

Report on the visit of Shri Chaman Lal, Special Rapporteur
NHRC to Shivpuri (MP) on 25 March 2003.

I visited Shivpuri (MP) on 25 March 2003 to see a Bonded Labour Rehabilitation Project set into motion by a commendable initiative of a young energetic DM Shri Kanta Rao. I was informed about this project by Swami Agnivesh, President, Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM), New Delhi a few days back. I also spoke to Shri Bimal Julka, Commissioner, Gwalior who mentioned some additional facts which increased my curiosity to visit the project site.

Shri Kanta Rao, IAS, DM Shivpuri briefed me about the project. Some nomadic families belonging to Saharia tribe employed as bonded labourers at the stone-quarries in District Gwalior were got released through intervention of B.M.M. some time in July 2002. Four families comprising 7 members (4 male and 3 female) had expressed their desire for settlement in District Shivpuri and were accordingly rehabilitated in village Thakarpura (Shivpuri Town Ward). 11 families comprising 20 members (11 male and 9 female) chose to go to Ishagarh in District Guna. However, after finding things not to their liking in District Guna, these families migrated to KOLARAS in Districts Shivpuri and started working as casual labourers. They were contacted by the pro-active elements of District Administration and after learning about their desire to settle in Shivpuri, arrangements were made to rehabilitate them in village Banskheri. They were provided some land for homestead purposes and given financial assistance to

construct houses under the Indira Avas Yojana (IAY). Firm arrangements for providing them with sustainable means of livelihood were also initiated.

Accompanied by the DM Shivpuri, I visited village Banskheri and held an intimate interaction with the released bonded labourers. Almost all the 20 released labourers were present. The DM also arranged the presence of the District Officers of Labour, Education, Health, Revenue, Civil Supply, Women and Child Development, Mining, Rural Development and Cooperative Departments at the site for my interaction.

Shri Sidharth s/o Shri Hazari and Shri Budha s/o Bhadai, leaders of the released labourers narrated the entire sequence of their release and settlement at Banskheri after spending a short stint at Guna. The District officials explained the various aspects of the rehabilitation project worked out by the administration. The visit to the site and interaction with the labourers and District Officers revealed the following picture of rehabilitation:

1. A Self-Help Group of 11 rescued families was constituted and got registered on 20 February 2003. As these persons have been working as labourers at stone-quarries since long, their request for allotment of stone-quarries on lease was considered by the Administration and a piece of land measuring 12 hec. adjacent to near village Banskheri was allotted to them. Shri Sidharth and Shri Budha confirmed suitability of land allotted to the Group. It was learnt from them that against a daily wage of Rs. 50 per day

for a husband and wife team when they were working as labourers at Gwalior, their average earning from the work at the site allotted to the Group is now Rs. 200 per day.

2. All the 11 families have been allotted Rs. 20,000 each for construction of houses under the Indira Avas Yojana. The first instalment of Rs. 8750 has been paid to all the 11 families. 5 families have also received the second instalment of Rs. 8750 which is being released for the remaining 6 families also. The third instalment of Rs. 2500 for construction of smokeless chulah and toilets will be released after the construction is completed. They are hopeful that houses will be ready for occupation by April end. The Group has engaged a contractor by contributing Rs. 250/- per family for ensuring proper completion of a skilled-job.
3. To meet the requirement of drinking water, a Handpump for the exclusive use of these families has been installed. The labourers expressed difficulty in supply of water for construction purposes. The DM agreed to provide a small tank to be fed by a Municipal tanker. It was heartening to note that the labourers were prepared to make the fixed payment and did not insist on free supply of water for this purpose. To me, it appeared as a pleasant sign of self-esteem these families have acquired.
4. The District Administration has supplied tools worth Rs. 20,000/- to the 15 released families including 4 settled at village Thakarpura for mining operations under the Saharia Tribal Development Scheme.

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5. A temporary Anganwadi Centre has been opened at village Banskheri under the ICDS centre Seergaon. At present, arrangements have been made for providing supplementary nutrition to 40 children. Presently 27 children of these families are receiving this benefit. This was confirmed by 3-4 mothers I spoke to. The District In-charge, Women & Child Development Department confirmed the eligibility of village Banskheri for having an Anganwadi centre of its own. The DM was advised to send a proposal to the Government. After the establishment of a regular ICDS centre, coverage could be extended to pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls also.
6. Educational interest of the children of released labourers have been addressed carefully. Shri Jai Prasad of Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Gwalior informed that 17 children of these families have been admitted to the organisations/school at Faridabad. 23 children are attending the primary school at village Banskheri. It was heartening to note that drop-out rate was nil and the parents are ensuring that the children do not miss school on any day. District Administration has provided school uniform to all these children.
7. A medical camp was held at the site on 10.2.03 for the medical examination of the released labourers and their families. Free medicines were provided to 22 persons and 3 children were admitted to District Hospitals. District Administration sanctioned Rs. 1000/- for the purchase of medicines. Before this, a medical camp was arranged by the District Red Cross Society on 8.12.02.

Red Cross Society has also distributed blankets (27) polythene-sheets for making 15 Tents and food items worth Rs. 500 as an immediate interim relief to the families when they were brought to village Banskheri.

8. All the 15 families including 4 settled in village Thakarpura have been issued ration-cards and are getting wheat, sugar and kerosene oil on BPL rates. Their leaders requested for additional supply of rice at PDS rate. DM ordered that these families should be given 5 kg. rice also. The District Supply Officer announced that a Fair Price Shop has been opened for the supply of all grocery items including tea in village Banskheri. It was also announced that their names are being included in the BPL list in the on-going survey in the District.
9. Under the Centrally sponsored scheme, a released bonded labourer is entitled to receive a rehabilitatory grant of Rs. 20,000/- to be shared by the Centre and the State Government on 50:50 basis. Rs. 1000/- per labour is required to be paid immediately on release as interim subsistence allowance. Proposal for grant of Rs. 19,000/- to each family has been sent to the Government and the allotment is awaited from the Labour Commissioner, Indore.
10. All the 11 families have also been allotted agricultural land of 0.50 hec. each. The District Administration has taken pains to get land levelled and made fit for cultivation. The Group expressed apprehension about the lack of irrigational facilities. The DM assured that this aspect is being considered through a Water Harvesting Structure Scheme taken up near the site.

I visited village Thakarpura to see the settlement of four families who were the first to arrive in their District after being released at Gwalior. These families have been accommodated in the main village and they have built/renovated their houses using the rehabilitatory grant of Rs. 19,000/- each received from the Administration. They have also been provided livelihood by allotting them a 3 hec. mine near the village. However, Smt. Sheela w/o Sanathan complained that the site is not suitable for mining purposes and they are getting very little return for their labour. The DM assured to look into the matter and arrange for an alternative site, if necessary.

I spoke to 5 of the 7 released persons including Smt. Sheela. They confirmed that they are getting PDS supplies. They expressed some difficulty in the supply of drinking water. The DM could identify the cause and assured remedial action.

Settlement of 15 families of released bonded labourers in District Shivpuri offers an excellent example of the scheme of rehabilitation ordered by the Supreme Court in its order of 13 May 1994. The released labourers have not only regained their physical freedom but also been provided the means to earn their livelihood and lead a dignified life.

Chaman Lal
 (Chaman Lal) 5/14/03
 Special Rapporteur