

VIMUKTI TRUST – JEEVIKA - OKKUTA

Introduction

Vimukti Trust / Jeevika has been in existence for over a decade with the sole purpose of eradicating bonded labour in Karnataka. It has been undertaking a number of programmes and activities with that one aim.

For Vimukti Trust / Jeevika, bonded labour is intimately linked to caste system. Bonded labour in India is not just an economic issue or an issue of poverty but it has very much a social dimension; it is part of the caste system in India. Eradicating bonded labour strengthens the efforts in abolishing caste system or the fight against caste system to be effective must also involve fight against bonded labour. Most of the bonded labourers being dalits (and wherever tribals are found, tribals), working for bonded labour means working for the most marginalised section of the society in India.

VT / Jeevika combines a variety of approaches in its involvement with bonded labour. It follows a rights based approach. The Constitution of India prohibits, as a Fundamental Right, traffic in human beings, *begar* and other forms of forced labour and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act effective since 25 October 1975 contains a number of radical provisions for the elimination of bonded labour. The fundamental right of a person is violated when she / he is made to work as a bonded labourer. The law stipulates punishment of the offender and rehabilitation of the victim in such a way that the person does not relapse into further bondage.

VT / Jeevika seeks to implement the law by lobbying and advocacy on the one hand and by mobilising, conscientizing and organising bonded labourers together with landless agricultural workers. Landless agricultural workers are also involved because it is from their ranks bonded labourers emerge, by and large, and into whose ranks bonded labourers fall when released. Towards this end, a union of bonded labourers and agricultural workers is formed and registered in 1997 under the Trade Union Act. Further, as a strategy for effective community mobilisation, all the activists recruited by VT / Jeevika are from dalit communities. These activists spread out in 22 taluks of 8 districts are capacitated to form and register their own societies in the coming phase. (Similar bodies for another 17 taluks contiguous with the 22 and covering another two new districts and in other taluks in the remaining 15 districts excluding the two coastal districts of Udupi and Dakshina Kannada are being visualised.) VT, then, will become one of the members of the network along with all those societies and Jeevika, as Jeeta Vimukti Karnataka - Bandhana Mukta Jeevana, will be that network

In the initial stages in the mid 90s, extensive surveys were conducted all over Karnataka to identify bonded labour, i.e., in 48 taluks representing the different regions in Karnataka. Concrete involvement was carried out only in a few taluks, depending on the availability of financial support. VT / Jeevika has gone through the dark stage of denial of bonded labour continuously by the Karnataka Government till 2000, though initially, in 1990, its advocacy and lobbying efforts had met with some success by the

acknowledgement by the Minister concerned of the existence of bonded labour and the commitment on behalf of the Government to take action according to the law. A process was initiated to identify bonded labour. Only in 2000, the Government did make a firm resolve to identify, release and rehabilitate bonded labour wherever it exists and whenever it comes to light. The efforts at identifying, releasing and rehabilitating bonded labour from 2000 to 2004, however, reveal that those processes have taken place almost entirely where VT / Jeevika has been active, i.e., in about 25 taluks. In the rest of the 150 taluks of the state, the Government officials have not reported any bonded labour! This brings out the need to extend the efforts of VT / JEEVIKA in other parts of Karnataka, apart from consolidating its involvement so far. At the same time, the networking efforts since 1993 of VT / Jeevika with other organisations have shown that almost all the NGOs in Karnataka exhibit reluctance in taking up the issue of bonded labour. New type of organisations of dalits will be built up specifically to take up bonded labour issues.

Involvement on bonded labour in Karnataka for a little over 15 years by VT / Jeevika and its predecessor, Jeeta Vimukti Sanghatane, Anekal has made some significant gains in eradicating bonded labour. In all the taluks where VT / Jeevika has been active, the incidence of bonded labour has come down significantly. The challenge is to completely eradicate bonded labour in those areas in a matter of few years. It has kept the discourse on bonded labour alive in Karnataka. It has evolved a holistic approach to address the issue. It has promoted effective leadership among ex bonded labourers and agricultural workers to address the evil. It has shown a way of mobilising dalit youth from rural areas to become capable activists in the fight against bonded labour and related issues. The gains of the involvement must be nourished further and not allowed to fritter away.

Till the middle of 2005, most of the activities of VT / Jeevika were supported by one organisation. There were a few other organisations which have supported parts of the programme now and then. Since the withdrawal from July 2005 by the main organisation, there is an urgent need to secure financial support from other quarters.

Comprehensive Vision Statement

Building an egalitarian society in India giving witness to a life free from bondage by eradicating bonded labour and child labour systems and opposing and abolishing caste-class-patriarchal structures and unequal globalisation processes, through organisation building, conscientization, agitation, advocacy, lobbying, networking and study
in accessing constitutional guarantees and welfare remedies for the weaker sections,
in promoting self reliant and collective economic ventures,
in promoting ecological security,
in promoting holistic health,
in strengthening decentralisation efforts in governance through Panchayat Raj Institutions; in seeing that the present representative democracy works for people; and
in promoting direct democracy through alternative political processes,
in questioning superstitious beliefs and practices, in inculcating scientific and rational attitudes, in respecting and protecting cultural richness and diversity and opposing communal feelings and forces.

Thus the **Broader Goal** of Vimukti Trust / Jeevika is ‘Building an Egalitarian Society in India’ and the **Specific Goal** is ‘Eradication of Bonded Labour System in Karnataka.’ (The other clauses in the **Comprehensive Vision Statement** contain VT / Jeevika’s **Objectives and Strategies**, which are spelled out below. **Specific Activities** under each of the Objectives are also elaborated separately.)

Objectives:

1. Seeing to the implementation of the Statute on bonded labour and securing other rights that have a bearing on the prevention of bonded labour.
2. Stopping child labour through universalisation of quality primary education
3. Promoting economic self reliance
4. Bringing about gender justice and empowerment of women
5. Respecting cultural diversity including promotion of dalit cultures and opposing communal forces, questioning of superstition, adopting rational and scientific attitudes
6. Taking part in Panchayat Raj Institutions, making representative democracy work for people and working towards direct democracy
7. Promoting holistic health including conservation and promotion of knowledge of herbal medicines, promoting awareness of diseases like HIV/AIDS and promoting the interests of the elderly and the differently challenged
8. Protection of environment
9. Opposing unequal globalisation processes

Strategies

Conscientization & Training; Organisation & Unionisation; Agitation & Campaigning; Lobbying & Advocacy; Networking & Use of Media; Reflection, Study, Research & Documentation.

Main among those strategies is organisation building and unionisation. All activities will be carried out in consultation with members of the Union and under their leadership. The Union leaders will take part in all the meetings and activities of Jeevika

Activities

A number of activities are proposed under each of the above objectives taking into account also the different strategies identified above.

The Objective and Activities on Bonded and other Working Children: Since 1997, specific activities were taken up with a focus on bonded and other working children first in Anekal, then in other taluks including Malur with a view to mainstream them into formal educational system and universalize elementary education as a way to eliminate child labour and also eventually bonded labour. The activities include running residential bridge courses of one year duration for working children and having follow up activities to support the mainstreamed children in their studies; conducting educational camps to students; motivating parents to stop sending their children to work and send them to schools, mobilising public opinion and raising awareness of people against child labour, promoting networks to promote child rights and prevent child labour and so on.

Activities in Detail:

0. Registering 39 taluk level societies: 1 already registered; 16 are ready for registration
22 are prepared for registration.

1. Eradication of Bonded Labour:

- 1.1.1 Survey of BL
- 1.1.2 Submission of applications to officials
- 1.1.3 Making GP secretaries to report to DC on BL
- 1.1.4 Ongoing lobbying activities

1.2 Meetings

- 1.2.1 Village Union meetings
- 1.2.2 Union taluk level meetings
- 1.2.3 Taluk review & planning meeting at office of taluk society
- 1.2.4 State level review & planning meeting
- 1.2.5 State level interaction between all activists & taluk Union leader

1.3 Trainings

- 1.3.1 Social analysis trainings in villages to Union members
- 1.3.2 Social analysis trainings at taluk level to Union leaders
- 1.3.3 Social analysis trainings at state level to activists, Union leaders & youth

1.4 Mass Awareness

- 1.4.1 BL Day
- 1.4.2 BL System Awareness Day
- 1.4.3 Forced Labour Day

1.5 Campaigns

- 1.5.1 Minimum Wages
- 1.5.2 EGA
- 1.5.3 Right to Food
- 1.5.4 Right to Water
- 1.5.5 Right to Information

1.6 Activists

- 1.6.1 Hobli Coordinators (HC)
- 1.6.2 Taluk Coordinators (TC)
- 1.6.3 Action coordinators (AC)
- 1.6.4 Overall coordinator (OC)

2.1 Identifying Child Labour

- 2.1 Getting lists of out of school children from BEOs/schools & Identifying CL
- 2.2 Admission to Schools
- 2.3 Taking part in SDMCs
- 2.4 Running RBCs in Anekal, Malur, Shidlaghatta and in other areas
- 2.5 Follow up of the mainstreamed children
- 2.6 Conducting educational camps to students
- 2.7 Building up children's associations to promote child rights and prevent child labour
- 2.8 Motivating parents to stop sending their children to work
- 2.9 Mobilising public opinion and raising people's awareness on child labour
- 2.10 Promoting networks to promote child rights and prevent child labour

3.1 Self Help Groups

3.1.1 forming SHGs for women in families of BLs & Aws; with banks; taking loans from banks

3.1.2 Forming SHGs for men in Union

3.1.3 Trainings on A/c

3.1.4 Trainings on A/C

3.1.5 Federating at taluk & state level

3.2 Accessing poverty alleviation schemes, ration cards, certificates and other benefits

3.3 Land Issues

3.3.1 Settling land disputes through executive & judicial magistrates

3.3.2 Securing lands from SC & ST Corpn schemes

3.3.2 Acquiring common lands

3.3.3 Procuring 5 gunte land under 'namma bhumi namma thota' scheme of RDPR

3.3.4 Campaign on Land Reforms

3.3.5 Advocating natural farming Methods of Palekar

3.3.6 Advocating collective cultivation

3.5 Campaigns

3.5.1 Right to food

3.5.2 Right to water

3.5.3 Right to housing

3.5.4 Right to work

3.6. Training & Exposure

3.6.1 Skill trainings

3.6.2 Permaculture trg

3.6.3 Exposure trips to organic farms

3.7 Activists

3.7.1 WHCs (Women Hobli Coords)

3.7.2 WTCs (Women Taluk Coords)

3.7.3 WSCs – Assts (Women State Coords –Assistants)

3.7.4 WSCs (Women State Coordinators)

4.1 Reflection on issues of **gender injustice** in all meetings of Union, SHGs, activists

4.2 Taking up women's issues at village, taluk district and state levels: female infanticide, dowry, rape, drinking, equal wages

4.3 International Women's day

4.4 Trainings

4.4.1 Legal

4.4.2 Leadership

4.4.3 Skills

5.1 Awareness on social issues like BL, CL, Gender issues, superstition, illiteracy, untouchability, panchayat raj, environment, HIV/ AIDS....through **street theatre and songs**

5.2 Trainings

5.2.1 taluk level on ST

5.2.2 State level on ST

- 5.2.3 training on tamate beating
- 5.2.4 training for taluk teams in 4 batches for 5 days each
- 5.2.5 Ongoing trgs during state monthly meetings and taluk weekly meetings
- 5.3 Programmes**
- 5.3.1 Dalit cultural festival**
- 5.3.2 Jeevika Day
- 5.3.3 Simple marriag
- 5.3.4 Reflections on superstition in all meetings of Union, activists and in trainings
- 5.3.5 Promotion of Vipasana as a daily practice for all activists, union members, youth and elders
- 5.4 Publications
- 5.4.1 Booklet-Songs
- 5.4.2 Book- ST skits
- 5.4.3 Cassette-Song
- 5.4.4 CD-ST skits
- 5.6 Activists
- 5.6.1 part time troupe members
- 5.6.2 Cultural Coordinators (C)

- 6.1 Contesting elections in GPs
- 6.2 Accessing schemes of GPs
- 6.3 Trainings to GP members
- 6.4 Advocacy for direct democracy & promoting alternate political processes

- 7.1 Conducting free health camps
- 7.2 Promoting cleanliness in villages
- 7.3 Promoting herbal medicine
- 7.3.1 training to activists on herbal medicine
- 7.3.2 Workshop on herbal medicine with village practitioners
- 7.4 Awareness of HIV/AIDS
- 7.4.1 Training to activists on herbal medicines
- 7.4.2 Discussion during various during various on HIV/AIDS

- 8.1 Planting trees
- 8.2 Cultural programs
- 8.3 Promoting organic farming

- 9.1 Campaign on unequal globalisation processes
- 9.2 Seminars
- 9.3 Networking with other organisations on the issue

The Context: Bonded Labour in Karnataka

Bonded labour is a way of exploiting labour of very poor persons and that too of dalits (the untouchables) and the tribals by making use of their very vulnerable condition in life. Bonded Labour system is that form of labour wherein, people are made to work for long hours and for very little wages without the freedom to seek employment with someone else till they have cleared their debt. Mere non-payment of minimum wages cannot be equated with BL. If this were so, then a large section of unorganised labour, which is 92% of the labour force in India, would have to be considered bonded as almost all of unorganised labour does not get the stipulated minimum wages. Apart from non-payment of minimum wages, there is a section of unorganised labour force, which is characterised by unfreedom, and long hours of work.

The bonded labourers have no freedom to seek employment elsewhere till they have repaid their loans. They have to work for long hours. They must be available for work, day in and day out. They have neither weekly nor annual holidays. Often the bondages are passed on to the next generation. Bonded labour is found very much in agricultural occupations and in occupations in the unorganised sector like brick kilns, stone quarries, hotels, garages, silk industry, domestic work and so on.

According to a survey conducted by National Sample Survey of India in 1992, about 6% of the agricultural labour is bonded. According to the 2001 Census (provisional), Karnataka had a total population of 52,733,958. The total number of workers among them was 23,521,533 (44.6% of total population). Of these, the agricultural labourers were 6,209,153 (26.4% of total workers). The 6% among them would be 3,72,549! If bonded labour in other categories of work is included, then the total number of bonded labourers in Karnataka may be five lacs or more. The survey conducted by Jeevika in 1995 in 45 taluks had revealed 18,992 bonded labourers in agriculture alone. The forces of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation seem to make the life of landless agricultural workers and other unorganised workers harder and reduce more and more of them to conditions of bondage.

Organisational Forms: Jeevika – Vimukti Trust – The Okkuta

VT / Jeevika has involved itself with bonded labour in agriculture initially for strategic reasons. Originally activities on bonded labour started in Anekal in 1990 under the banner of Jeeta Vimukti Sanghatane. In 1993, Jeeta Vimukti Karnataka - JEEVIKA - Bandhana Muktha Jeevana was formed as a state level organisation. Currently, three organisations complement each other. Jeevika is an unregistered forum. The Karnataka Jeetadalu Mattu Krashikarmikara Okkuta, formed initially in 1990 and registered under The Trade Union Act on 20 May 1997, is the union of bonded labourers and agricultural workers. The Vimukti Trust, registered on 2 July 1996, under The Trust Act, was formed for legal reasons and raising funds with Jeevika as its project.

Until 2001, VT / Jeevika's operational taluks were 16 spread out in 7 districts. Since 2001, 23 additional taluks which are contiguous to the 16 – 20 in southern Karnataka and 3 in northern Karnataka and covering another 3 districts have been added where minimal activities such as identifying BL, submitting affidavits to the tahshildars and deputy commissioners and forming village-level samitis of the union are undertaken. In one taluk, there is a registered society already. In the initial 16 taluks and another 5 new taluks, totally 21, efforts are going on to register separate societies under The Karnataka Societies Registration Act. Efforts to register similar societies in another 17 taluks and then another 15 taluks in 15 new districts will be made in the coming years.

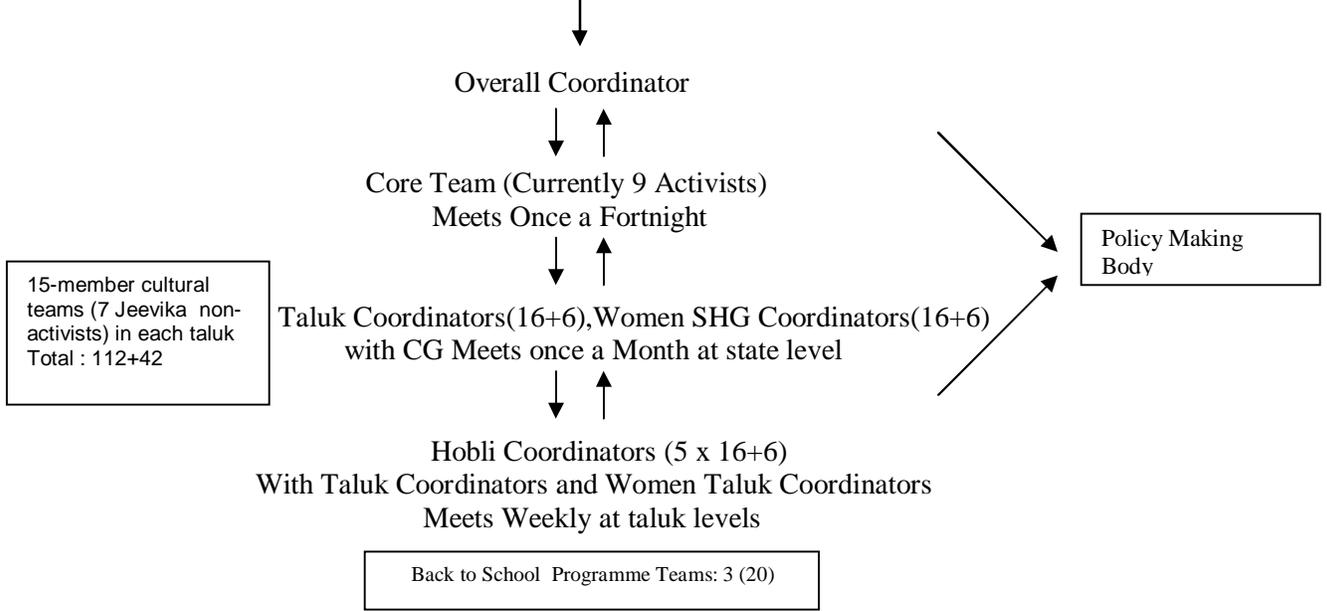
An organogramme of the three organisations is worked out below.

VIMUKTI TRUST

Registered on 02-07.1996, under the Trust Act
7 Trustees

4 Jeevika Activists (1 woman taluk Coordinator and 3 men Coordinators) and 3 non-activists

Jeeta Vimukti Karnataka - JEEVIKA-Bandhana Mukta Jeevana
A Programme of Vimukti Trust (Total Membership: 253)



Karnataka Jeetadalu Mattu Krashikarmikara Okkuta
(Registered Union under the Trade Union Act – 20 May 1997)

