

## The Price Of Stone: Children At Risk Of Silicosis In Rajasthan's Quarries

<https://www.indiaspend.com/rajasthan/the-price-of-stone-children-at-risk-of-silicosis-in-rajasthans-quarries-849922>

Shravan was just 11 years old when his father, who worked in a stone quarry near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, died of silicosis in 2007. Left to fend for themselves, Shravan's mother, Raju Devi, turned to her oldest child for help. Shravan dropped out of school and began working--ironically, in a quarry. A decade later--when he turned 21--Shravan found out he had the same disease that once consumed his father, Shravan, now 26, told IndiaSpend.

Silicosis, or Patthar ki bimari (disease of the stone) as it was once known among stone quarry workers, is the effect of long term exposure to silica dust on the lungs. An incurable occupational disease, affecting mostly mine and construction workers, silicosis is prevalent in nine Indian states and one Union territory, Puducherry.

Shravan's is not an isolated case; in his village Ganderi ki Dhaani, there are several who started working as children in stone quarries, and were later diagnosed with silicosis. Thirty-year-old Lala Ram started working in a stone quarry when he was 11, after his parents were diagnosed with silicosis. "I am the eldest in the family--we are three brothers and two sisters...I had to start working," Lala said. His mother, who also worked in the quarry, has been sick for the last 15 years. His father passed away from the disease.

Between 2018 and January 19, 2023, in Jodhpur district alone, 11,462 cases were registered with the Rajasthan Silicosis Grant Disbursement portal, of which 7,475 cases were certified for compensation after being screened at a Community Health Centre. In all, Rajasthan had registered 48,448 silicosis cases of which 31,869 were certified.

### Mining and silicosis in Rajasthan

Rajasthan has the highest number of mining leases in the country--189 leases for major minerals, 15,245 leases for minor minerals and 17,688 quarry licences, bringing the total to 33,122 licences. A majority of these are sandstone mines and quarries in the unorganised and small scale sector.

Ganderi ki Dhaani is among the 20-25 villages in the sandstone mining belt. Villagers call it the 'widows village', as there are nearly 40-50 women widowed due to silicosis. Children are the silent victims, sometimes medically, sometimes because of the intergenerational burden of the disease that their parents suffer from.

One of the major demands by civil society has been for mines and quarries to stop dry drilling, which does not use water, and exposes workers to fine silica dust that makes

them vulnerable to the disease. Wet drilling, also recommended by the Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission in a special report, can reduce risks.

The Rajasthan Policy on Pneumoconiosis (including silicosis detection, prevention, control & rehabilitation), introduced in 2019, says that the state government will take measures to register all mines, industries with dust hazards and potential to cause pneumoconiosis and notify them as hazardous industries.

"The aim of the policy is to streamline the strategy to deal with pneumoconiosis. For the first time, we are looking at a strong preventive mechanism and better assistance to the victims and their families," principal secretary of Rajasthan's Social Justice and Empowerment Department, had reportedly said in 2019. The policy aims to detect silicosis, and provide rehabilitation to victims and their families through the pneumoconiosis fund, but more needs to be done, our reporting showed.

The bulk of the implementation of the policy is funded through the District Mineral Foundation Trusts which are formed with levies on mining operations for the welfare of the districts where mines are, the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Fund, the state budget and funds from Corporate Social Responsibility commitments of companies.

#### Low compliance to rules

The mining area near Jodhpur. Though the Rajasthan government records 33,122 mines in the state, the Rajasthan Human Rights Commission had said in 2014 that there are 12,000 mines operating around Jodhpur alone.

Many mines are illegal and not part of official records. The Mine Labour Protection Camp (MLPC) Trust, a nonprofit, like the Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission had said in 2014, said that there are at least 12,000 mines operating around Jodhpur alone, even as the entire state records 33,122 licences mines in all.

Mahesh Mathur, Additional District Magistrate, Jodhpur in the Department of Mines and Geology--the regulatory authority--said they conduct regular checks to identify illegal mines. Mathur said that the department has cancelled the lease of more than 100 mines in Jodhpur in the last two-three years for dry drilling. "Mine owners are now aware of the regulations in place about safety measures in the workplace, about safety equipment for workers. Wet drilling is now increasing (in quarries and mines)."

"The machine required for wet drilling is expensive. Now there are other machines, like dust extractors which have a filter bag that needs to be changed periodically. It is also a safer option," said Rana Sengupta, Managing Trustee and CEO of MLPC Trust. During their research in December 2022, MLPC found that while 25 dust extractors were bought by mine owners in Jodhpur, either because notice was served to them or they were applying for a lease, "none has been used".

When asked, mine and quarry owners from the area, along with saying that they use wet drilling, also allege that the "silicosis claims" among mine workers are "highly exaggerated".

Ghanshyam Panwar, a mine owner, said: "People who have never even been to a mine are proving to suffer from silicosis. These numbers are false." He says the real reason for ill health among workers is a lack of hygiene and addiction to country liquor. "Workers mostly suffer from tuberculosis and they miss their treatment cycle. Then, when they don't feel better, they assume it's silicosis."

Mohanlal Kataria, who has a mine near Kal Beriya village, which employs 30 workers, said that there is now a growing crop of middlemen who "can get you a silicosis certificate from a doctor on payment of Rs 50,000". "It's for the government compensation."

The Rajasthan state government gives a rehabilitation sum of Rs 3 lakh to a certified silicosis (or pneumoconiosis) patient and another Rs 2 lakh to their family in the event of their death. A disability pension of Rs 1,500 per month is given to the widow and the family is eligible to get benefits from the Palanhar scheme for minor children.

People continue to suffer on the ground

Birju, a silicosis widow, has not received compensation because she was unable to access her husband's death certificate. She works in the quarry to support her four children.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on December 30, 2022, instituted a bench to deal with all silicosis cases in the country, except in the National Capital Region (NCR), to address complaints of non-payment of compensation to silicosis victims.

For others, the compensation amount is not sufficient. "I spent most of the money in repaying the debt taken from the contractor when my husband first contracted the disease, in paying for the vehicle to take him to the hospital, in settling medical bills," said Gulab Devi, a silicosis widow in Gandero ki Dhaani. Medical bills are higher because families want treatment at private facilities, which have better treatment than at government hospitals.

Govind, 11, on the right, who clears debris at a nearby stone quarry for Rs 200 a day. He is enrolled in school but since his father dies of silicosis in 2019, he barely attends class.

A lack of other livelihood options means despite knowing the risks, Gulab Devi's 16-year-old son started working in a quarry. "Mukesh dropped out of school; he was in class 10. He is risking his life for his three younger sisters," she said softly.

Mine owners, like Kataria, are aware of children being employed by contractors for unskilled work in the quarries--like clearing debris, pushing trolleys. "It doesn't happen in my mine, but children do go to quarries for work and to earn some extra money," he said.

Priyank Kanoongo, chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, admitted that there is low reportage on cases of child labour from the mining industry. "There are hardly any FIRs [First Information Reports to the police] done on this issue," he told IndiaSpend, adding that "no one" is interested in the subject. "Foreign companies want their products to be child labour-free but no industry here wants to be audited. We tied up with the Quality Council of India to audit industries in an effort to make them child labour-free, but no industry wants to be audited unless forced to."

Kanoongo added that one of the ways to discourage families from sending their children to work is by increasing workers' pay. "We have to strengthen the families by increasing their pay. We have had a successful intervention in Jharkhand where we suggested the same to the mica industry," he said.

A report from December 2005, titled, Budhpura 'Ground Zero', Sandstone Quarrying in India by P. Madhavan and Sanjay Raj, said the main reasons for children working in mines was the low wages of parents, alcoholism and bonded labour--when loans taken by parents fall on children's shoulders to be repaid. The researchers had found that of the 100,000 quarry workers in the Bundi district of Rajasthan--another major mining district--roughly 15,000-20,000 are children. Most of these were in Budhpura's sandstone quarries.

Enrolling children in schools is not as effective in dissuading child labour in mines.

In Kaali Beri village in Jodhpur's mining belt, "there are at least 70-80 silicosis patients" in a village of 400 households, estimates Sajjan Kanwar, an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA). "Children going to the quarry for work is common... They go to school and after coming back, go to the quarry."

In Ganderi ki Dhani, 11-year-old Govind, who lost his father to silicosis in 2019, is also enrolled in school but hardly attends classes, and instead goes often to the stone quarry nearby to clear debris for Rs 200. His mother, a silicosis patient, works as an agricultural labourer, to support her family of four.

"It's difficult to work with the disease," Mamta said, "I saw my husband go through it but we have to work to feed ourselves."

Flicker of hope

Shravan was 11 when he started working in a stone quarry after his father passed away from silicosis contracted at the same job.

At 21, Shravan too was diagnosed with silicosis. He says he does not regret it and his work kept two of his younger brothers in school.

Shravan, who was 11 when he started working in the mines after his father's death, is now married. Because he took up work, his two younger brothers did not drop out of school. "I did what I had to do," Shravan said, without any regret for the decision he made.

Despite a majority of people saying that they do not possess any other skill to earn a living, those like Shravan and Birju, the silicosis widow, are determined to keep their families out of the quarry. "My two sons and two daughters go to school. I will not send them to the quarry," Birju said, while getting ready for her job at the quarry. "I know the risks (of silicosis) but I cannot sit at home in fear. With this work, I earn a daily sum of Rs 300."

Lala Ram, who himself started working in the quarry at 11, too wants a different life for his children. "Both my children go to school...I will not let harm come their way. They must live a different future."

## एचईसी मामले पर राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग ने लिया संज्ञान

<https://www.livehindustan.com/jharkhand/ranchi/story-national-human-rights-commission-took-cognizance-on-hec-matter-7654677.html>

एचईसी के कर्मचारियों को 14 माह से वेतन नहीं दिए जाने पर राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग ने संज्ञान लिया है। आयोग ने भारी उद्योग मंत्रालय के सचिव को नोटिस जारी कर आठ हफ्ते में समाधान करने के निर्देश दिए हैं। वेतन नहीं मिलने से एचईसी कर्मियों की हालत खराब होने की जानकारी और बकाया वेतन दिलाने के लिए हटिया कामगार यूनियन ने 12 दिसंबर को राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग से शिकायत की थी।

यूनियन की ओर से आयोग को शिकायत करते हुए कहा गया है कि एचईसी देश का मातृ उद्योग है। देश के रक्षा, अंतरिक्ष, न्यूक्लियर और कई जरूरतों को यह कारखाना पूरा करता है। यहां के कर्मचारी और ठेका श्रमिक 25-30 साल से लगातार काम कर रहे हैं। लेकिन पिछले 14 माह से उन्हें वेतन नहीं मिल रहा है। काम करने के बाद वेतन मांगने वाले श्रमिकों का मौलिक अधिकार है, लेकिन केंद्र सरकार और एचईसी प्रबंधन कामगारों को वेतन नहीं दे रहा है। वेतन नहीं मिलने से कर्मचारियों की स्थिति खराब है। उनके समक्ष भोजन का संकट हो गया है और बच्चों की पढ़ाई और शादी-विवाह नहीं कर पा रहे हैं। पैसे की कमी के कारण इलाज भी प्रभावित हो रहा है।

कर्मचारियों को वेतन नहीं मिलने की शिकायत केंद्र सरकार से कई बार की गयी है, लेकिन केंद्र सरकार ने अभी तक यह स्पष्ट नहीं किया है कि वेतन का भुगतान कब तक होगा। केंद्र सरकार एचईसी को किसी प्रकार की आर्थिक सहायता भी नहीं दे रही है और न ही वेतन के लिए राशि दे रही है। एचईसी में कई युवा इंजीनियर काम कर रहे हैं। वर्षों तक सेवा करने वाले श्रमिकों को वेतन नहीं देकर उनके अधिकार से वंचित किया जा रहा है। आयोग से इस मामले में हस्तक्षेप करने का आग्रह किया गया था।

## **NHRC registers a case in Kandukur stampede incident**

<https://www.thehansindia.com/andhra-pradesh/nhrc-registers-a-case-in-kandukur-stampede-incident-778222>

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has registered a case against the death of eight people during the TDP president Chandrababu's road show in Kandukur, Nellore district on 28th of last month. Ambati Naga Radhakrishna Yadav, a doctor from Vijayawada, filed a complaint with the NHRC on 29th of last month that the road show was deliberately organized in narrow streets and stampeded in order to show that more people had come, resulting in the loss of innocent lives

The complainant brought to the notice of the Commission that 29 people died in a stampede as a result of Chandrababu's actions for publicity in the Godavari Pushkaras during the previous government. He requested the commission that the Kandukur incident should be investigated impartially and strict action should be taken against those responsible and justice should be given to the families of the victims.

## Haryana recommends 7 IPS officers for central deputation

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/haryana-recommends-7-ips-officers-for-central-deputation-8392931/>

The Haryana government has recommended central deputation of seven IPS officers after obtaining vigilance clearance from the Director General of state Vigilance Bureau (VB).

The officer are Sandeep Khirwar (ADGP, law and order), OP Narwal (DIG, law and order), Kuldeep Singh (DIG, VB), Sulochana Gajraj (SP, SCB), Rajesh Duggal (SP, Palwal), Abhishek Jorwal (ADC, Governor) and Rajender Kumar Meena (SP, IT).

The state government recently communicated to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs for consideration of these names to fill up the vacant posts on central deputation. The Vigilance Bureau has also informed the state police that no inquiry is pending against five more IPS officers —Alok Kumar Roy, SK Jain, Dr CS Rao, Charu Bali and Maneesh Chaudhary. Roy and Jain are 1991-batch IPS officers while Rao and Bali belong to the 1995 batch. Maneesh Chaudhary is a 2005-batch officer of Haryana cadre.

Five IPS officers from Haryana cadre are already on central deputation. They include former state police chief and 1988-batch IPS officer Manoj Yadava who is currently Director General, National Human Rights Commission. Among other IPS officers, Sibash Kabiraj is looking after the responsibility of Regional Passport Officer (RPO) in the Union Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). KV Ramana (RAW), Ashwin (CBI) and Manisha Chaudhary (Chandigarh SSP) are also on central deputation. A state police services (HPS) officer Simardeep Singh is a group commander of Special Protection Group (SPG).

Meanwhile, the Haryana Police is looking for promotion of its four IPS officers to the rank of IGP and DIG and granting selection grade to the officers from 2005, 2009 and 2010 batches.

According to the officials, currently, only two IPS officers are holding selection grade against the availability of 12 posts. The officials also said that IPS officers — Sulochana Gajraj, Sangeeta Kalia, Rajesh Duggal and Surender Pal Singh — have become eligible for grant of selection grade with effect from January 1 this year.

An IPS officer should have completed 14 years of service for promotion from the rank of SP to DIG. State police officials say currently as many as 13 officers are posted on DIG rank posts against the availability of 15 cadre posts of DIG while two posts are lying vacant. According to officials, IPS officers Abhishek Garg (2008 batch) and Rahul Sharma (2009 batch) have become eligible for promotion as DIG with effect from January 1 this year.

Abhishek Garg is on extra-ordinary leave with effect from July 1, 2020 to June 31, 2021 and has further requested for extension of leave up to June 30, 2023, which is under consideration of the state government.



Referring to the guidelines, the officials also say that an officer should have rendered 18 years of service in IPS and also should have undergone phase-IV Mid Career Training Programme. With these parameters, the officials say, two IPS officers of 2005 batch—Maneesh Chaudhary and Kulvinder Singh have become eligible for promotion from DIG rank to IGP with effect from January 1 this year. According to the officials, as many as 12 IPS officers are currently posted as IGP against 16 cadre posts for this rank while four posts are currently lying vacant. An IGP level officer is currently under suspension in Haryana.

Sources say no promotion of IPS officers has taken place in Haryana since May 2022 when four IGP rank officers were posted as ADGP rank. After these promotions, questions were raised alleging the same were done despite the “non-availability of vacancies”. Amid controversy, sources say, these four ADGP rank officers (1996 batch) are still drawing salaries of pay scale level 14 which is meant for IGP rank officers.

In fact, as many as 14 posts of ADGP rank were available in Haryana in May, 2022. But with the promotion of four more IPS officers, the number of police officers occupying the post of ADGP had gone to 17.

As many as six of them are cadre posts, while 11 are ex-cadre posts. Ex-cadre posts are temporary posts of the same rank as a cadre post and created by the state government. Sources say the government has plans to convert three ex-cadre posts of DGP into ADGP to meet the shortfall in ADGP rank.

## Orissa HC dismisses govt plea against NHRC order

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2023/jan/20/orissa-hc-dismisses-govt-plea-against-nhrc-order-2539640.html>

The Orissa High Court has declined to interfere against the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)'s order where it directed the state government to pay Rs 1.5 lakh to the family of each of the 40 persons, who died in various parts of Cuttack and Khurda districts by consuming spurious liquor.

The hooch tragedy had happened in February 2012. The NHRC had issued the order on February 11, 2015 on a petition filed by Raghib Ali, member governing board Manav Adhikar Jan Nigarani Samiti (Uttar Pradesh). But the state government challenged it in the high court in August 2015.

While dismissing the petition on Tuesday the division bench of Chief Justice S Muralidhar and Justice M S Raman said, "The court notes that even otherwise for the accidental deaths, an ex-gratia amount of Rs 1,50,000 is usually paid by the state government. The NHRC itself noted that the Justice Naidu Commission has already recommended payment of such relief to the families of victims. Consequently, the court is not persuaded to interfere." Justice AS Naidu, a retired high court judge was appointed Commission of Inquiry after the illicit liquor deaths of brick kiln workers. The incident rocked the state and also led to the resignation of excise minister AU Singhdeo on moral grounds.

Justice AS Naidu Commission of Inquiry submitted its report in April 2013 confirming that 41 persons had died after consuming contaminated medicinal preparation containing spurious alcohol. The Commission recommended payment of Rs 1.5 lakh as compensation to the families of the 40 deceased although 41 people had died in the tragedy. The Commission was not inclined to pay damage to one of those dead as he was one of the illicit vendors of the spurious liquor. The state government accepted the report of the Judicial Commission, but decided not to pay compensation to the families of the victims.

## उड़ीसा HC ने NHRC के आदेश के खिलाफ सरकार की याचिका खारिज कर दी

<https://jantaserishta.com/local/odisha/orissa-hc-dismisses-govt-plea-against-nhrc-order-1949936>

उड़ीसा उच्च न्यायालय ने राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग (एनएचआरसी) के आदेश के खिलाफ हस्तक्षेप करने से इनकार कर दिया है, जहां उसने राज्य सरकार को कटक और खुर्दा के विभिन्न हिस्सों में मारे गए 40 व्यक्तियों में से प्रत्येक के परिवार को 1.5 लाख रुपये का भुगतान करने का निर्देश दिया था। जिले में जहरीली शराब का सेवन कर रहे हैं।

जहरीली शराब त्रासदी फरवरी 2012 में हुई थी। मानव अधिकार जन निगरानी समिति (उत्तर प्रदेश) के शासी बोर्ड के सदस्य रागिब अली की याचिका पर एनएचआरसी ने 11 फरवरी, 2015 को आदेश जारी किया था। लेकिन राज्य सरकार ने अगस्त 2015 में इसे हाईकोर्ट में चुनौती दी।

मंगलवार को मुख्य न्यायाधीश एस मुरलीधर और न्यायमूर्ति एम एस रमन की खंडपीठ ने याचिका को खारिज करते हुए कहा, "अदालत ने नोट किया कि अन्यथा भी आकस्मिक मृत्यु के लिए, राज्य सरकार द्वारा आमतौर पर 1,50,000 रुपये की अनुग्रह राशि का भुगतान किया जाता है। एनएचआरसी ने स्वयं नोट किया कि न्यायमूर्ति नायडू आयोग ने पीड़ितों के परिवारों को ऐसी राहत के भुगतान की सिफारिश पहले ही कर दी है। नतीजतन, अदालत हस्तक्षेप करने के लिए राजी नहीं है। ईंट भट्ठा श्रमिकों की अवैध शराब से हुई मौतों के बाद उच्च न्यायालय के एक सेवानिवृत्त न्यायाधीश जस्टिस एस नायडू को जांच आयोग नियुक्त किया गया था। इस घटना ने राज्य को झकझोर कर रख दिया और आबकारी मंत्री एयू सिंहदेव को नैतिक आधार पर इस्तीफा देना पड़ा।

जस्टिस एस नायडू जांच आयोग ने अप्रैल 2013 में अपनी रिपोर्ट सौंपी जिसमें पुष्टि की गई कि 41 लोगों की मौत जहरीली शराब युक्त दूषित औषधीय तैयारी के सेवन से हुई थी। आयोग ने 40 मृतकों के परिवारों को मुआवजे के रूप में 1.5 लाख रुपये के भुगतान की सिफारिश की थी, हालांकि 41 लोगों की मृत्यु हो गई थी। त्रासदी। आयोग मृतकों में से एक को नुकसान का भुगतान करने के लिए इच्छुक नहीं था क्योंकि वह नकली शराब के अवैध विक्रेताओं में से एक था। राज्य सरकार ने न्यायिक आयोग की रिपोर्ट को स्वीकार किया, लेकिन पीड़ितों के परिवारों को मुआवजा नहीं देने का फैसला किया।

## **Karnataka RTI activist was killed for probing MNREGA irregularities, family alleges**

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/karnataka-rti-activist-was-killed-probing-mnrega-irregularities-family-alleges-172179>

The relative of Karnataka-based RTI activist Murthy R, who was murdered in Ramanagar district in December 2022, has filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) alleging that his murder was linked to his RTI activism, and not a family dispute.

Murthy was murdered on December 22, 2022, after he was chased and assaulted with a stone in Kuruballi Doddi village in Ramanagara district. Police officials said Murthy's family members — Srinivas (50), his wife Savithamma (45) and their son Chandan alias Kariya (22) — allegedly killed Murthy over a family dispute. However, complaints raised since then have alleged he was killed for his RTI activism. The three accused were arrested by the police in Ramanagara district over the murder case.

However, Shilpa Rani, a relative of Murthy and an advocate based in Bengaluru, told TNM that Murthy was attacked twice — in July and October 2022 — over complaints raised by him in his village. "Murthy had filed police complaints on both occasions and an FIR and a counter case was registered. The police failed to protect Murthy even though he was threatened several times for raising questions about MNREGA works in his village," Shilpa Rani told TNM. "He was repeatedly asked by the same people who had attacked him to stop looking into the civil works in his village," she said.

Murthy was an RTI activist who had previously examined the details of the civil works carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA). He had filed a complaint with Ramanagara Zilla Panchayat about irregularities in the works under MNREGA in the village.

In July 2022, a standoff had ensued after Murthy's complaints to the Ramanagara Zilla Panchayat led to a confrontation in the presence of panchayat officials in his village. A complaint letter filed by Murthy accused Gopal, a gram panchayat member, of instigating the assault. A few months later, in October 2022, Murthy's house was attacked with beer bottles by the same group, FIRs accessed by TNM stated. Along with Gopal, the accused in the case included Kiran, a tractor driver, Venkatesh, Thimmesh, and Prathap, who are all residents of the village.