

HIMMATGARH consists of a cluster of small houses and narrow lanes hidden behind the splendid buildings of New Delhi. Most of the women and girls of the nearly 500 families living here earn their living by making paper bags. They work at home—in dark, two room tenements crowded by a sofa, a bed, a radio, utensils, a *chulha*, pictures of gods and goddesses, and in one corner a heap of newspapers or brown paper. As soon as the women are through with one round of household chores, they sit down near the heap of paper and set to work, tearing, folding, sticking. There they sit, immersed in their work—on the stairs, round the well, in the lane, on the roof or inside a room.

Various sounds echo all around—film songs, shouts and screams, chatter and laughter. There is a handpump on top of a closed well. Someone or other is always having a bath or filling a bucket there. The lanes are cluttered with rubbish, faeces, living and dead animals. Children play amidst the fumes of *chulhas*. Houses are piled higgledy-piggledy on each other, shutting out the sky. Amid all this turmoil and tension, each woman is haunted by the everpressing need to earn a couple of rupees.

Women's Work

For centuries, paper bag manufacturing has been carried on in this colony. Many women picked up the skill in childhood. "I've been in this business ever since I can remember. My mother and grandmother also did this work." Kamla says that 25 years ago, her mother used daily to walk the couple of miles from Himmatgarh to Sadar, to fetch paper from a trader there. All day long, Kamla and her sisters would help their mother to make paper bags, and in the evening she would again go to the trader, carrying a headload of paper bags. Kamla's father died young, and her mother reared six children on her earnings from paper bag making. Kamla was only three years old when she started helping her mother with the work.

Old Ashoki says that she learnt this work after marriage, when she came here to live with her in-laws. Her parents, who live in Agra, do not do this work. She

Invisible Labour Force

—Women Paper Bag Makers In Delhi

does not know how long she has been married—perhaps 30 or 40 years. She recalls: "In my mother's house I didn't make paper bags. I used to help with the cooking and cleaning. And I used to play a lot—I remember a game we played with tamarind seeds."

Manglo's parents live in a village near Palwal. They too do not do this work. Manglo was the eldest of nine children so the burden of helping her mother with the housework fell early on her. She was married at the age of 14, and sent to her in-laws at Himmatgarh two years later. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were employed in paper bag making. Manglo took up this work after the birth of her first child.

Most of the women are illiterate but most of the girls are now sent to school. The schoolgirls also spend a few hours each day making paper bags. Nanda is in the sixth standard and Ratna in the third. Both of them spend some time every day helping their mother to make paper bags. Their mother says she does not prevent them from studying, but it is better for children to earn some pcfey than to waste their spare time doing nothing. Their brother Sanjay is in the ninth standard. He, like the other men, has never learnt to make paper bags.

Pushpadevi passed tenth standard over a year ago. She is very eager to study further but her paternal grandfather has refused permission. Pushpa's mother has always been employed in paper bag making, but Pushpa had not learnt the work. After leaving school, she

too has learnt it and now works at it an average of eight hours a day. Pushpa's two brothers, one older and one younger, are both studying. They do not make paper bags: "We don't have the time."

There are many areas in Delhi where women manufacture paper bags. This work goes on in Madipur, Mongolpuri, Patel Nagar, Karol Bagh, Ranjit Nagar, across the Yamuna and in many other colonies. Most of the women are Hindus and belong to scheduled castes. Over the last few years, the municipal authorities have forced many of these people to leave their homes and resettle elsewhere.

The traders in paper bags have spread their tentacles into all the colonies. There are a great many traders—some of them millionaires and some small-time traders who do not own shops but travel on cycles, delivering paper to the workers and paper bags to the buyers. Thus there are numerous middlemen in the trade, not all of them making, uniform profits. The women collect the paper from a nearby trader, prepare the glue themselves and deliver the finished product to the trader. They are paid at a piece rate. Since the women deal individually with different traders, the rates of payment vary, as do the working conditions.

18 Hours A Day

How do the women manage to make the paper bags and also do the housework? How do they organize their daily lives? Kamla's routine is something like this: "I get up around 5 in the morning.

When the children were small, I had to get up even earlier. I light the *chulha* and put on the water for tea. I have a bath in cold water and if wash a couple of clothes. Then I make tea and drink it, get out the flour, sieve and knead it, sweep and can the house, and go buy vegetables from a shop in the next lane. I cut and cook the vegetables. By that time, my husband is ready for breakfast so I feed him. I have three schoolgoing children—the girls go to morning school and the boy to afternoon school. I don't ask them to help with the housework because I want them to study well. At 10, I take food to the girls. Their school is very near our house. Then I eat, and wash the utensils. By 11, I sit down with the bundle of paper. Other women also start around that time. And oh yes, every day in the morning I have to prepare a pot of glue. If I have *maida*, I use it, otherwise *atta*. I mix it in water, stir in some *neela dhotha*, and put it on the fire to cook. I keep making paper bags till about 5 in the evening. I eat a little *pan supari* while I am working. When the girls come home, they help me for a while. When the bags are ready, I load them on my head and go to the trader. If the girls go with me, they calculate correctly, and we get the proper payment. I am paid on a monthly basis. I prefer that because if I were paid daily, the money would get spent daily. Then I cook rice and vegetables for the evening meal. My husband comes around 7 and we all eat. After washing the dishes, I again start making paper bags. It's near midnight by the time I get to sleep."

Like Kamla, most of the women work without a break for about 18 hours a day. Kamla's sister-in-law says that she gets up between 3 and 4 in the morning, cooks, cleans, and washes clothes. Then she works at the paper bags all day long. She has eight children, all living together in her three room house. The two oldest girls are at home all day, and help her with all the work. Her youngest daughter is only two years old, and is still breastfed. Her two older boys are both married, and one has two children. The daughter-in-law helps with the housework. In one day, the mother and

two daughters manage to make around 3,500 paper bags.

How are paper bags made? What are the skills required, and the methods used?

Considered Unskilled

First, paper has to be brought from the shop. If it is a bundle of catalogues, magazines or books, then each one has to be prised open, straightened out and torn to the required size. If newspapers are given, the soiled or damp ones have to be sorted out and discarded. Then comes the *gol* process, which means folding each paper near the centre, and sticking the edges together. After

specialization and skill.

The women have developed their own ways of speeding up the work process. One girl has a big brush. Before the *gol* process, she lays out the papers in a row, and then three or four strokes of the brush are enough to spread glue on all the edges. After this, she quickly folds each one down.

What are the women's thoughts and feelings about their work? It is significant that the women consider this work, like housework, their destiny. Thus they hardly question having to do it. One says : "I've been doing this work since childhood. I never learnt any other trade.



Little girls making paper bags

completing one bundle, comes the *gila* process. This means folding the bottom ends together in a special way, and sticking them up. After all the bags are ready, they are counted, and simultaneously those which have got stuck together are pulled apart. Then they are neatly arranged in bundles of 45 or 48 and carried in a headload to the trader. As she delivers one set of paper bags, the woman brings back bundle of paper.

Years of experience have made the women extremely dexterous at the work. Anyone can learn to make a paper bag but to make 500 in an hour is an art. Their work is unbelievably neat. Their hands move like machines, their bodies sway back and forth. It hardly seems accurate to call this labour "unskilled" since it does involve a high degree of

All of us do this work. We can do it at home, so it is all right."

Their Self View

Though they know from their own experience how strenuous the work is, they have accepted the prevalent social opinion that it is easy, trivial work. One says: "I can't do any work, I just make paper bags." 45 year old Manglo says : "It's our work. Where is the question of its being good or bad? One always likes one's own work."

Working at home has its advantages. The women can organize their work themselves, without constant supervision or bullying. 20 year old Bannodevi says : "I've been making paper bags ever since I was a child. There is no compulsion, it is not like being in service. It's up to me. Today I don't feel like it so I didn't make a single

one, tomorrow I will make 3,000.” When the women sit together, the work becomes enjoyable, but conversation slows the pace, so most of the women prefer to sit alone and work.

Though the work is considered trivial, the women do feel stronger in the knowledge that they are earners. The work is an imposed bondage, not a chosen one, yet it does bring some money into their hands. Bhagwati says: “This two pice job takes up the whole day. But by the grace of god, I am not in want. By my toil I am able to feed and clothe my children.”

Some women regret that they are not educated: “If I had studied, I wouldn’t be sitting here with old newspapers. I’d be sitting on a chair in an office. However, the girls who have studied do not see anything ahead of them except paper bag making. On the one hand, it is difficult to get a job and on the other, girls are forbidden to work outside the house: “People will talk, the community won’t allow it.” These girls feel quite discontented, because going to school and meeting people outside the community have broadened their horizons, kindled aspirations for which they can find no outlet.

Kamla is educating her daughters, against her husband’s wishes. Will they study further after school? An inarticulate desire flickers in her eyes: “Let us see what is in their fate. It will be difficult for them to study further. We do feel afraid of our community.” In another context she says: “It is only by changing that change comes. I want some girl from our area to study and complete her BA.”

Health Hazards

Old Munnidevi’s grandchildren are in school. She has lived for years in these lanes. She says that formerly, women used to bring the raw material from Sadar: “They needed the money so they had to go. Even when they were heavily pregnant, they would parry head loads all that way. Now the traders have shifted into this area so months pass without our setting foot outside these lanes.” Ashokidevi says thoughtfully it “We have spent our lives wearing out our fingers to the bone.”

What effect does this work have on the women’s health? They live with constant stress and exhaustion, thus falling prey to a host of chronic ills. Their bodies ache from constantly sitting in one position, their backs grow bent from constantly having to stoop. They suffer particularly from pain in the back, shoulders and waist, and stiffness in the joints. Their eyes ache and water from hours of strain.

The *neela thotha* has a disastrous effect on their hands. *Neela thotha* is a necessary ingredient of the glue because its poisonous quality protects the bags from being nibbled by mice. Constant contact with *neela thotha* causes the women’s skin to harden and crack. Deep cracks develop all along the fingers, become permanently discoloured, and cause itching.

The women also talked about related diseases. Kamla has developed a desire to eat mud. This is because she works in a dark room all day and is thus not able to absorb vitamin D from the sunlight. This vitamin D deficiency in turn reduces the body’s capacity to absorb calcium. The unhygienic atmosphere causes many health problems. Munnidevi has tuberculosis and spent a month in the hospital. All the women have stomach problems. Ashoki suffers from constant acidity in spite of being on a diet, Kamla is a heart patient and has regularly to take injections. Most of the people go to the nearby Girdhari Lal government hospital, and they have faith in medical treatment and drugs.

The monotony of the work dulls the mind—the same mechanical motion repeats itself in the brain. I asked Kamla whether she can think while she is making paper bags. Her flying fingers pause, and she replies: “Yes, I can. Shall I tell you what I was thinking just now? I was thinking that I must finish this work quickly, because as soon as this is done, I have to knead *atta* and *make rotis*!”

Meagre Wage, Big Profits

How much money do the women get in return for all this toil and trouble? One woman is able to make at most 3,000 paper bags in a day. Ashoki says: The rates have changed in these 30 years. I

remember the time when we were paid 40 paise per 1,000. Then it became 60 paise, Rs 1.40, Rs 2, Rs 2.40.” Last year, the women demanded and got a raise in wages. Now the rate varies from Rs 2 to Rs 3 per 1,000 paper bags, depending on the size of the bag and the kind of paper used.

The accepted rate for bags made of newspaper is Rs 2.50 per 1,000 and for bags made of brown paper Rs 2.25. The trader weighs out the paper, for example, he may give the woman 12 kilos of newspaper, from which she must make 2,000 paper bags. The women use their own glue, and the 2,000 paper bags, when completed, must weigh 12.5 kilos, that is, the glue must weigh half a kilo. The women have to pay for the ingredients and the fuel used to cook the glue. A kilo of glue costs about Rs 4 to make, so a woman spends about a rupee on glue for 1,000 paper bags, which means that her net earnings are only Rs. 1.25 per 1,000 paper bags.

The women spend nearly twice as much time on books and magazines which have to be prised open and torn, but they are paid only 25p extra per 1,000 bags made of this material. The rate for brown paper bags remains Rs 2.25, regardless of whether the bags to be made are big or small, even though the big bags take more time, and double the amount of glue.

“Some of the traders are all right but some are cheats. If the trader is a rogue, he will pretend that the bags weigh less, and will cut our wages. Once a trader told a woman that the weight was far less than it should be, so he would not pay her. She fought back, and the people around took her side, so finally he had to pay her the full wage. Usually women do not fight back. They let themselves be cheated. It is the big traders who cheat us. The small traders understand the feelings of the poor.”

A small trader in newspapers buys the paper from a big shop, and distributes it to four contracted women, who make the paper bags and are paid their wage. Then the small trader goes from shop to shop, selling the bags. He says: “It takes two days to make about

11,000 bags, then it takes me two, days to sell them. The buyers prefer to buy from whoever can sell at a slightly cheaper rate." The bags sell for about Rs 40 per 1,000, of which the woman labourer gets about Rs 1.50, that is, about 3.75 percent.

The brown paper is manufactured outside Delhi, for example at the Star paper mills, Saharanpur. It is brought into Delhi by the wholesale merchants at Chawri Bazar, who then sell it to the small traders. These bags cost about Rs 36 per 1,000. One trader says that he makes a profit of Rs 5 to 10 on every Rs 100 worth of bags that he sells. If four or five women work for him, he makes an average profit of Rs 15 to 20 each day. The labourer earns much less than this.

What Men Do

The middlemen are all men and the labourers all women. Some of the small traders' wives also work at making paper bags. The men, however, are ashamed to do this work. One old woman explains: "Some boys used to do this work, but now none of them do it. If a boy sits down, the men laugh at him, saying: 'You're a man and you do this dirty work!' But if a girl does not learn the work, she is criticized. This work is considered suitable for women. Women should stay at home, but men should go out and earn. The men object to our going out to work. They say: 'Why do you need to go out? If you go and work outside, people will say that I am living on my wife's earnings.'"

The men of this colony do a variety of jobs. Some sell vegetables, fruit, gram, radishes, some ply rickshaws or scooters. They earn an average of Rs 4 to 5 a day. Lakshmi's husband makes sieves in a workshop and can earn up to Rs 15 a day. Lakshmi has also picked up the craft, and wonders whether it would be possible for the other women to learn it too so that they could earn more for the same amount of labour. So far, sieve making has been exclusively men's work.

The boys study but if they do not do well in studies, the parents try to teach them a trade. Very few children do well at school. The parents are anxious for them to study but the teachers are careless

and there is no one to help the children at home. The home atmosphere is not conducive to study. A mother of five says: "We have one room, which is enough for us", but when speaking of her children's lack of prowess at school, she says: "It is a matter of fate. Those children who are destined to study, do manage to study." The temptation is strong to set girls to paper bag making and to put boys into a trade. All these factors contribute to the high drop out rate for children, especially for girls.

Their Family Life

Child marriage was formerly common. Marriages now take place when the children are between the ages of 15 and 20. Marriages are arranged by the parents and the community. Dowry is rampant: "15 or 20,000 is commonly demanded. You have to pay it by taking a loan or anyhow." Dowry items include utensils, furniture, jewellery, a sofa set, even a television set. A feast is given and a large *baraat* comes for the wedding. Formerly, women were not allowed to join the *baraat* but now urban women do join it.

The women fondly recall their parents' homes, and at festival times, they try to meet their parents, brothers and sisters. They are unable to write letters. Manglo says: "My mother thinks of me and worries about whether I am happy or not. I long to be able to look after her. She has my brother and sister-in-law with her, but she doesn't have her daughter." Omvati was brought up in a village. When she came to Delhi, she felt suffocated in its closed rooms and narrow lanes, but now she has grown used to it.

Some of the women use contraceptives. Lakshmi swallows a pill each day. She has not had a tubectomy even though she has two sons. She says: "I want a daughter. The boys need a sister to tie the *rakhi* and a girl is always her mother's child. I don't want more than three children. I have seen my mother's and my mother-in-law's condition. There is no happiness to be got from producing half a dozen children." Children are usually born in the hospital. There is a midwife in the colony but she charges at least Rs 60 for a delivery.

There are quite a few unemployed men in the colony. Though they do not earn anything, they continue to spend money. Lakshmi says: "My father used to drink a lot. Sometimes he'd do a whitewashing job or sell some vegetables. We were four brothers and two sisters. I have been making paper bags ever since I was a child. When I was small, my fingers worked faster. That is how it is, usually. After marriage, one's pace slows. Perhaps this is because the burden of housework falls on one's head."

Bannodevi says that she was married at the age of 15 but her husband did not come to fetch her so she still lives with her parents. Old Ashoki says that her husband never earned anything. He was sickly and used to drink a lot. Ashoki used to vend vegetables and radishes on the roadside. She also made paper bags. She brought up five children on her own daily earnings. Now her eldest son sells radishes and Ashoki usually stays home, making paper bags.

Lakshmi says: "My husband is all right. His only fault is that he drinks every day. When he is drunk, a man loses himself, so even if violent, it is not his fault, is it? Most of the men in this neighbourhood have the drinking habit, and they often take the boys along too. One man can easily spend about Rs 10 on drink in one evening. Some men throw away all their earnings on drink. And what pays for the household expenditure? The 'dirty' paper bag earnings, of course!"

Bhagwati says that her husband earns but does not contribute any money to the household budget. "He is a miser, he keeps his money to himself. He has a habit of flying into a temper and hitting out. He stays out all day. My children and I keep the house going."

Very few women go to work outside the house. Even if a woman is the sole earner in the family, she is not supposed to go out and work. The women themselves have learnt to fear the idea of working outside. They do not have the courage to move around by themselves. Bhagwati exclaims: "Oh god, how can I go out on my own? When I

get into a bus my heart starts thumping like mad.” She says with pride that her 15 year old daughter never sets foot outside the house: “She doesn’t like to go out, we also think it is best this way. These days one can’t trust anyone. If a girl goes out, anything can happen to her.”

When they get an opportunity, some of the women do go for an outing. Kamla says that her husband sent her alone on a bus, so that she could learn to be somewhat independent. Now, at festival times, she travels on her own in a special bus and goes to far off places. She also makes friends with other women on the bus. Manglo is also able to travel alone. “What is there to do—you just buy a ticket and sit down. I have never felt scared.” She has been to Hardwar, Vrindavan, Rishikesh, Lakshman jhoola, Kaila, Vaishnodevi.

All the women are religious minded. They try to visit the temple, but if they are unable to do so, they light a *diya* before the idol at home. Manglo does not go to the temple; if she does, it is just for the entertainment. “But I do believe in god. Religion means one should have faith, keep the soul pure, speak kindly and live in peace.” When Kamla meets two old women on the street, she says: “I fall at your feet.” They are not related to her, but they are older than she is, so they bless her: “May you live long, daughter.”

How Can We Protest ?

The women are conscious of their poverty but even if they do wish to protest, how are they to do it? Kamla says: “Generations of us have been making paper bags. Those for whom we make the bags have become millionaires, but we remain where we were.” Omvati says : “We are poor, that is why the teachers don’t bother to take pains with our children at school. In the hospital, the doctors don’t bother about us. The big *babus* go in ahead of us, we keep sitting there all day, and that means losing a day’s wages. And during the emergency, they threw us around here and there. My mother had lived here all her life. They suddenly made her homeless and sent her off to Ranjit

Nagar.”

Manglo says a government man came to her sister-in-law’s house to see whether they were poor enough to qualify for their children to be exempted from payment of school fees. He started demanding Rs 10. The sister-in-law got frightened and called Manglo: “I asked his name and designation. He got scared and started begging pardon. The government helps us a lot, but wherever you look, there is some trickery going on. These officers think we are weak so they are always ready to suck our blood.”

Old Ashokidevi feels : “No one will come from outside to remove poverty. If we poor people do something about it, then poverty can be removed.”

The Work Of SEWA

Over the last two years, Sewa (self employed women’s association) has been working amongst these women. This organization has 15 years of experience organizing women in Ahmedabad. (See **Manushi** No. 8) The Delhi branch was started three years ago. The organizer in Delhi is Qamarunissa whom the women in Himmatgarh call “didi.”

Sewa conducted a survey which showed that the women were being paid meagre wages and could gain from organization. Qamarunissa says that Sewa has had three main aims while working in this area—to train the women and make them more skilled, to improve the quality of work, and to raise the wage rate. After much discussion, three Himmatgarh women—Manglo, Kamla

and Bimla—agreed to work as Sewa activists or “mohalla workers” in the area. It was explained to them that Sewa is a women’s organization in which women work for the benefit of women. They were given some training and they began to conduct discussions among the women regarding their problems, particularly their work-related problems.

To upgrade the women’s level, a master craftsman was found to train them in new techniques. However, only about 15 women came, because the women did want to lose their wages while undergoing the training. The master craftsman was also not too pleased with the idea. He remarked : If women start making all kinds of paper bags, what will become of the men ?” Qamarunissa explains that there are several workshops manufacturing paper bags. Most of them employ children and pay them extremely low wages. Some of the work, like cutting of the paper, is done by machines. Factory laws are not implemented even in these workshops, let alone amongst the women working at home.

Sewa encourages the women save money. A women’s savings fund has been started, in which the women can deposit the money they save. Over a 100 women have opened savings accounts. This is the first time they have tried to save money. Sewa also helps the women to take out insurance policies. Sewa has made attempts to help the women with the supply of glue. It is possible to buy better glue wholesale at Rs 3 a kilo, thus



-Deepti

saving money and effort. Sewa is also exploring possible alternative ways of buying raw material and of selling paper bags. "Perhaps we will not succeed in this. We are not prepared to engage in any fraud, and the market runs by fraud. We are no 'middlemen' after all!"

Sewa has tried to organize literacy classes for the women but this has proved difficult because the women have not a free moment. Even if they do sit down to learn, they have a score of tasks on their minds so they are unable to concentrate. About 15 girls are learning tailoring. They will be able to stitch clothes for themselves and their families, and if they stitch for the neighbours, they can earn something as well. There are also plans to start teaching embroidery.

New Struggles

Sewa has held many discussions with the women regarding the rising prices and the low wages. The women have thought a great deal on these issues. In September 1981, about a 100 women called a meeting round the well. It was decided that the rates for all kinds of paper bags should be raised. A couple more meetings were held and the women prepared a new rate list. Didi got the new

list cyclostyled in pamphlet form. Most of the women in the area had agreed, so they put their thumb impressions to the pamphlet. Each one of them was given a pamphlet which she then showed to her trader, with the demand for payment according to the new rates.

The traders flatly refused to raise the rates so the women refused to work at the old rates. A strike was in motion. The traders thought the women would come back humbled, as soon as they needed money, but the women had decided not to work at the old rates, whatever happened. The traders began to get alarmed, and called several meetings of their union. The women did not go to the traders. Some took loans to survive, others spent their savings. Sewa helped some women. Hardly 10 percent of the women agreed to work at the old rates. A month passed. Finally, the traders agreed to the wage hike, though at slightly lower rates than the women had demanded. The women accepted the offer and work was resumed.

Kamla narrates : "Sewa gave us courage. Many sisters and their families suffered a lot during that period. Every day, I used to go from house to house, talking, explaining. Some sisters, who

were suffering, cursed and abused us. We learnt and heard a lot, we discussed and understood. We said to the traders : 'Why don't you also call a meeting and take a decision, as we have done?' When we finally won, all our sisters were overjoyed. Our enthusiasm and courage increased."

The wage rise in Himmatgarh led to a wage rise in all the other paper bag making areas of Delhi. This happened after women in other colonies heard about the rise and demanded it from their traders, while some traders did raise the wage on their own. Sewa has also started work in Mongolpuri. One problem they face while trying to expand their area of work is finding capable and dedicated activists.

The success of their struggle last year has boosted the courage and self confidence of the Himmatgarh women. Sewa has contributed to this burgeoning self confidence. The women's confidence in Sewa has also increased but they do not feel dependent on Sewa. Hopefully, the organization will grow from strength to strength, and the women will also gain in self reliance and independence. □

(translated from Hindi)

Cheating Women Out Of Jobs

IN 1976, CCL and BCCL, two major collieries in Dakra, introduced a voluntary retirement scheme for female workers only. Under this scheme, a woman of any age could retire voluntarily and nominate a male relative in her place. She could not, of course, nominate a woman relative. Women are employed as loaders and quarry workers. The management wanted to get rid of women workers. In 1978, the scheme was extended to male workers between the ages of 47 and 57.

The mines have displaced local tribals from their land, but very few of them have been given employment in the mines. The few tribal women who did have jobs in the mines were often tricked into marrying outsiders who then took

over their jobs under the retirement scheme. These men deceived the women, promising to look after them, but deserted them immediately after getting the jobs. Some of the marriages were fake affairs. Older women were made into "mothers-in-law", that is non-tribal men "married" their daughters, and then were nominated by them to take over their jobs. Of the money given to the women who retired, a major portion was consumed by officers and intermediaries, so that only a tiny *fraction* reached the women.

In 1980, the villagers agitated over the lands that had been usurped by the mine owners, and demanded jobs as compensation. The CCL declared that no jobs were available, as they had surplus

labour. I then helped the villagers to file a public interest litigation, petitioning that since jobs are being bought from tribals by non-tribals, with the connivance of the management, jobs held by tribals should be made hereditary. The supreme court stayed the scheme, and the case is still pending.

The scheme has had the most disastrous effects on women. Even though it has been stayed by the court, other pernicious variations are in operation. One of these is the scheme whereby a worker who falls seriously ill can nominate someone to take his or her place. The management encourages women to do this. The medical board is advised to issue a certificate of unfitness to any woman who declares that she is unfit for work. Most of these women are pressurized by their husbands who "sell" the women's jobs for paltry sums, often rendering the women destitute.

—as related by Ramanika Glipta