

Aajeevika Bureau – The Organisation That Made Invisible Workers Visible

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Skill Development

Published: May 2026 · Last reviewed: —

Ramesh Kumar was a stone carver from Rajasthan. He and fifty others had spent more than a year building statues for a temple in Gujarat. The work was completed. The promised pay — more than Rs 5 lakh — never came. The contractor had disappeared. Ramesh and his colleagues had no contract, no documentation of their employment, no relationship with any institution that could help them. They were invisible in the economy they had served.

Through Aajeevika Bureau's legal aid support, Ramesh and his colleagues eventually recovered their wages. The story took months of mediation and legal pressure. It is a story that happens thousands of times every year across India's informal labour market. Aajeevika Bureau exists to be there when it happens.

Who They Are

Aajeevika Bureau was founded in 2005 by Rajiv Khandelwal and Krishnavatar Sharma — both Ashoka Fellows with professional backgrounds in development work in Rajasthan. Their founding observation was specific: income from migrant work had become central to the survival of rural households in southern Rajasthan's tribal communities, but the conditions under which migration happened — no contracts, no social protection, no recourse when wages were stolen or work was hazardous — revealed a crisis that no institution was systematically addressing.

Aajeevika focuses on seasonal, circular migrant workers: the population that moves between rural Rajasthan (Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Bhilwara, Sirohi, and adjacent districts) and urban Gujarat and Maharashtra, undertaking casual construction, manufacturing, stone carving, and service work that urban economies depend on but that urban institutions systematically ignore.

India had 40.2 crore domestic migrants in 2023 according to the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. Aajeevika's focus population — the seasonal circular migrant, most vulnerable because of the total absence of social security in their lives — is the largest and least protected subset of this already-invisible category.

The Rs 120 Crore Wage Recovery

Over two decades, Aajeevika Bureau has helped 12 lakh migrant workers reclaim Rs 120 crore in wages. This figure — verified through their legal aid programme records — represents stolen, withheld, or fraudulently withheld wages recovered through mediation, legal aid, and collective worker pressure.

Rs 120 crore is not an abstract number. It is 12 lakh families' food security, children's school fees, medical costs, and accumulated debt repayments. It is the difference between a migration that built household resilience and one that perpetuated extraction.

The LabourLine and India Labour Line

Aajeevika's LabourLine, operational since 2011, receives an average of 5,000 calls monthly from workers across Rajasthan and Gujarat. Workers call because their wages haven't been paid, because they've been injured with no compensation, because their employer has threatened deportation, because they need to navigate the BOCWA (Building and Other Construction Workers) welfare board system that technically covers them but practically ignores them.

The India Labour Line (ILL) — 1800-833-9020 — is the scaled version of LabourLine, now operational in 13 cities across 9 states. As of June 2024, ILL had registered approximately 21,000 cases and recovered a sum of Rs 21 crore. The helpline model — simple, accessible, immediate, operating in workers' own languages — is the institutional form through which Aajeevika converts legal rights into lived reality for people who would otherwise have no access to either.

The 15,000 Ujala Samuoh Women

At the rural end of the migration channel, as men migrate seasonally to Gujarat and Maharashtra, women remain in Rajasthan managing household agriculture and care. Their labour is invisible and unpaid. Aajeevika's Family Empowerment Programme organises these women into hamlet-level solidarity groups — Ujala Samoohs — that currently number 15,000 across rural southern Rajasthan.

The Samoohs are platforms through which women cultivate mutual concern, articulate their needs, and claim entitlements from local administration. They are also collective insurance against the specific vulnerabilities of women whose partners are absent: wage pressure, agricultural risk, healthcare access, domestic violence without the social witness of community presence.

Ujala Samoohs federate into Block-level Ujala Sangathans — a structure that parallels the SHG federation model but is specifically designed for the economic and social conditions of migration-source communities rather than standard rural development contexts.

The Odisha Migration Corridor

Aajeevika's documentation specifically identifies Odisha as one of the expanded out-migration regions — alongside Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Districts like Bolangir, Kalahandi, and Nuapada send 2 lakh+ workers annually to brick kilns and construction sites in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The conditions that Aajeevika addresses in Rajasthan's tribal communities are identical to those facing Odisha's tribal migrant workers: no contracts, no social protection, no wage security, no access to legal aid at destination, and families left behind navigating agricultural and care responsibilities alone. Aajeevika's model — source-destination presence, legal aid helplines, worker collectives, women's solidarity groups — is directly applicable to Odisha's migration corridors.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: aajeevika.org | **India Labour Line:** 1800-833-9020 | Udaipur, Rajasthan headquarters

Key evidence:

- The Better India: *12 Lakh Migrant Workers Win Dignity & Rs 120 Crore Wages With Aajeevika Bureau* (October 2025)
- Aajeevika website: aajeevika.org/what-we-do-program — LabourLine, Ujala Samoohs, STEP Academy documentation
- Global Fund to End Modern Slavery: Aajeevika case study on migrant construction workers
- India Exclusion Report: *Protection of Wages of Seasonal Circular Migrant Labour* — Aajeevika research contribution

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