

LETTER

## **FREE AT LAST**

Thirteen dalit families comprising 32 bonded labourers were rescued recently from a brick kiln by officials in Tiruvallur district. All of them hailing from Kothamangalam village in Villupuram district had been made to work in the brick kiln because they were unable to repay their debts.

However, their remuneration fell far short of the standards required and neither were they provided basic amenities. This flagrant violation of human rights occurred in Tirunin-dravur, not far away from Chennai.

Sathiaraj, a 16-year-old boy who was also rescued recounted his experience : “We were working there since 2007... I was a daily wage labourer in my village. My family had taken several loans amounting to Rs 15, 000. Since we could not repay them we were asked to work in the kiln. We had to work for at least 15-18 hours a day, but were only paid Rs 60 a week. We were told that our actual wage was higher, but most of it was deducted to repay our debts”. The boy said the workers were not allowed to leave the premises, and in case of dire necessity, one member of a family alone would be allowed to go, with the rest remaining as surety to ensure that he or she returned.

Their fortunes, however, took a turn for the better when one of the labourers escaped and lodged a complaint with the district collector. “One labourer, Asaimani, came to my office on Tuesday and submitted a petition describing the conditions under which they were employed at a company, Rasi Brick Works, and requested us to rescue the others”, said Tiruvallur collector T P Rajesh. Mr Rajesh immediately directed a team of policemen and a revenue divisional officer to rescue these people.

P C Balasubramaniam, the revenue divisional officer (RDO) who witnessed their living conditions first hand, said they lacked basic amenities. The company had not even provided them with proper drinking water or toilet facilities. The wages provided to them were inadequate to make ends meet. Also, the labourers were not allowed to leave the premises and were kept under strict guard.

A Kathir, executive director of *Evidence*, a non-governmental organisation, said the labourers were transported back to their villages by the government. They were first taken to the district collectorate office, where they were given a sum of Rs 1, 000 each as compensation amount. They will later receive another sum of Rs 20, 000 from the government. They were issued release certificates by the RDO. Shortly thereafter, they were transported back to their village.

**R Vasundara, Chennai**

## **ARUNDATHI ROY AND GANDHIJI**

Should Arundathi Roy be prosecuted for her long seditious piece in *Outlook* actually campaigning for disaffection against the Indian state which was voted into power by people exercising their franchise which is the untrammelled free speech under Article 19 of the Constitution?

When she accepted the invitation by the Maoists to visit the areas under their control, she will be committing offences of sorts. They are not capital but if proceeded against can plague one's patience, as it did Binayak and Ajay. The latter got off very lightly but not Binayak because he is attending to their healing the tribes and therefore strengthening the Maoist onslaught. So he is held on short leash until the end of the trial of all.

Not all the global campaigning for him led to this release. Yet human rights activists are apprehensive of her arrest and the email on this reader's computer says that there is a flurry of activity to prevent her detention.

Fortunately Mrs Gandhi anticipating such bad time brought forth certain Amendments to Constitution. One such Amendment is a Chapter on Fundamental Duties and all the Duties are compressed in Article 51. Clause (b) of that Article reads "to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle." Arundathi Roy was speaking out against the injustices and deprivations which were brought about by unconstitutional governance in those. Her article never said anything different from what Gandhiji said before Judge Broomfield. And it may be quoted as precedent :

"Section 124 A under which I am happily charged, is perhaps prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen. Affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law. If one has no affection for a person or system one should be free to give the fullest disaffection, so long as he does not contemplate, promote or incite to violence." Arundathi freely expressed her disaffection to the Home Minister's way of carrying on the war against the people. She pointed in that long piece how he has been violating the two crucial fundamental obligations viz. "The ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve common good. How you have been violating clause viz, that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and of means of production to the common detriment;" pointing out to the Government that they are functioning unconstitutionally. The accusation is government ceased to be functioning like the government established by the law and the constitution and Arundathi sent a timely warning and that cannot be sedition. Directive principles are politically enforceable and such enforcement cannot be concerned illegitimate.

**K G Kannabiran**, Hyderabad