14 per day (monthly Rs.338 and Rs.364 respectively) - for 26 days	Demand by workman was Rs.30 for a daily consolidated wage (basic wage +DA) besides HR, LT x MA The current/existing wage – range of Rs.3 to Rs.6 per day – Rs.78 to Rs.156 per month of 26 days.
B	Up to 6600	6 to 15	First 6 months Rs.8 per day Second 6 months Rs.9 per day Third 6 months Rs11 per day	Unskilled Rs.17 per day Skilled Rs.18 per day	Have Rent Allowance Rs.1 per day worked +DA prevailing Rs.7 to Rs.12
C	Up to 11,000	16 to 25	First 6 months Rs.8 per day Second 6 months Rs.9 per day Third 6 months Rs11 per day	In addition to existing wage Rs.2 per day or Rs.52 per month	H R Allowance Rs.52 + DA
D	Above 11,000	Above 26		Rs.123 per day	As on 1.5.1986 per month wage was Rs.1115- (rough calculation of monetary benefits)- Rs.42.80 1974 – Rs.30.57 1979 – Rs.50.47

A Special Industrial Tribunal was set up by the Tamil Nadu Government to resolve the industrial disputes between the managements of certain mills in the state of Tamil Nadu and their workmen. Honourable Judge Thiru. K.V. Varadhan, B.A., B.L., after hearing the arguments, from both sides on issues like revision of wages, D.A. and the grant of other benefits, gave the award and the same was notified by the Tamil Nadu Government in its Gazette dated March 18th, 1987. A summary of this award is given in Table 1 to get an idea and the details can be seen in appendix –A.

In the interest of justice and equity, Thiru K.V. Varadhan classified the textile mills into four groups, as given in an earlier table, and the revision of wages has been suggested and a consensus has been arrived at accordingly. This award misfired and facilitated the closure of big mills (above 11,000 spindles and some mills used to have around 60,000 spindles), which were already reeling under the stress of the lack of modernisation and non-cooperation from the workforce (represented by the trade unions) for rationalisation. Thus began the era of proliferation of small-scale textile/spinning mills both in terms of number and geographical spread.

The next aspect that became quite popular was the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS). Several mills adopted this method very quickly and effectively to get rid of the members of the 'permanent' workforce. The irony was that those who took VRS and were reemployed in the same mill, were paid low wages (for example, Rs 70/- per shift).

The Issue

Certain things, at the surface, look very normal, no matter what is going on underneath. In Coimbatore region, especially in the Avinashi-Tirupur-Palladam belt, the presence of power looms, sizing mills, spinning mills and garment units in large numbers, demand a high volume of labour force. This demand for labour, which is not met by the local populace, or even at the regional level, is fulfilled by migrant labourers, drawn mostly from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The working conditions and the wage payment systems in these establishments vary widely. Among them, one (in)famous method is what is commonly known as “**Camp Coolie System**” (CCS).

From field observations, what has been discerned is the wide spread existence of CCS, in power looms, sizing units and spinning mills. Further, there exists a vast difference in the CCS that is followed in those units. In the power looms, housing facilities are given to the workers and the whole family (husband, wife, son and daughter) is engaged in work. Payment of advance to these workers is most common. In other words, no single worker is drawn into this sector without an advance payment. To that extent, they are not allowed to move outside the factory premises.

In sizing mills, mostly young boys are employed. The current trend is that young boys drawn from as far as Bihar are employed in sizing mills on a large scale. These boys are kept in the sheds and in confinement.

The widespread prevalence of CCS has also been found in the spinning mills. Many claim that it started in Dindigul area, where a large number of textile mills (mostly big ones, employing more than 1000 workers) are located, but a majority of the owners are from Coimbatore district. The inference is that, the owners in and around Coimbatore closed their mills and started new ones in the Dindigul area, a dry belt and lacking industrial activity. Their arguments in favour of employing temporary workers are two fold.

- a) The price of cotton yarn supplied is the same, whether it is produced by the small unit or the big unit and also whether it employs permanent workers or casual workers or *badlis*. However, the cost of production of yarn for a unit employing permanent workers is much higher compared to the units employing temporary

workers. Hence, mills preferred temporary workers and adopted VRS for the existing permanent workers.

- b) When labour from the southern districts is ready to work at lower wages, why should such mills employ workers at a higher wage?

Another dimension is that, this system has now penetrated the garment sector. The major reasons provided by the managements of the garment units have been that they want a 'disciplined labour force'. Mr Ananda Kumar, owner of a small garment unit in Tirupur, puts it subtly, "You can't shout at the local labour. If you do so, he or she changes the company immediately. Moreover, earlier the Tirupur units employed eight or nine year old boys / girls. Now this is not possible. So, the big/large units are fast moving towards the adoption of the Sumangali System to lure girls. In the process, they become 'camps of workers', with a disciplined and uninterrupted supply of labour force".

The Scheme of Analysis and Presentation

Unlike the Sumangali System, which also comes under CCS and covers only unmarried girls, the general usage of the phrase CCS, implies employing unmarried girls and unmarried boys as workers. This means that unmarried girls do not necessarily come under the Sumangali System or the Marriage Assistance Scheme. They are all paid wages on a monthly basis. The present survey covered both textile mills and garment units, which employed workers under CCS. Except for the wage structure and to a limited extent, the facilities, all other things were found common in both types of units. So, the results were presented to describe and explain the CCS by putting the information drawn from these two sectors together. At the best, they indicate an unhealthy trend, which is of serious concern from the worker as well as from the view of human rights.

The first and foremost point that came across during the survey has been the confinement of workers, both men and women and boys and girls in the premises of spinning mills and garment units.

The second aspect is the long working hours i.e. one and a half to two shifts in the spinning mills. In the name of training, the girls and boys are given very low wages Rs 40 to Rs 50 per day for the first six months and out of this Rs 20 are deducted for the provision of food. Initially, they i.e., girls and boys are put in the cone winding section and given work cleaning and oiling the machines. Then they are moved to carding and finally to the simplex sections. Due to the lack of proper ventilation and dust, these workers are prone to lung diseases.

The third aspect is the wide variations found in the wages paid, per day, to these workers. No mechanism has been found to compare and argue for uniform wages. Gender difference in wage payment is also visible. For the same work, men are paid more than women. Further, there is a mention of incentive, efficiency wage, etc, during the interview.

Wage Structure

S.NO	Category	Range of Salary	
		Wage (Per Day)	Wage (Per Month)
1.	Krishna Spinning Mill	Rs 60 – Rs 90	-
2.	Dhanalakshmi Spinning Mill	-	Rs 400 – Rs 750
3.	Kailash Spinning Mill	Rs 75 – Rs 95	-
4.	SKTV Spinning Mill	Rs 70 – Rs 100	-
5.	Premier	-	Rs 600 – Rs 1000

6.	Renuka	-	Rs 500 – Rs 1000
7.	KTM Mill	-	Rs 400 – Rs 700
8.	JEE Tex	-	Rs 600 - Rs 1000
9.	KPR Spinning Mill	-	Rs 600 – Rs 1000
10.	KG Mill	-	Rs 450 – Rs 800
11.	Udumalaipettai	-	Rs 600 - Rs 1200
12.	Sandhiya Mill	-	Rs 500 – Rs900
13.	Vijaya Mill	-	Rs 400 – Rs 800
14	Premier Mill	-	Rs 600 – Rs 1000
15.	Visaka Mill	-	Rs 600 – Rs 800
16.	Tripur Textile	Rs 50 – Rs 70	-
17.	Jaganathan Mill	-	Rs 10000 – one year bond
18.	Thangamani Mill	-	Rs 600 efficiency wage
19.	KPR mill	-	Rs 50 monthly increment
20	TTP Mill	-	Rs 500 – Rs 700
21	Thangam Spinners	Rs 95	
22	Amirtha Textiles	Rs 90	
23	Sampooorna Shree Textiles	Multiple rates	
24	Vishnulakshmi Textiles	–	
25	KVM Textiles	Rs 95	Boys and Girls

It has been authentically established from those who prepare the wage bills (one from a small scale unit and one from a large unit) that the management does not adhere to what has been said in the beginning (agreement). Since the workers are in the camps, they do not know much about what is happening in another section of the same premises as well as what is happening outside.

In the name of technological upgradation, imported (sometimes second-hand machines) machines are bought into the carding and simplex and other sections and only a few men / women are put to man the machines in the name of automation. These are fewer than the number actually required. During visits it was found that many young girls were given this work.

The system of wage payment in garment units is much more complex and complicated. After adopting the CCS in their premises, and also shifting / locating the units on the outskirts of the towns and cities, the wages paid have undergone dramatic changes, of course, at the cost of the workers. Normally, under the non-camp coolie system for those girls working as helpers the daily wage varied from Rs 50 to Rs 80, it varied from Rs 70 to Rs 90 for those working in checking and those work at the over-lock machines were given at the time of joining, Rs 90 and after six months, it would be increased to Rs 120 per day. In the flat machines it varied from Rs 140 to Rs 150. Due to a strong trade union, this has

been paid and those who are working for piece rate used to get more. However, what is most disturbing is the low wages paid to the girls and boys who work under the CCS as they are virtually under confinement. In some places (like Armstrong Garments) the girls are paid monthly wages ranging from Rs 2000 to Rs 2500 and Rs 500 to Rs 600 per month is deducted for food.

Yet another problem is that, the labour cannot move out of the factory / mill for fear of abuse or physical punishment or both. There is a strict vigilance and entry of outsiders is restricted.

The following are the major complaints against both the Sumangali and Camp Coolie Systems.

Major Complaints

1. Signature on blank papers
2. Phone tapping (confirmed personally in one spinning mill)
3. Girls below the age of 15 years – confirmed by
 - i. Field Investigator
 - ii. Lady Surgeon, ESI, Coimbatore
 - iii. Lady Doctor, Tirupur
4. No leave
In a few mills, it has been authentically established that for three years the girls were never allowed to go to their village / native place. Only their parents / brothers coming to collect the wages could meet them.
5. No agreement signed with specific details under the Sumangali System i.e., Marriage Assistance Scheme.
6. Even if agreements are signed under the 'scheme' the increments are not given as agreed. No copy is given to the worker.
7. Poor to worst (like local cinema theatres) toilet and bathing facilities
8. Hostels in big and medium units are okay, but in small units the girls sleep on the floor.
9. It was personally observed and ascertained that the girls are given household and cleaning chores.
10. Burning of records. The spinning mills / units never kept records, especially the workers' pay bills.
11. Abusing girls who talk or laugh
12. The girls are escorted by a women warden when they are, if at all, taken out to the market.
13. Confirmed about overtime and this is covered by the words like incentives, efficiency wages etc. But no systematic payment is reported.
14. The fear of losing money at the end of three years makes everybody maintain a stoic silence.

Responses to these complaints by the owners / managements are summarised below.

The **version of the management of big groups** – both garment and textile units. They all claimed that,

- They went by Labour Standards – “We provide all the facilities to our workers. Especially, the girls and women workers are given hostels, canteens and rest rooms, medical and recreational facilities.”
- They justified the protection, high security given to the girls. “You call them ‘camp coolies’, but go and visit their native places / villages to see the abject poverty in which they all live.”
- They were giving the workers all medical benefits and compensation in the case of accidents.

- They donate money to build temples and schools and for festivals in the workers' villages.
- They also justified the strict rules and restrictions imposed on outsiders. This has been done on two important grounds
 - This is to protect their workers, especially the unmarried girls, as they say they have assured their parents that nothing will happen to their wards when they are inside the factory premises.
 - They didn't want to land themselves in police stations with complaints of sexual harassment, love marriages, running away from the factory premises, suicides and so on.

The **version of owners / proprietors of small textile units**. They justified CCS / Sumangali System as,

- They had to safeguard the girls from any untoward incident.
- They have close contact with the parents of the girls and are prompt in paying wages and the amount promised to pay for their marriage after the completion of the period of contract.
- They can't afford to provide the facilities offered by the 'big units'. But please note that, there (in big units) no direct contact between the management and the workers (read girls) exists. Due to this, there is no chance :
 - to air their complaints and inconveniences to the management, and
 - for parents to meet the owner / management. Everything is carried out by the managers/supervisors/brokers.
- They have invested crores of rupees, and with the increase in the competition in the yarn market, they are ready to go to any extent to 'procure' labour.
- Gone are the days when they got any number of workers / labourers. Nowadays, they personally visit the villages in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala to meet the parents so as to convince them about the benefits they are offering unmarried girls. They spend a lot of money and time on these. Mr Karthikeyan, proprietor of Vishnulakshmi Textiles, Chinniampalayam, Coimbatore district, said it took three months for him to get the required labour force [under the 'scheme'] and this included many personal visits by him.

The **managements which are not employing girls either under 'Sumangali system' of 'camp system'** put forward the following reasons for not resorting to such schemes.

- They can not bear the harassment meted out by the Labour Department (they used the word Labour Officer)
- If something happens inside the factory premises, it not only spoils their reputation, but one cannot imagine the extent of police harassment.
- If a girl is affected by any wrong doing (read physical assault) and the news reaches the village, the girl's relatives / villagers will come in a van to seek justice, and in the process the owners have witnessed violent incidents, blackmailing and closure of units / mills.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVENTIONS

The violation of established norms and rules by the powerful (political power / capitalists) in the employment of the workforce, must, at any cost, be resisted. In the case of bonded labour, the kind and extent of the system of bondage varies widely from place to place, region to region and occupation to occupation. There were measures to abolish the system of bonded labour. The rehabilitation of bonded labourers has been yet another important issue. The laws passed and Acts enacted, so far cover, the traditional mode of bonded labour, and whatever may be their effectiveness. Notwithstanding the laws passed, both by the central government and state governments, to abolish bonded labour, the system persists, in various new forms. One such new form is the CCS and within it there is a brand new form called 'Sumangali System'. In this section, a brief explanation has been given about, with the available data, the interventions made to abolish the CCS. For the purpose of clarity, the interventions have been put under different heads - studies by trade unions, by police, by the Labour Department and by the state / central government.

Studies

Two studies were available. The first study was designed and conducted by Mr S M Prithviraj of CARE Trust. It was supported and coordinated by the Centre for Social Education and Development (CSED), an NGO at Avinashi. The topic of the study was "Rapid Assessment on Status of Internal Migrant Workers in Tirupur and Coimbatore Region". The sample size was 28 male and 28 female migrant workers employed in knitwear units, 24 male migrant workers in dyeing and bleaching factories and 10 men and 10 women in power loom units. The study covered the push factors of migration and explained how the promise of Rs 20000 to Rs 25000 at the time of marriage, under the Sumangali System (i.e., after three years of contract) has lured unmarried girls to come to the knitwear sector. The major findings were, poor working conditions, excessive work, unfair wages and forced labour, in the units studied.

The second study was by an employee of CSED on "Sumangali Scheme" or "Marriage Assistance Scheme". It talks about the strong network of employers to find unmarried girls and lure them in the name of Mangalya Thittam, promising a lump sum of Rs 25000 to Rs 40000 after three years. Mangalyam means Mangalasutra, a nuptial tie. There is no mention about the sample size and period of study. One significant observation was that the girls were made to work long hours. Further, they were not given identity cards, pay slips and they were denied Provident Fund (PF), ESI and other fringe benefits.

I By Trade Unions

Among the various trade unions only the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has taken certain steps to abolish the CCS.

The Tirupur office of CITU conducted a survey in 2003 covering the textile units located in Sulur, Avinashi, Tirupur, Udumalpet and Kamaickenpalayam (near Palladam), all in Coimbatore district. At that time, it was found that only one out of 30 units (3.3%) had the Marriage Assistance Scheme (and now it is 90%).

The major actions taken by the CITU were:

- Observed a fast in front of the Fort (Legislative Assembly), in Chennai on 31st July 2005.
- Questions raised by CPM members in the assembly.
- Memorandum was submitted to the Inspector of Factories.

- Memorandum was submitted to the Labour Commissioner.
- Picketing on 2nd February 2006 in front of the offices of Enforcement, the demand being ESI and PF benefits to the workers in the spinning mills.
- Conducted an agitation at Tirupur on 4th January, 2007.

The observation made by an important functionary of CITU sums up the scheme of things that is going to come.

“In the course of time, this (‘the scheme’, ‘camp wages’) will become a major issue of contention. Unfortunately, the third generation of workers is not in favour of unions.”

II By NGOs

Effective Plan to Eradicate Bonded Labour by Development and Education for Workers (DEW) and the Society for the Abolition of Bondedness (SAB)

1. The Government should appoint special officers in all districts and empower them to abolish the bonded labour system and rehabilitate the labourers.
2. Maximum punishment should be awarded to those who engage bonded labour. A separate budget allocation should be made for dealing with the problem.
3. Non-governmental organisations should assist in providing education to labourers' children and create an emergency fund and see that the labourers have access to it.

III By Human Rights Commission

A. National Human Rights Commission

National Human Rights Commission member Justice Y. Bhaskar Rao has said that the conviction rate under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, in Tamil Nadu was encouraging. Mr. Rao said that 803 of the 884 employers against whom cases were filed under the Act had been convicted. A total of 13175 persons have so far been rescued from bonded labour in Tamil Nadu.

Around 2.86 lakh people had been rescued from bonded labour throughout the country and 2.68 lakh rehabilitated till March 31, 2006. The whereabouts of the others were not known.

B. State Human Rights Commission – Tamil Nadu

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) will deem the recommendations on petitions it forwards to government departments “accepted” if they fail to respond within three months. In such an eventuality, the SHRC would monitor the implementation of the recommendations, as per the directions of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The SHRC would not mind what the government departments thought of the Commission while striving to find a solution to the complaints it received.

IV By the Police

No complaints regarding / concerning disputes between workers and the employers where ‘the scheme’ (CCS/SS) is in force have been registered in recent years, in Avinashi, Palladam and Tirupur (North). However, cases of suicides of girls were registered and, at the same time, in no case has the identity of the textile unit been made known.

Two cases that need to be mentioned

1. In the local Tamil newspaper Dinamani, a case of a girl's suicide who was working in a spinning mill was reported on 12.12.2006. Afterwards, it was concluded (i.e., after enquiry by the police) that it was a case of a love affair gone wrong. The said mill is near Palladam Police Station. The girl belongs to Sirkazhi in Cuddalore district
2. On 11.01.2007, the local news papers especially Dinanthi and Dinamani reported a suicide of a girl working in a garment unit in the outskirts of Coimbatore. She was a migrant worker and the parents came and lodged a

complaint with the police. On 13.01.2007, the news paper carried the statement of a Police Officer (DC) that it was a case of a failed love affair and positively a suicide.

During the survey, it was found that the inspector, sub-inspector and constable interviewed were not familiar with the conditions of the girls working under the 'scheme' in spinning mills.

One crime branch inspector accepted the fact and revealed that they never register the cases and try to settle the issue by compromise / consensus.

The reasons are

- a. The mills / owners are more powerful.
- b. Once the name of the mill is registered, the higher-ups will be asking / demanding reports frequently and it is a real head-ache.

V By the State Government

Whenever the issue is raised in the state assembly, the response has been 'we will look into the matter'.

The present Chief Minister stated that "come with evidence (i.e. evidence of bondage) of the bonded labour system (especially in Tirupur), then the government will take action".

Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tamil Nadu Policy Note - 2006 – 2007, Demand No. 4 has stated the following.

a. Abolition of Bonded Labour

The Government is determined to eradicate in toto the Bonded Labour System in this State. Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act was enacted in 1976. This Act is being implemented in Tamil Nadu since its inception. This Government is committed in not only releasing the persons held in bondage but also to rehabilitate them. District level committees have been formed under the Chairmanship of the respective District Collectors, to ensure the effective implementation of the Act in the District. At State level, a High Level Monitoring Committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretary. So far 13,051 Bonded Labourers were released and rehabilitated at a cost of Rs.15.06 crores. A sum of Rs.110.00 lakhs has been provided for this scheme for the year 2006-07.

b. Model Scheme for Abolition of Bonded Labour and Rehabilitation

The Scheme is implemented in Thiruvallur District where more number of Bonded Labourers were identified. Through this Scheme, concentration is made not only in abolishing the bonded labour and rehabilitating them, but also to release them from indebtedness. A "Project Advisory Committee" under the Chairmanship of Secretary to Government, Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department is functioning for the implementation of scheme effectively and to eradicate Bonded Labour.

VI By the Central Government

Mr Subbarayan, the MP representing Coimbatore Lok sabha constituency, asked a question in Parliament (November 2006) regarding camp wages and bonded labour that exist in the Tirupur area. The Ministry of Labour, GoI, passed this to the Collector of Coimbatore district and he, in turn, asked the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) of Tirupur to conduct an enquiry (on CCS/ Sumangali System) and submit a report.

The RDO of Tirupur directed the Tehsildhar to conduct the enquiry. The Tehsildhar, with the help of two Revenue Inspectors conducted the enquiry and submitted the report.

Prior to that, the Revenue Inspectors, Tehsildhar and the RDO were unaware of the Sumangali System and of course had heard about the CCS. They (Tehsildhar and two Revenue Inspectors) conducted a quick study at three major spinning mills.

- i. Jayavishnu Textiles, Pongalur
- ii. Vijay Velavan Mills, Avinashipalayam (North), and
- iii. Rayar Textiles, Avinashi

They interviewed two workers, Stella (20), ninth standard, from Rameshwaram and Kaleeswaran (21), seventh standard, at Rayar Textiles, Avinashi. And P Shanthamani (20), ninth standard, from Thirupuvanam, Sivaganga district and 20 other girls were present at the time of enquiry. Only these three workers (one boy and two girls) signed the forms – written statements. The three stated / gave the following particulars.

- i. Monthly wage paid is Rs 1000/- out of this Rs 400 is paid for food and Rs 600 is given in money / cash.
- ii. No advance received.
- iii. No record or written statement signed.
- iv. One day/ week holiday.
- v. One weeks leave for every six months worked.
- vi. Working one shift of eight hours.
- vii. Free accommodation is provided with television viewing facilities.
- viii. They are taken out once a week to temples.
- ix. They are all well-fed.
- x. They will get Rs 35000 at the end of three years (Rs 32000 & Rs 30000 PF).

On the basis of their written statements and the Tehsildhar's and Revenue Inspectors' personal visits during which they saw 'five star hotel facilities', they submitted their report to the District Collector that **there exists no system of bonded labour**. They used the word / phrase, i.e., what they observed cannot be called '***bonded labour system***'.

Note: The Principal Investigator and the Field Investigator tried to personally visit the Vijay Velavan Mills and even by using the good offices of the Tehsildhar, they were not given permission.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Researchers like Agarwal, Olsen, and Mehta are of the opinion that bargaining over wage rates and terms and conditions is an important way that workers obtain decent work. Their bargaining position requires them to have firm civil rights, strong assets and household incomes, and a close connection between family members and the place of work (all these are absent in the CCS and Sumangali System). Without these conditions, indecent work is set to continue.

How to achieve the rights, when different organs of the state have been working in vision, and a pattern is firmly in place, aimed at destroying any organised initiatives from the working class. Further, as Prashant Bhushan observed “several recent judgements of the court have grossly diluted the various labour laws, which were enacted to protect the rights of workers. The government has been wanting to dilute these laws for bringing about what they call “labour reforms”, in line with the new economic policies, but they have been unable to do so because of political opposition. The courts have thus stepped in to do what the government cannot do politically. They have diluted the protection afforded to workmen by various laws”. No wonder then the Chairman of Tiruppur Exporters’ Association (TEA) asks for relaxation in labour laws and permission to employ ‘**contract labour**’!

The situation is grim. There is desperation. Notwithstanding all these, there are still ways to demonstrate the capacity of civil society by taking determined actions against all forms of bonded labour.

One possible way, apart from the continuous and constant struggle by the trade unions (in the specific context of CCS and Sumangali System it is CITU) is the intervention of civil society mainly represented by NGOs. An example, worth mentioning here is the evidence given by Supriya Roy Chowdhry. It is about a successful story of labour getting their fair due in the garment export industry in Bangalore. A quote from the author, “in an interview conducted with around 30 women belonging to this particular factory (a factory having an arrogant manager), it appeared that the intervention by the National Commission for Women (NCW), through the mediation of Civil Initiatives for Development (CIVIDEP) is looked upon as a water shed in the occupational lives of these women. After the visit of the NCW, their toilet facilities improved, they were being paid for overtime work, their working hours were typically limited to eight, it was easier to get leave, and so on”. Thus, an organ of the government and an extended arm of a NGO can do some thing better for bonded labourers. This can also happen for the poor workers working in spinning mills and garment units in Coimbatore region also, if concerted efforts are made.

The fight for getting fair wages, ESI and PF benefits should continue. Towards this the said mills and garment units must be asked to maintain a list of names (section wise, gender wise) and the pay rolls, for scrutiny.

It is so inhuman to keep, especially, young girls for three years in the camp without any break. The psychological impact, (of course to be scientifically examined) will definitely affect the girls. The fear of abuse and sexual exploitation in an alien atmosphere on the one hand and the helpless parents on the other prevents the girls working under the CCS and Sumangali System from expressing their emotions. The working hours, leave and incentives / increments should be streamlined.

The very definition of ‘bondage’ has to be modified. Very cleverly, nowadays, the managements of the production units – spinning mills and garments in the present context - do not give a copy of the agreements signed to the workers or to their parents. And all the

workers and their parents are told in clear terms, by the owners that they should never tell anybody anything and also not to use the word “**advance**”.

At Tirupur, significant work in terms of creating awareness is being done by an NGO, SAVE. They conduct regular meetings and disseminate information through printed posters and pamphlets. This kind of work should be intensified further.

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APPENDIX

Appendix - A

GROWTH OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN TAMIL NADU

	UNIT	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05 (P)
FABRIC PRODUCTION (MILL SECTOR)						
Cotton	Thousand sq.mtr	102585	74670	64944	54956	84434
Blended	Thousand sq.mtr	23104	16933	7944	7843	7829
100% Non-cotton	Thousand sq.mtr	4869	5393	4591	4365	3197
Total	Thousand sq.mtr	130558	96996	77479	67164	95460
Closure position (Non-SSI)						
	No.	77	81	95	115	115
	No.	5	5	6	5	6
Spinning	No.	82	86	101	120	121
Composite		1096	1037	1386	1645	1771
	Thousand No.	3432	5972	6020	10180	11540
Total		2196	2196	2292	2196	2652
	No.	24347	23192	27216	30202	33479
Affected due to closure						
	No.	102	129	151	165	171#
Spindles	No.					
Rotors		345	480	604	766	1078
		2082.02	2598.49	3001.36	3621.17	5564.82
Looms		304	421	537	703	996
	No.	990.71	1212.71	1465.45	1852.07	2784.96
Workers on roll		218	323	427	583	821
		543.33	753.54	1065.84	1326.50	1759.48
BIFR (Calendar Year)						
Registered with BIFR (Year –end position)	No.					
	Rs. Crore					
TUFS						
No. of application received	No.					
	Rs. Crore					
Total cost of project	No.					
No. of application sanctioned	Rs. Crore					
Amount sanctioned						
No. of application disbursed						
Amount disbursed						

* Cotton Year
As on 31.05 2005
P = Provisional

Compendium of Textile Statistics –2005
Office of the Textile Commissioner
Ministry of Textile Government of India
Mumbai.

Appendix - B

STATE-WISE INSTALLED CAPACITY AND WORKERS ON ROLL OF SMALL SCALE SPINNING UNITS AS ON 31.03.2005

STATE/UNION TERRITORIES	NO.OF MILLS	INSTALLED CAPACITY		WORKERS ON ROLL
STATES				
Andhra Pradesh				
Delhi	19	65044	5600	789
Gujarat	4	2352	0	86
Haryana	28	47096	4481	611
Himachal Pradesh	79	37819	39114	1899
Karnataka	1	0	1080	18
Madhya Pradesh	6	31385	2296	578
Maharashtra	5	17320	660	383
Orissa	10	5808	920	149
Punjab	17	45938	2664	1609
Rajasthan	1	224	0	15
Tamil Nadu	31	117702	3936	1961
Uttar Pradesh	8	14071	2608	455
Uttaranchal	900	2745983	46620	31079
	43	85240	4769	1152
UNION TERRITORIES	3	1160	0	47
Daman & Diu				
Pondicherry				
	2	728	0	32
	4	7576	0	103
TOTAL	1161	3225446	114748	40966
AHMEDABAD	19	33348	3560	364
Coimbatore	514	1422766	14136	14276
Kanpur	5	1312	1928	127
Panipat	42	24532	34706	1101

Source: Compendium Textile Statistics, 2005

Appendix – C

Growth of the Textile Mill Industry

Year	Spinning	Composite	Total
1980	400	291	691
1981	415	278	693
1982	442	281	723
1983	561	280	841
1984	639	281	920
1985	674	281	955
1986	702	282	984
1987	744	283	1027
1988	752	283	1035
1989	769	282	1051
1990	770	281	1051
1991	777	285	1062
1992	846	271	1117
1993	874	268	1142
1994	909	266	1175
1995	1148	268	1416
1996	1294	275	1569

Source: *Compendium of Textile Statistics – 1996*

Appendix - D

GROWTH OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN TAMILNADU

	UNIT	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05(p)	Dec'06
COTTON/MAN-MADE FIBRE TEXTILE MILLS							
Spinning mills (Non-SSI)	No.	844	850	858	834	834	805
Composite mills (Non-SSI)	No.	821	827	838	814	812	805
	No.	23	23	20	20	22	
Spinning mills (SSI)							
Exclusive weaving mills (Non-SSI)	No.	792	828	904	884	900	977
	No.	18	19	19	19	18	
100% Export Oriented Units (EOUs)	No.	18	18	17	20	20	
	No.	67350	67387	67522	68652	74316	
Power loom units	No.	2	2	2	2	2	
Man-made fibre units	No.	2	2	2	2	2	
Man-made filament yarn units							
CAPACITY INSTALLED							
	Thousand	14746	15068	15522	15458	15810	
	No.	124909	129701	142109	153517	158633	
	No.						
Spindles (Non-SSI+SSI)	No.	7549	7561	7177	7121	7141	
	No.	318944	319244	320196	334372	365797	
Rotors (Non-SSI+SSI)	No.	90.45	94.95	94.95	94.95	94.95	
Looms (Composite & Exclusive weaving units)	Mn kg.	16.68	16.68	16.68	16.68	16.68	
	Mn kg.						
No. of power looms							
Man-made fiber							
Man-made filament	No.	192457	193051	199353	194903	192917	
	No.	24930	26066	29323	29872	31079	
Workers on roll							
	No.	2727	3026	3026	3272	3287	
Spinning mills & Composite mills (Non-SSI)	No.	4330	4330	4387	6422	6404	
Spinning mills (SSI)							
Exclusive weaving mills (Non-SSI)	Lakh bales	5.50	5.00	3.00	3.75	5.50	
EOUs	Thousand kg.	37467	28254	24478	30334	31162	
PRODUCTION OF FIBRES							
	Thousand kg.	1010605	1016827	1036840	1011815	1071237	
Raw cotton *	Thousand kg.	109774	127364	141447	149076	174590	
Man-made fibre							
COTTON CONSUMPTION BY MILLS							
	Thousand kg.	956718	958839	967641	952602	1029375	
	Thousand kg.	107232	110147	118183	129977	131240	

Non-SSI	Thousand kg.	60430	70537	78979	89796	101385	
SSI	Thousand kg.	1124380	1139523	1164803	1172375	1262000	
PRODUCTION YARN	Thousand kg.	4700	2026	–	–	–	
Cotton yarn							
Blended yarn							
100% Non-cotton yarn							
Total spun yarn							
Man-made filament yarn							

Source: *Compendium of Textile Statistics, 2005*

Appendix – E

Profile of Textile Industry in Tamil Nadu and All India

Particulars		Tamil Nadu		All India	
		2003-04	2004-05	2003-04	2004-05
I ORGANISED TEXTILE MILLS					
1)	No. of Spinning Mills	814	813	1564	1566
2)	No. of Composite Mills	20	22	223	223
	Total Number of Mills	834	835	1787	1789
3)	Installed Capacity				
	a) Spindles (Lakhs)	129.1	130.79	340.2	342.45
	b) Rotors (Nos.)	108849	112821	383185	385395
	c) Looms (Nos.)	5947	5959	88111	85762
II SMALL SCALE SPINNING UNITS					
1	No. of Spinning Mills	884	900	1135	1161
2	Installed Capacity				
	a) Spindles (Lakhs)	25.49	27.46	30.1	32.25
	b) Rotors (Nos.)	44668	46620	98720	114748
III YARN PRODUCTION (including SSI Units) (Million Kg)					
	a) Cotton Yarn	952.60	1029.37	2121.05	2269.33
	b) Blended Yarn	129.98	131.24	589.08	584.30
	c) Non-Cotton Yarn	89.80	101.37	340.94	366.96
	Total Spun Yarn	1172.38	1261.98	3051.07	3220.59
IV CLOTH PRODUCTION (Mill Sector) (Million Sq. Mtrs)					
	a) Cotton	N.A.	N.A.	968	995
	b) Blended	N.A.	N.A.	253	185
	c) Non-Cotton	N.A.	N.A.	212	7
	All Cloth	N.A.	N.A.	1433	1187
V	Number of Workers ('000' Nos.) (SSI+Non-SSI)	225	224	928	918

Note: N.A.: Not available

Source: Office of the Textile Commissioner, Mumbai