

# **CAMPAIGN AGAINST CAMP COOLIE SYSTEM (CACCS)**

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## **Demands on behalf of the rural young women mill workers working under Sumangali Scheme**

### **An Appeal to all Political Parties, in view of the forthcoming general elections to include the following demands in their elections manifestos**

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We, the collective of socially concerned individuals and civil society organizations, make this appeal to all political parties to look into the gender, labour, child rights and human rights violations that take place in the textile and garment industries in different parts of Tamil Nadu in the name of Sumangali Scheme and to put forth the following demands to be included in their election manifestos.

Sumangali Scheme, an euphemism for Camp Coolie System, introduced a decade ago by textile mills and garment industries in Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem and Dindigul region is nothing but a modern form of bonded labour system. On completion of three years, the young migrant women workers from rural pockets are promised Rs.50,000/- to Rs.1,00,000/-, which could be used to meet out their dowry demands and other marriage expenses. Such an enticement from the mills has been a real allurements that promises adolescent girls to join the scheme, with the hope of getting married, after three years of contract period working in the mills.

Southern Tamil Nadu has been one of the key pockets to supply adolescent girls to Textile and garment industries in western part of Tamil Nadu. Poverty and growing unemployment, coupled with dowry system, have been major push factors in the recruitment process of the Sumangali Scheme, contributing to largescale migration from this drought prone area. The socio – economic conditions of the poor families in the rural areas are instrumental to continuously generate cheap labour much to the advantage of labour brokers of this nefarious scheme.

Nearly 3800 textile mills and garment Units are functioning in Tamil Nadu and an estimated 7500 small and medium size ancillary units are operating in Tirupur alone. More than 70 percent of the workforce in the mills are women, mostly being recruited from rural pockets.

Several studies have revealed startling facts on the working conditions in the mills, health of the women workers in the mills, violations of established norms under the existing labour laws, gender issues and child labour in the textile mills and garment industries that employ young women

workers under the scheme. These studies have proved that forced labour, recruitment of adolescent girls at tender age, restriction of movement of young female migrant workers, very low wages, compulsory overtime, late night shifts, no weekly holidays, excessive work, overtime without payment and sexual harassment have been the hallmarks of this peculiar scheme.

With no safety tools provided to the workers in the mills, most of them suffer from physical ailments and fatigue. The mill owners allow them to go home only for festivals such as Deepavali or Pongal, twice a year. Even for their village festivals or family functions, the young female workers are not allowed to go home, unless their parents show some proof for the same. Verbal and physical abuse in the mills are too quite common. Lack of sleep, mental and physical fatigue, health problems related to tiredness, low calorie food intake and malnutrition, problems related to menstruation cycle and chronic headache are found among these young women. It is to be noted with concern that these young women workers are kept in jail like confinement in factories and denied freedom of movement.

It is in this context we, on behalf of the Campaign Against Camp Coolie System, approach the political parties to include the following demands in their election manifestos.

## **Our Demands**

1. The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) covers only those children between 6 to 14 for compulsory education and does not cover the adolescents between 15 and 18. And therefore the Campaign insists on the political parties to demand that the Central Government should make necessary changes in the Right to Education Act to expand its scope so as to cover the children between 15 and 18, as defined by the UN Convention on the Child Rights.
2. Our demand is that all forms of Camp labour system such as Sumangali scheme or Mankalya Thittam or Thirumagal Thirumana Thittam or in any other names should be banned as these schemes exploit and affect the life of thousands of poor rural adolescent girls. Any such attractive schemes in the garment industries to exploit the existing dowry and income related socio – economic conditions of the most vulnerable rural communities should not be allowed.
3. When corporate introduce any new labour system such as camp labour system (Sumangali Thittam), the State Government must set up a high level committee consisting of Government officials and representatives of civil society groups to thoroughly scrutinize the

proposed schemes and those schemes must be permitted only after proper certification by the Government.

4. As per the Apprentices Act 1963, the apprentices should be less than 10% of the total workforce, in the factories. But in most of the textile and spinning mills, more than 70% of the workforce are female apprentices recruited under the Sumangali Scheme. The Labour Department must ensure that the percentage of apprentices in the total workforce in the mills should be below 10 percent.
5. As per the Factories Act 1948, all workers in textile and garment units should be given proper identity card, copy of the agreement, pay slip, ESI card, Insurance cover and they must be allowed to take the same along with them, when they leave the factories.
6. Proper code of conduct for Hostels in the factories should be formulated and the hostels must be monitored by the Department of Social Welfare, which should ensure that all the mills, with 50 female workers, should have nurses and crèches.
7. The Campaign demands that the young women workers above 18 years of age, who have completed 480 days of work in two years in the mills, as per the Tamil Nadu Industrial Establishments (Conferment of Permanent Status to Workmen) Act (1981) must be made permanent with all labour benefits and social security measures under the labour laws.
8. The Campaign calls for the attention of all political parties to look into gross labour rights violations under the existing labour laws such as The Minimum Wages Act (1948), Weekly Holidays Act (1942), The Employees State Insurance Act (1948), The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1976), Payment of Bonus Act (1965), The Employees Provident Fund Act (1952), Factories Act (1948), The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act (1970), and the Apprentices Act 1961.
9. Hundreds of young women workers have met with accidents at work place and suffer grievous injuries, at times death, but not received adequate compensation. Government of Tamil Nadu should issue orders to the respective mills to pay compensation to those women affected physically and mentally as per the Workmen's Compensation Act (1923) and the Industrial Dispute Act (1947). These accidents and deaths should be registered as FIRs in the concerned police stations.
10. The Campaign demands that the Government of Tamil Nadu issue orders to the mills to pay the promised amount, as per the contract under the scheme, with bank interest to all those adolescent girls and young women, who had worked earlier under the scheme for 3 years or in some cases more, but not received the contract amount. And the mills should pay the minimum wages for the number of days they had worked in the mills during the period.

11. The Campaign demands that anti-sexual Harassment Committees with due women representation must be formed at all work places, where women work and the same must be monitored, as per the Supreme Court guidelines in Vaisaka judgement. There must be proper monitoring of the functioning of other committees such as Grievance or Internal Complaint Committee, Health and Safety Committee, Canteen Committee, as per the Factories Act 1948.
12. All labour benefits and privileges enjoyed by the workers of National Textile Corporation should be given to all mill workers in private mills.
13. As per the Trade Union Act 1926, and under the Collective Bargaining Act, all registered Trade Unions should be allowed to function freely and to engage in collective bargaining fruitfully.
14. The Centre and the State should take effective steps to explore possibilities on alternate employment opportunities for rural work force with the available local resources, including strengthening of agriculture so that largescale migration of adolescent girls from poor families to urban centres be stopped and their livelihood rights are ensured. They should ensure that the benefit of the welfare schemes meant for the empowerment of rural women have reached them properly.
15. The Campaign demands that the Government of Tamil Nadu should constitute district level monitoring committees under the chairmanship of District Collectors, with the participation of civil society organizations working for labour rights, child rights and women empowerment. These committees should inspect all the textile mills to ascertain the facts like number of girls and young women workers engaged under Sumangali Scheme, and human rights and labour rights violations faced by them and the facilities available at the workplace.

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