

'The Brick Factory'

The hidden crime of urbanisation

This research was conducted during a research trip to Karnataka, India in January 2017. Through my observations and speaking to local people, I was able to study the impact urbanisation has on bonded labour in small, rural villages.

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INTRODUCTION

During my trip to Karnataka, I was able to observe the local culture in a number of small, rural villages. During a tour of a nearby village, Silvepura, I was given the opportunity to visit one of the brick factories. I saw a number of small, brick huts which housed several families. They were living in very poor conditions, with basic amenities. Our local tour guide explained that there were bonded labourers, who were working at the brick factory until their debt was paid off. These were families who had voluntarily been transferred from another state and brought here to work. They become enslaved until their debt to the site manager was paid off.

After visiting the brick factory, I conducted some online-research about the current law on bonded labour in India. I was shocked to find that it was strictly outlawed, yet the brick factory I visited was in open sight to anyone passing by. I then began searching for charities that were working towards removing labourers from these sites, and found several across India. However, without solving the underlying issues which allows bonded labour to survive, it will continue to exist.

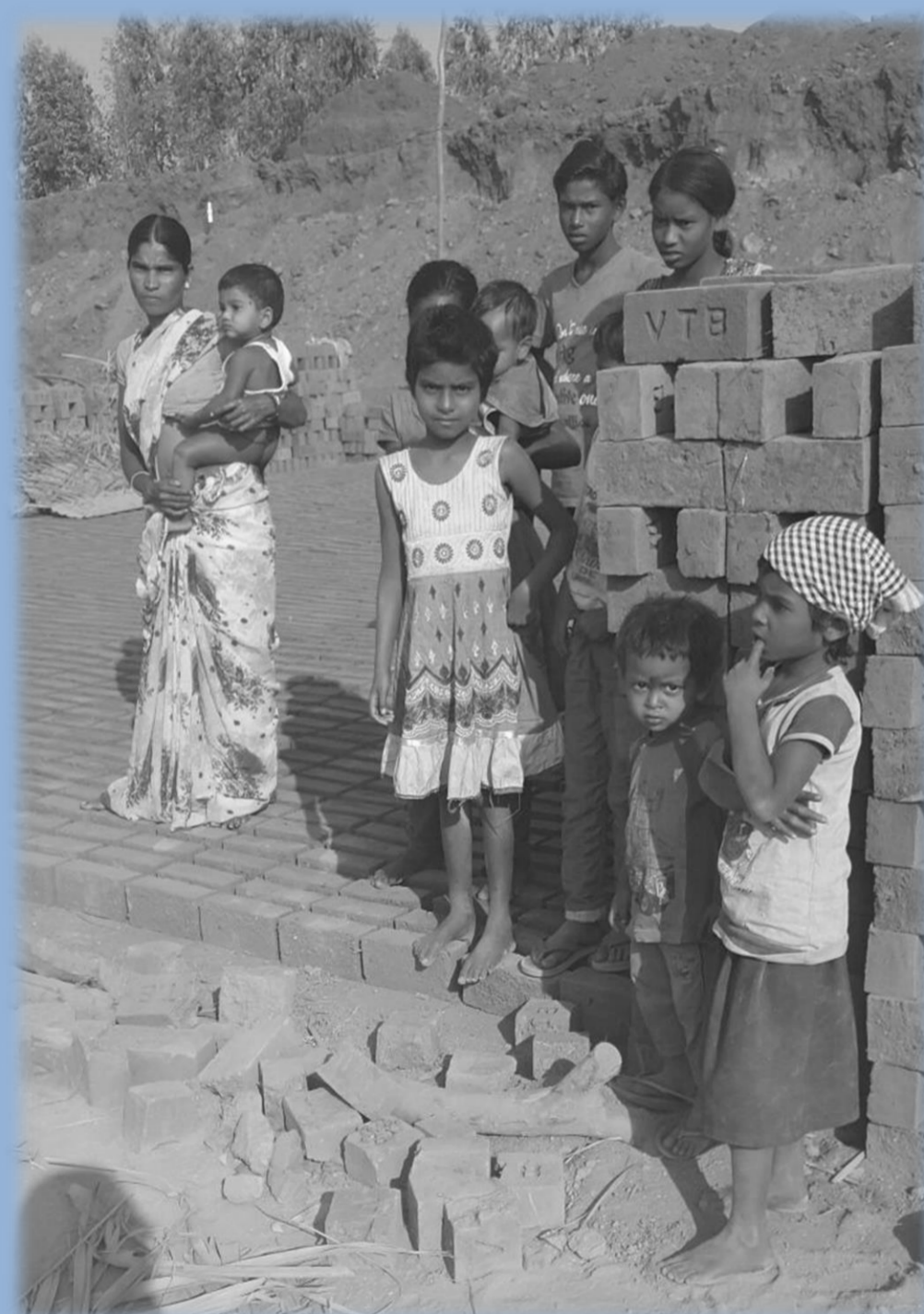
BONDED LABOUR

BONDED LABOUR is a form of forced labour due to an individual owing a debt or other obligation. The most common method used to entice workers is by offering those who are desperate for work an advance payment, which will then be repaid through their services. Paying off this debt is virtually impossible, through extremely low wages and extortionate interest rates on the debt. Workers who are illiterate are sanctioned further by corrupt accountants, which can trap families for generations on a false debt. When they become enslaved, they forfeit a number of their basic human rights, such as their right to liberty. Often, they are forced to live on site and are not permitted to leave the factory.



Entire families become enslaved by the debt
Brick Factory – Silvepura 2017

THE COST OF URBANISATION



Children forced to work instead of study
Brick Factory – Silvepura 2017

THE BONDED LABOUR ACT outlawed bonded labour in 1976, yet four decades later it is still a major human rights issue that India has not yet extinguished. India is a developing country, which comes at a cost. Big cities such as Bangalore are developing at rapid rates and this has caused a change of work in rural areas. Farming and agriculture are slowly dying out and there is a demand for hard materials, such as bricks. Cheap labour is required to keep the developments moving. As a result of this, officials turn a blind eye to bonded labour for the sake of the growing city.

The use of bribery in regard to the police officers and local politicians prevents the abolishment of bonded labour. According to the Global Corruption Barometer, corruption in India is double that of the global average. Furthermore, Indian political institutions were rated 4.4 out of 5 on a level of corruption. With this amount of corruption, it is much harder to end bonded labour.

FIGHTING FOR LABOURERS

TRANSPARENCY AND INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION INDIA (IJMI) are just two examples of organisations who are fighting to end bonded labour through a number of initiatives. They receive information by working closely with local, vulnerable people and collaborate with the relevant forces to retrieve the victims from the worksite. They have built a working relationship with police units such as the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) and State Government officials to prevent individuals becoming enslaved, and also locating the managers of these sites. Between 1999 and 2005, IJMI has helped rescue over 10,000 bonded labourers across the country. Transparency are tackling the issue of corruption, by holding governments and companies to account and exposing corrupt deals.



Labourers' home located in the Brick Factory
Brick Factory – Silvepura 2017

References:

<http://www.ijmindia.org/bonded-labour>
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Corruption-rate-in-India-is-double-of-global-average/articleshow/20988518.cms>
<http://www.transparency.org/impact/>

Pictures: Patience Nonyance – Oxford Brookes Student