

# Review of: "Understanding Bonded Labor: A Traditional System of Slavery in India"

Bibhuti Bhushan Malik<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University

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## Understanding Bonded Labour: A Traditional System of Slavery in India

### Introduction and Context

The article "Understanding Bonded Labour: A Traditional System of Slavery in India" by **Nirmal Joseph Das** and **Dr. S. Rama Gokula Krishnan** provides an insightful examination of bonded labour, a practice the authors characterise as a form of modern-day slavery. Rooted in historical and social structures, particularly the caste system, bonded labour continues to be a significant issue in contemporary India. The paper frames bonded labour as not only an economic problem but also a human rights violation that affects millions, particularly those from marginalised communities such as Dalits and Adivasis.

### Comprehensive Analysis of Bonded Labour

The authors' deep dedication to understanding and addressing bonded labour is one of the paper's core strengths. They provide an in-depth historical background, tracing the origins of bonded labour within India's socio-economic and caste hierarchies. The discussion expands to the various forms of bonded labour across multiple sectors, such as agriculture, brick kilns, construction, and sex work. This wide-ranging coverage adds significant value to understanding the diverse manifestations of this exploitative practice.

The authors also address the legal framework, specifically the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976. Despite this legislation, the paper highlights the challenges in enforcement and the persistence of this exploitative system, primarily due to inadequate legal oversight and the failure to rehabilitate victims effectively.

### Economic and Social Dimensions

The paper effectively underscores the economic and social factors that sustain the system of bonded labour. By tying labour exploitation to broader issues like landlessness, poverty, and caste-based discrimination, the authors provide a multifaceted view of why this system endures. The article emphasizes the authors' deep understanding of the cyclical nature of debt bondage, where entire families are trapped for generations, perpetuating a system that benefits the powerful while marginalising the most vulnerable sections of society.

## Psychological Impacts and Human Rights

The article focuses well on economic exploitation and the psychological toll of bonded labour. The authors discuss the severe mental health impacts on individuals and families subjected to extreme working conditions, physical violence, and degrading treatment. They link this to broader discussions of human rights, pointing out how bonded labour violates fundamental rights protected under both Indian law and international human rights frameworks.

## Critique of Existing Frameworks

A significant contribution of the article is its critique of the current efforts to combat bonded labour. The authors argue that, despite the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and other related laws, enforcement remains weak, and rehabilitation efforts for freed labourers are inadequate. The paper suggests that governmental and non-governmental initiatives must improve to address the scale of the issue effectively. The authors also stress the need for more robust international engagement and awareness to bring adequate attention to this hidden form of slavery.

## Areas for Further Improvement

While the paper is well-researched and thorough in its secondary analysis, it could benefit from incorporating more empirical data. First-hand accounts or interviews with bonded labourers would provide a more nuanced perspective and humanise the broader socio-economic analysis. Additionally, including data on recent efforts and successes in combating bonded labour would offer a more balanced and comprehensive view of the current situation.

## Conclusion

"Understanding Bonded Labour: A Traditional System of Slavery in India" is a critical and well-structured examination of one of India's most pressing labour issues. It makes a compelling case for strengthening both legal enforcement and rehabilitation measures. The authors draw attention to the intersection of economic, social, and legal factors perpetuating bonded labour, offering valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and human rights advocates.