The phenomenon of bonded labour involves the question of the violation of human rights of the vast bulk of the citizens in the democratic India. Whereas, the identification and release of the bonded labourers from the world of fear and acute helplessness are the first steps in the direction of restoration of their human rights, their meaningful rehabilitation is the real heart of the matter. In the whole process of the identification, release and rehabilitation, the last step i.e. rehabilitation is the most difficult, for most of the bonded labourers work in an extremely restrictive labour market because of their immobility, poor job opportunities and highly localised debtor-creditor relationships. They are forced to accept exploitative bonds. Merely legal release will only lead them to a world of uncertain freedom which the poor labourers can hardly face. The pangs of hunger would soon drive them back into the clutches of the exploitors. Thus freedom can be meaningful only when this uncertainty is removed through some productive and income-generating schemes. For this reason both the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act and the Rules framed thereunder make provision for the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. Section 11 enjoins the District Magistrates to promote the economic and social welfare of the bonded labourers. Section 14 requires the 'Vigilance Committees' to ensure the 'right to work' and subsequent bank credit for the bonded labourers.
In fact rehabilitation requires the initiation of a series of measures to discharge the debt obligations of the bonded labourers, to increase their income and to help them to build a viable economic structure to prevent their relapse into bondage. A number of formal and informal programmes have been initiated by the administration as well as the voluntary organisations for the positive rehabilitation of the bonded labour. Through the concept of 'judicial-activism', the judiciary is also participating in the process of rehabilitation of the released bonded labourers.

1.00 Rehabilitation Programme

The rehabilitation of the released bonded labourers is a follow-up measure under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act. This is an enormous and important process. It has been engaging the constant attention of the Centre and State Governments ever since the enactment of the Act. The urgency and complexity of the process are clearly reflected in the reply of the Labour Minister to the debate on the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Bill, in Lok Sabha. He observed, "Socio-economic legislation is bound to be reduced to a dead letter, if appropriate follow-up steps are not taken on the economic and social fronts." The minister recognised the real challenges before the planners and administrators, for the bonded labourers are used to a world of servitude and are ignorant of their rights. Sometimes they may not even
like to undergo the strenuous process of economic rehabilitation. It is against this background that the Ministry of Labour has been constantly urging the State Governments to undertake periodic surveys to identify the bonded labourers in their respective states. As the responsibility for the implementation of the Act is on the State Governments, so they have been directed to frame and implement the schemes for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. Upto 31st March, 1986 out of 2,05,923 identified and released bonded labourers 1,60,268 have been rehabilitated.¹

During the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) a total number of 53,530 bonded labourers were identified and 81,142 bonded labourers were rehabilitated.² To accelerate the pace of rehabilitation of the bonded labourers the State Governments had been allowed to delegate the power of sanction of rehabilitation scheme/o District Collector/Divisional Commissioner by setting up Screening Committees at the district level. Upto 31st March, 1990 out of 2,45,636 bonded labourers identified 2,18,028 were rehabilitated by the concerned State Governments, as is indicated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Bonded Labourers Rehabilitated</th>
<th>Not available for Rehabilitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>24269</td>
<td>9685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bihar</td>
<td>11358</td>
<td>1107</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ Indian Labour Journal, August 1986, p.1113.  
During 1990-91, 2,679 bonded labourers were rehabilitated. The details of the bonded labourers rehabilitated upto 31st March 1991 are given below:

Table-B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of bonded labourers rehabilitated</th>
<th>Balance Bonded Labourers rehabilitated</th>
<th>NOT available for Rehabilitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>2. Bihar</td>
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<td>6,430</td>
<td>8,611*</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
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<td>909</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>82**</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
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<td>98</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
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<td>Gujarat</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>523***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>2,22,935</td>
<td>18,088</td>
<td>14,585</td>
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</table>


* 893 bonded labourers have repatriated to their home states and 16 bonded labourers have died.

** The Government of Maharashtra has stated that 82 bonded labourers do not require rehabilitation assistance.

*** The break-up of 523 bonded labourers as reported by Haryana state is as follows - 124 Bls. have left of their own, 96 are not willing to go from Haryana state, 2 Bls. died of natural death and 321 Bls. have been sent to their home states, viz., Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa and Maharashtra, 1 Bl. is still employed in the office of the Secretary, Red Cross, Gurgaon.

During the year 1991-92, 1824 bonded labourers were rehabilitated. According to the latest report received from all State Governments 2,50,286 bonded labourers were identified up to 31st March 1992, out of which 2,23,108 had been rehabilitated. For the financial year 1992-93 Ministry of

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 1284.
Labour in consultation with the State Governments has fixed a tentative target of rehabilitation of 2,243 bonded labourers in respect of eight states viz., Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

2.00 Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour

Initially the entire responsibility for the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers was on the State Governments. Thus this process was largely dependent on the initiative of the District Magistrates. But the District Magistrates have varied duties to perform. They can hardly spare time for the complex process of identification, release and rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. Although some District Magistrates with the help of local officials did appreciable work and developed progressive schemes for rehabilitation, on the whole the implementation of the Act was dismal and slow.

After recognising the limitations of the various ongoing state schemes, the Central Ministry of Labour, in 1970, sponsored a scheme for the rehabilitation of the freed bonded-labourers. This scheme was subsequently approved by the Planning Commission. The object of having a Centrally Sponsored Scheme was to give a matching grant to the State Governments to provide seed capital to the beneficiaries. The existing Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour provides for a total subsidy of Rs. 6250 per

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6. Ibid., p.1285.
released bonded labourer, out of which 500 is paid immediately on release for consumption purposes. Fifty percent of this is given as central assistance and the remaining fifty percent is met by the concerned State Governments. The Ministry of Labour has also sent all State Governments the guidelines for the formulation of specific schemes on a matching grant basis. These guidelines have been revised from time to time in order to make the rehabilitation programme more effective.

Recently, the Central Government issued comprehensive guidelines to the States for preparing village level schemes for the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. These guidelines stress the need for the constitution of special vigilance committees to provide for the economic and social rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. To introduce an element of democratic decentralisation, the States have been asked to link self-employment programmes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme with area development plans to be formulated by elected institutions. These guidelines suggest the imposition of a ban on the use of labour-displacing mechanisation in agriculture, like the use of combine harvesters, and stress the need for organising the rural labour.  

It is seen that a large number of bonded labourers are still to be rehabilitated. To give a concrete shape to the pious hope of rehabilitation of all released bonded

---

labourers, the Ministry of Labour launched a new plan scheme, "Involvement of Voluntary Agencies in the Identification and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers" during the Seventh Five Year Plan, as stipulated in the 20-Point Programme. This scheme came into operation on 30.10.1987. The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was made responsible for its implementation.

3.00 Plan Outlay for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers

Keeping in view the importance of the elimination of debt-bondage, and the rehabilitation of bonded labourers, the planners have made special outlay for this purpose. Table-C contains the details of money released to the States upto March 1990 for the above purpose.

The details of Seventh Five Year Plan allocation, expenditure and approved outlay for 1990-91 for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers are given in Table-D.

Upto March, 1992 an amount of Rs 3517.35 lakh was released under this scheme as the central share. An outlay of Rs 10.00 crore has been provided for "The Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour" in the Eighth Five Year Plan(1992-97). An amount of Rs 190.00 lakh in the Central Sector has been allocated in the Budget estimates for the Annual Plan 1992-93.

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* See next page.
**See next page.
9 Ibid.
Table-C
Statement showing the amount of money released to various State Governments for the
Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of State</th>
<th>1978-79</th>
<th>79-80</th>
<th>80-81</th>
<th>81-82</th>
<th>82-83</th>
<th>83-84</th>
<th>84-85</th>
<th>85-86</th>
<th>86-87</th>
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<td>141.07</td>
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Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Labour, 1989-90, Vol.1, p.82
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of the Scheme</th>
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<th>1987-88</th>
<th>1988-89</th>
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<th>Plan Outlay</th>
<th>Budget Estimate</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
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<th>Budget Estimate</th>
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<td>160</td>
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</table>

In the Seventh Five Year Plan ₹ 100.00 lakh was earmarked for the scheme for the Involvement of Voluntary Agencies, out of which ₹ 10,000 has been released towards managerial subsidy as the central share in respect of four voluntary agencies identified by the State Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra at the rate of ₹ 2,500 per agency. An outlay of ₹ 10.00 lakh has been earmarked for the annual plan 1992-93 for this scheme. An outlay of ₹ 1.00 crore has been provided for this scheme in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97).  

The State Governments have to send utilisation certificates in respect of the money released under 'The Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour'. Submission of utilisation certificates is a condition for the release of more money from central funds. Time and again State Governments have represented that the quantum of rehabilitation assistance is not sufficient for formulating any worthwhile schemes for rehabilitation and pleaded for the enhancement of the assistance limit. The Expert Working Group appointed by the Planning Commission during the Sixth Plan to recommend measures for the alleviation of poverty, also recommended the enhancement of outlay under the rehabilitation scheme. The Group suggested that the funds under different plan schemes for the weaker sections should be pooled and integrated with the Centrally Sponsored Scheme to give a new shape to the scheme for rehabilitation.

10. Ibid.
4.00 Guidelines for the Formulation of Rehabilitation Schemes

Keeping in view the recommendations of the Expert Working Group, demands of the State Governments and the revised 20-Point Programme, the Labour Ministry circulated a Blue Print on Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in April, 1982. This Blue-Print contained detailed guidelines for bringing about integration between the schemes for development and employment generation by different ministries of the Government of India, ongoing schemes of different State Governments and 'The Centrally sponsored Scheme'. The object of such integration is to extend to the bonded labourers the benefits available under different anti-poverty programmes, so that their rehabilitation becomes meaningful. The rehabilitation scheme got a new fillip with the further revision of the 20-Point Programme in 1986. On the basis of the guidelines issued by the Central Labour Ministry from time to time the rehabilitation programme can be chalked out as follows.

4.10 Purposes of Rehabilitation

The purpose of the rehabilitation programme is to make the released bonded labourers economically viable and respectful citizens of the nation. The guidelines issued by the Labour Ministry aim not merely at the physical or economic rehabilitation of the bonded labour but at their psychological rehabilitation also. These two aspects of the rehabilitation are not independent of each other but are closely
inter-related. Sometimes the physical rehabilitation may itself lead to psychological rehabilitation, whereas in some cases psychological rehabilitation may be sought before the physical rehabilitation in order to wipe out pervasive mental depression of the bonded labourers arising out of bondage. Thus, the guidelines stress that these two aspects of the rehabilitation should always be taken together. Whereas economic rehabilitation aims at making the freed bonded labourers self-dependent by providing them with some assets and skills, the psychological rehabilitation assures them that they are human beings and entitled to the dignity and worth of humans. The debt is not their destiny any longer. They are assimilated in the modern civilisation and familiarised with the latest trends in development. All these steps not only protect the bonded labourers from the eager clutches of the moneylenders, but also wrench them out from the pernicious influence of the moneylenders. The guidelines issued by the Labour Ministry mention four main categories of schemes, i.e. land based schemes, non-land based schemes, skill craft based schemes and other schemes. Out of these categories the State Governments have to formulate the schemes for the released bonded labourers. A detailed analysis of these schemes is given below.

4.20 Land Based Schemes

This group of rehabilitation schemes aims at the permanent settlement of the bonded labourers. These schemes
help to develop a sense of ownership and belonging among the destitute labourers. The encouragement of such sentiments, it is hoped, will help the labourers to exert their energies for their personal benefit without the fear of the rich. This group of schemes includes allotment of house sites and agricultural land, provision of low-cost dwelling units, reclamation and development of assigned land, identification of the delivery system of in-puts, credit facilities, seeds, water-supply, agricultural implements, drought animals and fertilisers, etc.

4.21 Allotment of House-Sites and Agricultural Land

As most of the bonded labourers belong to the category of landless labourers, so an important aspect of physical rehabilitation is the allotment of land. It enables the bonded labourers to have access to other productive units as well as to improve their social status. If they already own a piece of land which is under charge, lien or mortgage etc. then section 7(1) of the Act requires that such landed property should be restored to the bonded labourers immediately on their release. For the purpose of the allotment of house sites and agricultural land the Ceiling Surplus land, Government land, Bhoojan or Gramdan land can be utilised. Temple land could also be leased to poor agricultural labourers. The Ministry of Labour has written to all State Governments that there should be a separate programme for the
allotment of land and house sites to the bonded labourers. On the one hand it will give them a sense of belonging, and on the other hand it will help in identifying the actual number of freed bonded labourers rehabilitated.

4.22 Land Development

The guidelines stress that the grant for reclamation of land should be accompanied by an integrated programme for the total development of land. The land should be levelled, terraced and a complete package of all necessary inputs should be provided. A freed bonded labourer can become a viable cultivator only with the help of such a comprehensive programme for land development. Resources from other development agencies or departments and various schemes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana can be pooled. The Special Central assistance under the Scheme For the Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes can be used for the same purpose, for according to the National Survey, 66 per cent of the freed bonded labourers belong to the Scheduled Castes and 18 per cent of them belong to the Scheduled Tribes.

4.23 Provision of Low-Cost Dwelling Units

Along with the allotment of house sites, provision of low-cost dwelling units is yet another essential component of rehabilitation. The dwelling units should be based on
local designs, local materials and local skills. Such programmes can be integrated with the State Government's plans for housing subsidies and the Indira Awas Yojana. The freed bonded labourers can contribute their own labour for the construction of such houses. While executing such programmes, care should be taken to provide common facilities and follow-up services like drinking water, electricity, drains, convenient access to main roads, dispensaries and educational institutions. For this purpose the outlay sanctioned under the 'Minimum Needs Programme' can be utilised.

The object is that every bonded labourer should have an independent identity, a sense of belonging to and a feeling of closeness to the community in which he lives.

4.24 Agriculture

The State Governments should ensure that the distribution or reclamation of the agricultural land should be backed by a complete package of all necessary facilities and services, such as the plough, bullocks and other production inputs (including seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and credit), so that each agricultural season is put to maximum use. Wherever the water resources are available, facilities should be provided for irrigation and lifting water. Irrigation facilities can be provided near or at the place of rehabilitation by way of Jor-Bandh. This process can be integrated with the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna and the special central assistance under
the Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan in the irrigation sector, which will directly benefit the released bonded labourers. Digging up of open wells, and other minor irrigation schemes like irrigation tanks and water harvesting structures can be undertaken under the Million Wells Scheme. Such schemes can be initiated under the Integrated Rural Development Programme as individual beneficiary schemes and on a community basis under the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes. The production inputs such as seeds, fertilisers can be provided by State Agricultural Departments free of cost or on highly subsidised rates. The State Governments should also encourage research projects to develop a farm technology which is adaptable to the local conditions and needs of the freed bonded labourers. These projects should take care of the incapacity of the target group to make substantial investment and their inability to hold the produce till the market prices become remunerative, for these labourers due to their needs take recourse to distress sale.

4.25 Credit (Including Consumption Loan)

Even after their release the bonded labourers turn to money-lenders for borrowing money for their daily needs, the purchase of agricultural inputs, and social ceremonies. For these loans the money-lenders charge exorbitant rates of interest. Since the exploitation of the weaker sections begins with the extortion of high rates of interest, fraud in sale
and purchase, the credit assumes both a protective as well as a developmental form. Consumption loan forms a part of short-term and medium-term credit. It includes a certain amount of cash loan for agricultural purposes and a loan in kind of seeds, and fertilisers etc. To meet such credit needs of the freed bonded labourers, the primary agricultural societies should make their credit limits flexible. On the recommendation of the ‘Working Group on the Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes’, the Labour Ministry advised the State Governments to create some sort of revolving fund for each district for lending money at nominal rates of interest for ceremonial purposes to the released bonded labourers. The money should be repaid in small instalments and recycled into the fund. At the same time the States were directed to check the mushroom growth of usurious moneylenders by strict enforcement of the Moneylenders Acts in force within their jurisdiction.

4.26 Horticulture

Where the land is extensive and undulating with high incidence of soil erosion, the Central Government suggested that an extensive programme of fruit trees plantation can be undertaken. This, besides checking soil erosion, would be a source of good income for the freed bonded labourers. The Horticulture Department can encourage the released bonded labourers to develop kitchen gardens also. Irrigation facilities for such orchards can be developed with assistance
under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. At the same time, processing units for the produce of such orchards can be installed on a co-operative basis, which would provide employment to a large number of freed bonded labourers.

4.30 Non-Land Based Schemes

The areas where land is not available in sufficient measure or has less productivity (particularly in hilly areas, drought-prone areas, or areas with undeveloped landscapes) the guidelines stress that schemes should be formulated to encourage other subsidiary activities which can provide the freed bonded labourers with alternative sources of livelihood. In these schemes the animal husbandry sector has been recognised as the most important, for it throws open maximum opportunity without requiring any special skill. These schemes provide for the supply of milch animals i.e. cows and buffaloes, sheep units, goat units, piggeries, poultry etc. These schemes can be successfully supplemented and integrated with other poverty-alleviation programmes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme. Poultry sheds in a large number can be constructed for a number of freed bonded labourers under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna and under the special central assistance under the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Each shed can be allotted to an individual
labourer for the rearing of a given number of birds supplied by the Animal Husbandry Department of the State Governments. Assistance can also be provided under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Similarly, to provide fodder for milch cattle supplied to the bonded labourers, the government land can be assigned to the groups of freed bonded labourers exclusively for the purpose of growing fodder under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna. The supply of milch cattle, poultry, pigs, sheep or goats should be followed by composite programmes covering health services, fodder supply, produce collection and marketing, feed, cattle insurance etc., so that the beneficiaries may be able to generate adequate income to cross the poverty line and become economically viable as animal husbandry men.

4.40 Skill or Craft Based Occupations

A large number of bonded labourers belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes have the requisite background and skills in various traditional crafts. But owing to a want of opportunities for making such skills marketable many of them have given up their crafts and turned to agricultural labour. The serfdom has not stifled their creative urge. It is necessary, therefore, to restore such labourers to the height of excellence of their traditional arts and crafts. It is not possible to absorb all the freed bonded labourers in agriculture by granting them land. Thus, to make them economically viable individual beneficiaries,
it is worthwhile that they should be provided with some elementary training. This group of schemes involves the identification and development of a skill or craft, and the supply of raw-materials, implements, working capital and work-sheds. It also involves developing links for marketing through co-operatives to eliminate exploitation by private middlemen, and administrative support to prevent falling into bondage again.

4.41 Training in Acquiring New Skills and Developing Existing Skills—Role of IRYSEM and ICDA

To develop traditional or new skills in the freed bonded labourers, some elementary training should be provided. For this, two programmes under the Integrated Rural Development Programme viz., Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas can play an important role. For this each sectoral department or agency should identify the opportunities and the potential in each area for schemes in cottage and village industries, handicrafts, small trades and businesses. Thereafter efforts should be made to establish a link with the training programmes under IRYSEM and ICDA, to ensure the coverage of freed bonded labourers. Such training programmes should be prepared while taking notice of certain peculiarities of the bonded labour system i.e. debt bondage, years of servitude, the atmosphere of ignorance, poverty,
backwardness and the resultant psychological depression in which these laborers have lived. The main objective of such training should be the promotion of the basic skills which the freed bonded laborer might possess in a rudimentary form. Such training should be accompanied by provision of tools free of cost, a programme for the supply of raw-materials, marketing of the produce and availability of credit etc. Such an integrated approach will reduce to the minimum the gap between skill formation and income generation. The funds under the Special Central Assistance can be utilised for the training of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes bonded laborers.

4.42 Developing the Traditional Arts and Crafts Further

As for the freed bonded laborers, who have an artisan background, a beginning can be made by taking them to the Production-cum-Design-cum-Training Centre under the Khadi and Village Industries Board for intensive training with the payment of a monthly stipend. After the completion of training some of them can be appointed to the Board itself as master craftsmen for training others in due course, while others can be persuaded to run independent careers of master-craftsmen with incentives of help from the Industries Department.

4.50 Other schemes

The schemes in this group include programmes to ensure
wage employment throughout the year, the supply of essential commodities, carts and animals, rickshaws, tom-toms, the education of the children, health cover and the protection of civil rights of the beneficiaries.

4.51 Wage Employment

To ensure subsistence wages to the freed bonded labourers and their family members, it is necessary that work should be available for them throughout the year. Schemes for this purpose can be integrated with the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna. The Yojna aims at providing gainful employment opportunities to the needy in the rural areas and also at creating community assets which will provide a big boost to the rural economy. In the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Development relating to the selection and execution of projects under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, there is a clear indication that preference should be given to such items of work as will improve the overall quality of rural life and provide benefits to the poverty groups, especially the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and freed bonded labourers. Thus the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, which provides wage employment as well as creates community assets is ideally suitable for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. For this purpose the projects under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna can be selected in areas having high incidence of freed bonded labourers. Such works can be selected under the Yojana as may have a direct beneficial impact on Scheduled
Castes and Scheduled Tribes and freed bonded labourers, for e.g. land development and reclamation of wasteland or degraded land, social-forestry, construction of houses under the Indira Awas Yojana, the Million Wells Scheme or irrigation wells for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, or freed bonded labourers etc. While executing these works stress should be laid on the creation of more and more man-days of employment, payment of minimum wages and direct beneficial impact of the project on the freed bonded labourers. Apart from this, work programmes under different departments of the Central and State Governments such as agriculture, irrigation, public works and others should be centred in or near the place of rehabilitation of the freed bonded labourers to ensure their wage employment throughout the year.

4.52 Assistance Through the Integrated Rural Development Programme

The objective of the Integrated Rural Development Programme is to provide assistance to the poorest of poor in rural areas namely the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, agricultural and non-agricultural labourers, rural artisans, etc., who have an annual household income of ₹ 4800 which is substantially lower than the cut-off income of around ₹ 6400 at the poverty line level. The persons released from debt-bondage who are obviously the poorest of poor

should be given the first priority for inclusion in the target group so as to entitle them to assistance under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Under this Programme assistance is provided for every viable economic activity which has the potential to provide substantial additional income and self-employment to the beneficiaries, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry, handicrafts, cottage industries, small businesses, trades etc.

In case of freed bonded labourers the choice of appropriate economic activity will depend on the market demand of the finished product, the inclination and suitability (along with training wherever necessary) of the beneficiary, the potential of the proposed activity for generating adequate income, and for amortising the loan etc. The Ministry of Rural Development has issued detailed guidelines to the State Governments and Collectors as Chairman of the District Rural Development Agencies to see that programmes for the rehabilitation of the released bonded labourers and assistance of the members of the target groups under the Integrated Rural Development Programme are administered in a well coordinated and effective manner. As the District Collector is the Chairman of the District Level Vigilance Committee for identification and rehabilitation of bonded labourers as well as the Chairman of the District Rural Development Agency, such integration can be brought about easily.
The objective of any worthwhile scheme for the rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers is to provide them with gainful employment on the one hand and with such income-generating units as would ultimately help in lifting them above the poverty line on the other hand. As the amount available under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme is extremely small, it is desirable that the funds under different schemes are pooled, and integrated with the former to provide meaningful rehabilitation to the bonded labourers. Thus, if a freed bonded labourer after receiving assistance under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme still qualifies as a beneficiary under the Integrated Rural Development Programme, he should be given all assistance under the latter for better avenues of earning livelihood and a better life. The same principle of integration can also apply to the Special Central Assistance under the Special Component Plan for the Development of Scheduled Castes. This assistance can be used for income-generating, economic development schemes and programmes including training, back-up services, institutional build-up, and arrangements for implementation, supervision and evaluation. The purpose of the integration of the funds is to ensure that for the same scheme funds are not drawn from different sources, while funds drawn from different sectors for different components of the scheme are integrated skilfully.
For centuries the Scheduled Tribes have earned their livelihood through the collection of minor forest produce. But they are not paid the full price of these products, for a major portion of the income is taken away by middlemen. The middleman should be eliminated by the encouragement of co-operatives of the primary collectors or opening of the branches of Forest Corporation or other agencies in areas having an abundance of such products. Besides, the tribals should be encouraged to trade in finished products instead of raw materials. Thus, operations like the extraction of oil from castor etc., treatment of lac, gum and tamarind, extraction of honey, rolling of tendu leaves into bidis, manufacture of broomsticks, rope making, rearing of tassar cocoons, and reeling and weaving of tassar should be encouraged. The labourers should be trained to actively participate in such economic activities. The traditional rights of the hilly tribes to collect minor forest produce have been considerably restricted with strict implementation of the provisions of the Indian Forest Act. This has limited the scope for the encouragement of local processing units of these products. Therefore, the Working Group on Tribal Development during the Sixth Plan recommended that consistent with the need for preservation of forests and protection of ecological balance, there should be a planned supply of raw materials for the ongoing operations of Scheduled Tribes...
and for the expansion of these operations, where the raw material is not adequate, future planning should lay stress on the growth of material consistent with the needs of the tribals.

4.54 Health, Medical Care and Sanitation etc.

Years of malnutrition during bondage lead to a loss of health and vigour. Therefore, the rehabilitation guidelines require that the bonded labourers' families should be provided with a complete health cover. Immediately on release they should be thoroughly checked by qualified doctors. Afterwards regular medical check-up camps should be organised in the villages where freed bonded labourer have been rehabilitated. Medical teams must also visit the bonded labourers' houses for check-up. Health surveys of hamlets with bonded labourers with a high incidence of general or specific diseases should be launched. Along with the curative side attention may also be directed towards the preventive side, sanitation and hygiene. The supply of protected drinking water which is a basic need for health should be ensured. Funds for health and nutrition can be integrated with outlay under the Minimum Needs Programme. For drinking water, funds for the village which has been declared a 'problem village' can be drawn under the 'Minimum Needs Programme' on a priority basis. For non-problem villages, the provision of drinking water sources in Scheduled Castes and Tribes' villages, bastis or hamlets is permitted.
under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Thus, these funds should be utilised.

4.55 Supply of Essential Commodities

The equitable distribution of essential commodities at reasonable prices to the poorer sections is necessary. For that Fair Price Shops should be opened in a hamlet or the vicinity thereof, where freed bonded labourers have been rehabilitated. These shops would alleviate the miseries of the poor labourers, and they will not have to go a long distance for the purchase of ration. At the same time, attempts should be made to give the dealership of some of these shops to the members of the freed bonded labourers' families, who have got the minimum educational standards for this purposes. Such schemes can be skilfully integrated with the revamped Public Distribution System launched by the Government in about 1700 of the most backward blocks of the country. These blocks include areas covered under the area development programmes such as the Desert Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme and Designated Hill Areas. The Government is using the Public Distribution System to counter inflation, in particular to protect the poor from high prices and shortage. 12

4.56 Education of the Families of Freed Bonded Labourers

The Expert Group appointed during the Sixth Five Year Plan, under the chairmanship of Dr M.S. Swaminathan, a former

member of the Planning Commission, has made certain valuable recommendations in its report on the measures for the alleviation of poverty. One of such recommendations is the opening of 'Balwadis' in hamlets where freed bonded labourers have been rehabilitated, for the primary education of their children. The funds allotted under the Jawahar Koshar Yojana can be utilised for this purpose. But owing to extreme poverty, low wages and availability of employment only for a few days, these families have to send their children for work for bare subsistence wages. Thus any programme for the formal or informal education of the children of freed bonded labour families should be backed by wage employment programmes throughout the year.

Since most of the members of the bonded families are illiterate, the guidelines stress that a special adult literacy drive should be launched by the state governments. These plans can be activated through utilisation of the resources under the 'Minimum Needs Programme'. As the labourers remain busy with work during the day, such classes should be held at night. While planning reading materials and curricula for adult literacy, the culture, ethos and assimilative faculties of the beneficiaries should be kept in mind. More stress should be laid on non-formal education. They should be made aware of the avenues to successful self-employment, criteria of their viability and successful working, and remedies to the problems of successful working.

Knowledge should be given about various departments or
agencies concerned with the delivery of programmes beneficial to them, their procedures and addresses of functionaries at different levels. They should be made aware of the important aspects of such programmes and methods to implement them successfully. The beneficiaries should be made conscious of their rights under various statutes such as the Land Reforms Act, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of the Wages Act, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act etc. and of how to secure these rights. They should be made able to establish links with agencies concerned with the implementation of above said laws.

4.57 Protection of Civil Rights

The caste and feudal factors lie at the root of the existence of the bonded labour system. Even after the abolition of the bonded labour system and the formation of a comprehensive programme for their rehabilitation, they still need a protective shield against the atrocities by powerful and influential groups in the village community. The link between their economic plight on the one hand, and crime and atrocities and the social and civil disabilities on the other hand, has been recognised by the Government of India. Therefore, the Home Ministry has communicated to all State Governments a series of preventive and precautionary measures to be taken against such elements and forces. Two important preventive measures are that the scheduled Castes should be put in effective possession of the land.
belonging to or allotted to them and be enabled to carry on cultivation, and secondly that the payment of the statutory minimum wages to agricultural labourers must be ensured. They must be provided with additional and alternative employment opportunities throughout the year to improve their bargaining power for fair wages. Since debt is the root of the evil practice of bondage, so there must be credit support from co-operatives and rural banks. Special care should be taken of their need for consumption loans, to protect them from the clutches of usurious moneylenders. Strict implementation of the above measures will certainly develop a sense of security and protection among the freed bonded labourers, which is essential for their psychological rehabilitation.

The bonded labourers represent the extremes of poverty and backwardness among landless labourers and small or marginal farmers. They have widely different socio-economic backgrounds. No uniform guidelines for their physical, psychological or economic rehabilitation can therefore be laid down. In fact, the guidelines lay down only an illustrative list of such schemes. The basic approach is to provide the need-based and development-oriented rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. For this, schemes for rehabilitation have to be determined by topographical, environmental, agro-climatic and market conditions. Above all, the bonded labourers themselves should be given a choice between vari-
ous alternatives to finally select the schemes which meet their total requirements and enable them to cross the poverty line. Even the most well intentioned schemes fail, if those do not ascertain the skill, ingenuity, aptitude, resourcefulness and absorption capacity of the beneficiaries. It may cause some delay in the process, but making the scheme acceptable and viable is much more important.

Secondly, the guidelines stress that the paucity of funds should not be an inhibitory factor in the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. There is a large scope for securing adequate funds from a number of sources such as the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation, State plans matched by Centrally Sponsored Scheme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Minimum Needs Programme, Central assistance under the Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub-plan, Special Central Assistance to States’ Special Component Plans, States’ Tribal Sub-plans etc. The need is to integrate and co-ordinate these resources at the state, district and block levels. For this the State Governments have to make a lot of efforts. Apart from suggesting the measures for the selection of appropriate schemes and arrangements of funds for those schemes, the guidelines also suggest measures for a better implementation of the rehabilitation schemes. So, it has been stressed that the identification, release and rehabilitation should be simultaneous.

Whereas, formerly the state schemes for rehabilitation were finalised at the centre level, now the District Magistrates
have the right to formulate the village level schemes, which are finalised by district level screening committees. To expedite the release of the central grant directions have been sent to submit the utilization certificates at the earliest possible opportunity. The State Governments have been directed to avoid frequent transfers of personnel in charge of the programmes at various levels and also to avoid the transfer of the subject of bonded labour from one department to another, particularly in the middle of the year. Besides, the guidelines stress that all departments concerned with the implementation of the programme such as Revenue, Agricultural, Soil Conservation, Tribal Welfare and Social Welfare department should be fully involved. To make the rehabilitation programme more realistic and successful, the association of non-governmental voluntary organisations, social action groups and even political parties with the programme has been recommended. The Labour Ministry has set-up a Screening Committee to review the progress of the Centrally Sponsored Rehabilitation Scheme.

In short, the Centrally Sponsored Rehabilitation scheme is a well programmed and multi-pronged strategy. It does not merely make the provision of a small amount of money for the released bonded labourers, but takes into account the important needs of the freed bonded labourers from the time of their release upto the time they become viable economically. Actually this scheme provides for two
phases of assistance. In the first phase, the scheme envisages that the released bonded labourer will get an immediate relief worth ₹ 6250. Out of this ₹ 500 are to be paid in kind immediately on release, so that he may satisfy his basic needs. Then, within the shortest possible time he is to be provided assistance out of the schemes for rehabilitation formulated and in operation in the concerned district. While this small assistance under the rehabilitation scheme will enable him to fill his stomach, at the same time he will be provided with a loan, income-generating assets or skills or crafts, under some other poverty-alleviation or employment-generation scheme on a priority basis. The process of rehabilitation will be complete only when the beneficiaries will be able to cross the poverty line. Thus, the poverty-alleviation and employment-generation programmes can be seen as indirect efforts for the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers.

5.00 Poverty-Alleviation Programmes

The problem of bonded labour which is basically an economic malady is linked with rural poverty, unemployment and under-employment in the country. In the Five Year Plans a number of general as well as specific programmes were implemented for improving the living conditions of the poor. But in the early seventies it was realised that the earlier sporadic and often ad-hoc measures left untouched the bottom sections of the rural poor i.e. landless labourers, small and
marginal farmers and artisans and craftsmen. The bonded labourers also belong to these categories. It was realised that the groups which need special help should be treated on a preferential basis. Thus a package of anti-poverty programmes was initiated during the Sixth Plan to assist the households below the poverty-line through technology, services and assets transfer programmes. These programmes were continued during the Seventh Plan and are being continued during the Eighth Plan. The package of Poverty-Alleviation Programmes has three broad components.

5.10 **First Component**

The first component consists of individual household and group-oriented programmes of income generation through the endowment of economic assets, skill formation and upgrading, and providing wage employment through public works for the creation of assets of durable nature which would bestow continuing benefits on the employment situation. This component constitutes the core of the anti-poverty programmes and includes the following programmes:

5.11 **Integrated Rural Development Programme**

This programme is a most potent instrument of direct attack on poverty with a view to rescuing, resuscitating and rehabilitating the 'Castaways' of development. Its main objective is to raise the level of living of the poorest families in the rural areas above the poverty line.
lasting basis by giving them income-generating assets and access to credit and other inputs. It is aimed at evolving, on the one hand, an operationally integrated strategy of increasing productivity and production in agriculture and other sectors, and on the other hand improving resources position and income level of vulnerable sections of the population. The programme is now being implemented in all the blocks in the country.

5.12 Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment

The other sub-programs form an integral part of the Integrated Rural Development Programme. These programs aim at increasing the effectiveness of main programs. The first sub-program is called the Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment. It was started in August 1979. It aims at providing technical skills to the rural youth (in the age group of 16-35 years) who are identified as beneficiaries under the Integrated Rural Development Programme to enable them to seek employment. The ambit of this sub-program was extended in 1983 to include wage employment also. Training is imparted through institutions like the Industrial Training Institutes, Polytechnics, Training Centres or Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Agricultural Universities etc., and through master craftsmen/artisans.

5.13 Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas

The second sub-program of the Integrated Rural Deve-
Development Programme is the 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas'. This programme was introduced midway into the Sixth Plan. There was a stipulation in Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment programme that 30 per cent of the trainees should be women. But women fared very badly, even though they constituted 50 per cent of the rural workforce, but only 6 to 7 per cent of the women availed themselves of the facilities provided. Thus the programme 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas' was conceived to encourage women to participate in the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

5.14 Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

Rural unemployment and underemployment have been the major contributory factors in the high incidence of poverty in rural areas. In order to provide employment as well as the creation of capital assets in rural areas, several programmes have been launched by the Government of India which are complementary to the self-employment and asset-endowment programmes. The National Rural Employment Programme was launched in 1980 to create additional gainful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed persons in rural areas, while simultaneously creating additional productive community assets for improving rural economic and social infrastructure. Similarly, to further improve and expand employment opportunities for the rural landless and to provide guaranteed employment for at least one member of every rural landless household upto
100 days in a year, and at the same time to create durable assets, the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme was launched in 1983. As a multi-pronged strategy, a new scheme, Jawahar Lal Nehru Rozgar Yojana, was announced in February 1989 for employment generation in 120 backward districts. In order to implement these three programmes more effectively, all these three programmes were merged into a single rural employment programme since April 1989, viz., the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

5.15 Indira Awas Yojana

The Indira Awas Yojana was an important component of the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme. It aimed at the construction of dwelling units free of cost for the poorest of the poor belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and freed bonded labourers. This plan has been continued under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

5.16 Million Wells Scheme

The Million Wells Scheme was introduced in 1988-89 for a period of two years as a sub-scheme of the National Rural Employment Programme and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme for providing open irrigation wells free of cost to the poor, small and marginal farmers belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and freed bonded labourers. The funds under the Million Wells Scheme can be utilised for other minor schemes of irrigation through irrigation tanks, water harvesting structures, and also for the development of
the land of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and freed
bonded labourers.

5.17 Scheme for Self-Employment of
 Educated Unemployed Youth

This scheme was introduced in 1983 for providing self-
employment to educated unemployed youth. The scheme provides
for the grant of a loan up to a maximum of ₹25,000 to the
educated youths residing in areas other than cities and hav-
ing no other source of finance for self-employment.

5.18 State Schemes

Some of the state Governments are implementing
special employment schemes to provide additional employment
opportunities, whereby training, financial assistance and
other incentives are provided to the unemployed youth.

5.20 Second Component

The second component of poverty-alleviation package
consists of programmes for special areas to counter endemic
poverty caused by hostile agro-climatic conditions and
de-generation of the eco-system. The poverty in these areas
is accentuated by harsh and hostile climate conditions.
Deserts, ravines, and drought-prone areas constitute difficult
regions. The Special Area Development Programmes include the
programmes mentioned below.

5.21 Drought Prone Area Programmes

In the areas chronically affected by drought a rural
The Works Programme was started in 1970-71. The objective was to organise permanent works to obviate scarcity, bring relief and generate adequate employment through labour-intensive schemes such as irrigation works, soil conservation, afforestation and village and district roads necessary to open up the area for agricultural production. After a mid-term appraisal of the Fourth Five Year Plan this programme was redesignated as Drought Prone Area Programme. It has been reoriented as an integrated area-development programme in the agricultural sector. This programme is funded both by the Central and the State Governments on a matching basis. In the Seventh Five Year Plan the programme covered 615 blocks of 91 districts in 13 States. Several schemes have been promoted under this programme to reduce the severity of drought, to contain the degradation of land, to improve its productivity, to ensure the optimum development and utilisation of water and livestock resources, to restore the ecological balance and to stabilise the income of the people, particularly the weaker sections in the area.

5.22 Desert Development Programme

The Desert Development Programme was launched in 1977-78, on the recommendation of the National Commission on Agriculture. This programme aims at controlling further desertification through sand dune stabilisation, shelter belt plantation,

conservation of water resources and their efficient management, reforestation, grassland and pasture development, and horticulture, with an objective of improving the living conditions of the people, in both the hot and cold arid zones of the country. The programme was started as a Central Sector Scheme under which the entire burden of funds was on the Central Government. But since 1979-80, the cost of the programme is shared on a matching basis between the Central Government and the State Government concerned.

5.23 Hill Area Development Programme

To enable the people living in hilly areas—who are by and large very poor—to have their share of benefits coming from modern science and technology, special hilly area development programmes were initiated during the Fifth Plan. These programmes are based on the need to conserve the natural resources and the environment. These programmes also aim at balancing regional development and complementing the interests of the hills and plains.

5.24 Border Area Development Programme

In order to ensure balanced development of sensitive border areas and to improve the living conditions of the population of these areas a new programme for the development of border areas was launched in the Seventh Plan. The Border Area Development Programme is a fully centrally funded programme.
5.30 Third Component

The third component aims at giving follow-up support to the weaker sections by providing special consumption and social services. This component seeks to improve the quality of life and to give infrastructural support to the programmes of poverty-alleviation. This component includes such programmes as follow.

5.31 Socio-Economic Programmes
For Weaker Sections

The majority of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are below the poverty line and face problems peculiar to them. A large proportion of bonded labourers belongs to the Scheduled Castes. The social and economic impoverishment of these sections is the basic factor in their backwardness. Thus the Article 46 of the Constitution enjoins upon the state the duty to make special efforts for the development of these sections of the population.

Since the First Five Year Plan, programmes have been implemented for improving the economic and educational status of these groups. By the end of the Fourth Plan it was realised that to enable these groups to utilise the fruits of general economic development, plans should be made for the comprehensive economic and human resources development of these sections. Thus the Tribal sub-plan approach was adopted in the Fifth Plan. The Special Component Plans (for S.Cs) were formulated in the Sixth Plan. The programmes were continued during the Seventh
Plan also. These programmes resulted in earmarked allocations for the welfare of these groups, apart from the general programmes of economic development undertaken by the central and state governments.

5.32 Tribal sub-plan

The tribal sub-plan comprises the identification of development blocks in a state where tribal population is in a majority, the adoption of an integrated and project-based approach to development, earmarking of funds for Tribal sub-plan, the creation of appropriate administrative structures in the tribal areas, and the adoption of appropriate personnel policies. The tribal sub-plan has a two-fold objective i.e., socio-economic development of the tribal areas and of the tribal families. During the seventh Five Year Plan 245 tribal pockets were identified and 180 integrated Tribal Development Projects were in operation.

5.33 Special Component Plans

The socio-economic development programmes for Scheduled Castes envisage the adoption of Special Component Plans for 20 States and 4 Union Territories, with a relatively large scheduled caste population. The Special Component Plans are to be framed by the States/Union Territories identifying schemes and funds which would benefit the Scheduled Castes. Special Component Plans have a special central assistance counterpart by way of an addition to the states' plan programmes.
Besides these programmes, emphasis has been on strengthening the educational base of the weaker sections and on providing economic aid to them, in areas which are not adequately covered by the general sector schemes.

5.34 Minimum Needs Programme

The Minimum Needs Programme was started in the first year of the Fifth Five Year Plan with a view to establishing a network of basic services and facilities in all areas within a specified time-frame. During the Seventh Five Year Plan it was integrated with other rural development and anti-poverty programmes to create necessary linkage in the delivery system. The Minimum Needs Programme consists of two distinct sets of activities i.e., (i) human resources development activities which cover elementary and adult education, health, drinking water supply, nutrition and rural housing, and (ii) activities relating to area development like rural roads and village electrification. These components of this programme aim at enhancing the impact of both beneficiary-oriented and area-development programmes of rural development. Whereas the first component increases the productive capacity of the individual with a direct and personalised approach, the rural development programmes improve the productive capacity of the people as a whole by an indirect approach. Thus the two components of the programme are mutually supportive. The integration of these components will accelerate the growth and ensure the achievement of planning objectives.
5.35 Co-operatives

The development of co-operatives particularly among the disadvantaged in rural areas has received considerable emphasis during plans. The founders of planning in the country saw a village panchayat, a village co-operative and a village school, as the trinity of institutions through which a self-reliant and just economic and social order could be built. The non-exploitative character of co-operatives, voluntary nature of their membership, the principle of one man one vote, decentralised decision-making, and self-imposed curbs on profit-making combine the advantages of private membership with public good. Thus co-operatives have been considered a major instrument of development. They have played an important role in the field of credit as a defensive mechanism against the usurious money-lenders.

5.36 Panchayati Raj and Community Development

Democratic decentralisation, transfer of authority, and the sharing of state functions and responsibilities with local communities and geographical units have been given a crucial place in the whole development process. An elaborate delivery mechanism in the forms of development blocks and village level extension agencies was formed under the Community Development Programme. However, exogenous and endogenous factors left these potentially dynamic people's institutions in a virtually moribund state in most parts of the country. Since the Sixth
Five Years Plan, with the launching of large-scale, multi-sectoral, country-wide programmes of rural development, efforts have been made to restore to a great extent the mechanism provided under the Community Development Programme. In the Seventh Five Year Plan stress was on the formulation and implementation of plans for village development on the basis of local, decentralised planning instead of forming sectoral plans for the villages at the state and national levels. For this outright grants have been placed at the disposal of the Panchayati Raj and Community Development bodies. In addition, states have been asked to involve the Panchayati Raj institutions in the planning and implementa-
tion of the programmes of rural development, poverty allevia-
tion and the provision of minimum needs.

5.37 Organisation of Rural Labour

The largest work force in the country is the unorgan-
ised rural labour. Since they are unorganised, they are
vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. Thus, the labour-
policy of the Government lays stress on the welfare and
improvement of the working and living conditions of the
unorganised labour. For ensuring proper implementation of the
various development programmes for the rural workers, the
involvement of rural workers' organisations is very important.
Thus the most important task regarding the rural workers is
to organise them.
India has already ratified the ILO Convention (No.141) which provides that it shall be the objective of the national policy concerning rural development to facilitate the establishment and growth of strong and independent organisations of rural workers, so that they get their due share in the benefits of economic and social development. As it would take time for trade unions to make a dent among these sections, the promotional efforts in this regard have been undertaken by the state machinery to facilitate the process. A scheme for organising the rural workers was introduced in 1981-82. This scheme aims at motivating the rural workers to organise themselves and at providing information about the laws enacted for their welfare. This scheme is fully centrally funded. At present it is operative in 14 states. Around 1500 Honorary Rural Organisers have been appointed under the scheme. Another scheme for creating awareness among the rural poor, developing their organisation and helping them to seek the benefits of various welfare and legislative measures is functioning through the Central Board of Workers Education. The National Commission on Rural Labour set-up by the Government submitted its report in July 1991. The Commission has recognised the need for improvement in the living conditions of the rural poor and ensuring their effective participation in the development process. This can be achieved only through agricultural growth, employment guarantee programmes, creating infrastructure for rural industries.

developing human resources and provision of basic needs.

The Eighth Plan envisages accelerating employment growth with the goal of achieving nearly full employment in a period of about 10 years. To make the employment generated productive, it is to be created in the growth process. For this purpose agriculture and agro-processing have been identified as the main sectors. Thus to make the special employment programmes more effective, these programmes will be restructured during the Eighth Five Year Plan. On the basis of the recommendation of the experts, planners have identified some sectors such as food crops, oil seeds, cotton, sugarcane, horticulture, sericulture, dairy development, poultry, agriculture and agro-forestry, where India has comparative advantages over other nations because of its agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions. To improve the efficiency of production and post-harvest technologies and to develop a suitable marketing network for these products in the international market, the Government has decided to set-up a Small Farmers’ Agro-Business Consortium, as an autonomous corporate entity. This consortium will identify, to begin with, about 15 Small Farmers Agro-Business Programme areas, (each based on a contiguous agro-ecological area surrounding a designated district). Each Programme area will have an appropriate mix of enterprises. The enterprise mix for each programme area will be determined in consultation with the farmers. The programme will be developed on a participatory basis jointly
with rural families to ensure its success.15

5.38 Involvement of Voluntary Agencies

Planning process can acquire its full meaning only if the people are associated with planning formulation as well as implementation. This can be ensured by the promotion of purely non-governmental organisations, formal or informal in nature, which can motivate and mobilise the people in specific or general development tasks. These agencies can provide innovative models and approaches, ensure feedback and secure the involvement of the families below the poverty line. Efforts to encourage the involvement of voluntary organisations in the planning and implementation of programmes of rural development were made during the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans. In the Seventh Five Year Plan an amount of Rs 100 lakhs was fixed for grant-in-aid to voluntary agencies for the identification of bonded labour and for the improvement of the conditions of child labour through non-formal education, health care, nutrition and recreation under the new Centrally Sponsored Scheme. In the Eighth Five Year Plan also an amount of Rs 100 lakh has been fixed for the above said purpose.

6.06 Evaluation of the Programmes for the Welfare of the Bonded Labour

The Central Government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to fight the evil of debt-bondage. The measures

envisaged aim not merely at the release of the bonded labour from debt-bondage but also at his meaningful rehabilitation. For this, the poverty alleviation, employment generation, rural development and minimum needs programmes, which have been formulated for the poorest of the poor, have been supplemented by a special scheme for the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers. The scheme takes into account all the pros and cons of the problem of rehabilitation.

In fact, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme and the guidelines issued by the Central Labour Ministry have led to some innovative attempts to provide meaningful rehabilitation to bonded labourers. In Andhra Pradesh, the Government has formulated a scheme for the development of Government Land and Ceiling surplus Land for agricultural purposes. Wells have been dug on such land out of Sub-Component Plan funds. This land has been allotted to released bonded labourers. In Bihar, besides a grant of Rs. 6250, an integrated development scheme including land grant has been drafted. Immediately after identification the bonded labourers are provided with a social security pension. In Patna district of Bihar, a special scheme for the rehabilitation of child bonded labourers released from the carpet industry of Uttar Pradesh has been devised. These children are sent to residential schools where they are provided free text books, school uniforms, mid-day meals etc. They are also given training in carpet weaving.

In Karnataka, through Land Reforms Act efforts have been made
to release the bonded labourers. The Karnataka Land Reforms Act prohibits the creation of tenancy and confers occupancy rights upon the tenants. The definition of the 'tenant' includes a 'deemed tenant', i.e. a person whose name did not appear under any of the records but who was found on local inquiry to have been cultivating someone else's land. Under this definition, the bonded labourer becomes a tenant and gets occupancy rights, thus securing a release from bondage.

In Kerala, by integrating the development schemes of Department of Rural Development, Primary and Adult Education and Social Welfare, a land based rehabilitation project has been initiated. In Rajasthan, non-land based schemes for rehabilitation of bonded labourers have been preferred. In Tamil Nadu, the non-governmental organisations have come forward to implement the rehabilitation schemes. In Uttar Pradesh, the non-governmental activists and organisations have made efforts to develop the land allotted to freed bonded labourers. They have also come forward to release the women from brothels, where they had been sent by their families under debt-bondage.

In Orissa, for the employment of released bonded labourers in Group 'C' and 'D' posts under the State Government, the age limit has been raised up to 40 years.

But for various reasons, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme has failed to achieve its objectives. The rehabilitation process is started only after the identification and release of the bonded labourers. However, the procedure prescribed for the

identification and release has not yielded desired results. The identification is very difficult work. It involves the discovery of a non-being in a climate and milieu which is dominated by hostile elements. The resistance offered by the keepers of bonded-labourers is further strengthened by the ignorance and psychological fears of the bonded-labourers as well as by the administration, which avoids admitting the existence of bonded labour. Sometimes the identification process is hampered by some extraneous considerations such as that the persons already identified and released have not yet been rehabilitated or the identification and release of more bonded labourers would cost too much. Although the Act has laid down great responsibility on the Government machinery in this regard, yet due to a lack of sensitivity to this acute human problem and its socio-economic parameters, the work of identification by the Government machinery in many areas is indifferent and perfunctory. Generally, after identification a rigid procedure of release is adopted. This causes delay in the provision of relief and rehabilitation. Therefore, even the genuine bonded-labourers prefer not to be identified. After passing through the rigid and formal identification and release process, when the labourers become entitled to the rehabilitation assistance they have to face many problems. The rehabilitation assistance provided to them does not match their needs and is based on wrong identification of the priorities. Sometimes, the beneficiaries fear that they might have to pay back
the money or they might enter into some obligation. These psychological barriers inhibit the beneficiaries from getting full benefit of the assistance. Secondly, they are not put into effective possession of land. The land or assets provided are of very poor quality. Moreover, the allotment of land or assets is not followed by any follow-up facilities or services. Thus the released bonded labourers find themselves unable to face the exploitative system. Sometimes the big landlords get their own labourers identified as bonded labourers and misappropriate the benefits of these schemes to themselves. The general attitude of existing rural oligarchy or even the Governmental administration towards the welfare of the bonded labour is indifferent and hostile. Therefore, this mechanical scheme which does not provide for any follow-up machinery or supervision has failed to attain its objective. The amount of assistance provided under the scheme is insufficient to cover the wide aspects of the problem. To overcome this problem, the guidelines stress the imaginative integration of this scheme with various other development schemes. However, all this needs patience, devotion and well thought out policies. But this is not possible because of the indifferent and hostile attitude of the administration. Thus what the released bonded-labourers can get at the most is the assistance of Rs 6250 only as provided under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Even though some honest and devoted administrators have tried to make the welfare programmes effective, much success
has not been achieved. The programmes of poverty alleviation and rural development have their own drawbacks. Over the last ten years, 34.7 million families have been assisted under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Only 30 per cent of the families assisted have been able to cross the poverty line. Recent evaluation studies have highlighted the lack of a proper linkage between the Integrated Rural Development Programme, and the Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment and the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana has been able to provide work only for an average of 16 days in a year, the study conducted by Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission says. The study shows that 50 per cent of the funds are utilised during the last quarter and major works are undertaken during the terminal quarter violating the spirit of the Yojana. Some of the Panchayats do not have adequate technical staff and supervisory machinery and some others have not used the funds provided under the Yojana.17

The fact that the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers has failed to provide meaningful rehabilitation for the bonded labour. It has been recognised by the Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission, in a study conducted by it in 1980–82, in 16 districts of 8 states where the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour was implemented.

The need for re-orientation of the rural development schemes

17. Times of India, 13.7.1992, p.3.
has been recognised in the 'Approach Paper To The Eighth Plan'. The large investment in the rural sector during the Eighth Plan period is to be so managed that it ensures the growth of productive employment and better diffusion of income across different regions of the country. The employment schemes under the rural development programmes are expected to undergo a sea change. A large number of work schemes are on the anvil to meet the requirements of jobs to be provided under the right to work.