

9.1 The Bonded Labour System stands abolished throughout the country with effect from 25.10.1975 with the enactment of Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. It freed unilaterally all the bonded labourers from bondage with simultaneous liquidation of their debts. It made the practice of bondage a cognizable offence punishable by law.

9.2 The Act is being implemented by the State Governments concerned. Salient features of the Act are given below:

- On commencement of this Act, the bonded labour system stood abolished and every bonded labourer stood freed and discharged free from any obligation to render bonded labour.
- Any custom, agreement or other instrument by virtue of which a person was required to render any service as bonded labour was rendered void.
- Liability to repay bonded debt was deemed to have been extinguished.
- Property of the bonded labourer was freed from mortgage etc.
- Freed bonded labourer was not to be evicted from homesteads or other residential premises which he was occupying as part of consideration for the bonded labour.
- District Magistrates have been entrusted with certain duties and responsibilities for implementing the provisions of this Act.
- Vigilance committees are required to be constituted at district and sub-divisional levels.
- Offences for contravention of provisions of the Act are punishable with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years and also with fines, which may extend to two thousand rupees.
- Powers of Judicial Magistrates are required to be conferred on Executive Magistrates for trial of offences under this Act. Offences under this Act could be tried summarily.
- Every offence under the Act is cognizable and bailable.

Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour

9.3 With a view to supplementing the efforts of the State Governments; a Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour was launched by this Ministry in May, 1978. Under the Scheme, State Governments are provided Central assistance on matching grants (50:50 basis) for the rehabilitation of bonded labour. The said Plan Scheme has been drastically modified in May 2000 to provide for 100% assistance for conducting district wise surveys for identification of bonded labour, awareness generation activities, and evaluatory studies. The Rehabilitation grant has also been raised from Rs.10,000/-per identified bonded labour to Rs.20,000/-per identified bonded labour. Further, in the case of North-Eastern States, 100% rehabilitation grant is provided in case they fail to provide their matching contribution. A sum of Rs. 8404.22 Lakh has been released under the scheme to the State Governments upto 30.09.2015 for rehabilitations of 2,82,429 bonded labourers.

9.4 Besides, the State Governments have also been advised to integrate/dovetail the Centrally

Sponsored Scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour with other ongoing poverty alleviation schemes, such as, Swaran Jayanti Gram Swa-RojgarYojana (SJGSRY), Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes, Tribal Sub-Plan etc. Accordingly, the rehabilitation package provided by the concerned State Governments for the freed bonded labourers includes the following major components:

- Allotment of house-site and agricultural land;
- Land development;
- Provision of low cost dwelling units;
- Animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, piggery etc.;
- Training for acquiring new skills; developing existing skills;
- Wage employment, enforcement of minimum wages etc.;
- Collection and processing of minor forest products;
- Supply of essential commodities under targeted public distribution system;

- Education for children; and
- Protection of civil rights.

Role of The National Human Rights Commission

9.5 The Apex Court in its Order dated 11.11.1997 in PUCL Vs. State of Tamil Nadu & Others has directed that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to be involved in the supervision of the issues relating to bonded labour. In pursuance to the above order, a Central Action Group has been constituted in the NHRC. This group, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, is holding sensitization workshop on bonded labour at State Headquarters to sensitize the District Magistrates and other functionaries dealing with identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour.

9.6 A pilot project was launched with the ILO in Tamil Nadu for the purpose of reducing vulnerability to bondage through promotion of decent work. Efforts are now being made to extend the project to the States of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Haryana.