

Caste, Gender and Forced & Bonded Labour

Caste discrimination

Caste-based discrimination and similar forms of inherited social exclusion affect an estimated 260 million people around the world. Members of the affected communities experience systemic discrimination, and oftensevere violations of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Despite longstanding constitutional, legislative and affirmative action measures in caste-affected countries, implementation is lacking and the gross human rights abuses persists.

Forced & bonded labour

Forced and bonded labour, resulting in a loss of control over labour conditions and terms of work, is one of the most severe forms of caste-based discrimination and violence faced by caste-affected communities. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to these modern forms of slavery because of their socio-economic status.

While, it is uncertain how many forced labourers come from a lower caste background, the ILO estimates that the incidence of bonded labour remains particularly severe among Dalits and indigenous peoples in Asia. According to Anti-Slavery International, the vast majority of bonded labourers (around 90%) are predominantly from scheduled castes and minority groups.

“ILO research shows a clear link in Asian countries between forced labour and long-standing patterns of discrimination. In India, the overwhelming majority of bonded labour victims in agriculture, brick making, mining and other sectors are from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes” Gulnara Shahinian, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Weak economic positions and lack of access to resources increase the dependence of Dalits on wage labour. Further, extreme poverty forces Dalits to take up loans and they hold no other assets to lever their debt other than their labour. In addition to poverty, practices of social exclusion of Dalits push them into bondage.

The intersection of caste, gender and forced & bonded labour

Dalit women are particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination and are denied access to justice because of their socio-economic status and severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations. Often women and girls from caste-affected communities face multiple forms of violence including sexual violence, trafficking, abduction and abuse as well as forced and bonded labour and slavery.

Dalit women are specifically used as debt slaves in brick kilns, agriculture and textile industries and are heavily involved in caste-based forms of slavery including manual scavenging and forced prostitution. *Manual scavenging*, the removing of human excreta from dry latrines, railroad tracks and sewers by hand, is a caste-based and hereditary occupation form of slavery reserved exclusively for Dalits.

Caste and Forced & Bonded Labour links

Resources from IDSN

[IDSN webpage on Dalit women, Forced and bonded labour, Manual scavenging, Forced Prostitution, IDSN Submission on Forced Marriage and Forced Prostitution of Dalit Women \(2012\)](#)

Key Reports

[Cleaning Human Waste: Manual Scavenging, Caste, and Discrimination in India](#)” Human Rights Watch, 2014

[Rock Bottom: Modern Slavery and Child Labour in South Indian Granite Quarries](#), Stop Child Labour (SCL) and India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) May 2015

[Flawed Fabrics: The abuse of girls and women workers in the South Indian textile industry](#), Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations & India Committee of the Netherlands, 2014

[Modern Slavery in India – Bonded Labour Cases \(Franciscans International, 2012, Report\)](#)

[India's Childhood in the "Pits"](#) , Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Children - Samata, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, March 2010

[Tainted Carpets: Slavery and Child Labor in India's Hand-Made Carpet Sector](#), Harvard University, 2014

[Diversity in the workforce: why it is good for business](#), Ashwini Deshpande, Professor of Economics

[The Haratin in Mauritania – Minority Rights Group briefing](#)

[“Bonded Labor: Tackling the System of Slavery in South Asia”](#) Siddharth Kara, Harvard University, 2012

[Forced and Bonded Labour in Nepal \(Anti-Slavery International, 2009, Publication\)](#)

[Poverty, Discrimination and Slavery: The reality of bonded labour in India, Nepal and Pakistan](#) Anti-Slavery International, 2008

[Bonded Labour in Pakistan – An Overview](#) , ILO, 2001

[Bonded Labour in India: Its incidence and Pattern](#), Ravi S. Srivastava, published by the International Labour Office, Geneva, June 2005

Videos & photos on caste-based forced and bonded labour

[Witness: Freeing Women From Cleaning Human Waste \(2014, HRW, Manual Scavenging, India\)](#)

[In pictures: India's 'untouchable' scavengers \(BBC\)](#)

[New documentary on caste-based prostitution coming up \(Video\)](#)

[Slavery's last stronghold – CNN Documentary on caste-based slavery in Mauritania \(CNN, 2012, Report\)](#)

[On the trail of human trafficking: forced labor in Nepal \(CNN\)](#)

[Caste System Traps Nepal's 'Hereditary Prostitutes' \(2010, Video\)](#)

[End the Practice of Manual Scavenging \(Community Photo Project, PhotoVoice, 2009\)](#)

Examples of forced & bonded labour of Dalit women

Forced prostitution

Thousands of Dalit girls are also *forced into prostitution* every year. The link between caste and forced prostitution is apparent in the Devadasi and Jogini systems practiced in India. 93% of Devadasi are from Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and 7% are from Scheduled Tribes (indigenous) in India. In Nepal, many Badi women (Dalit sub-caste) are forced into prostitution and trafficking.

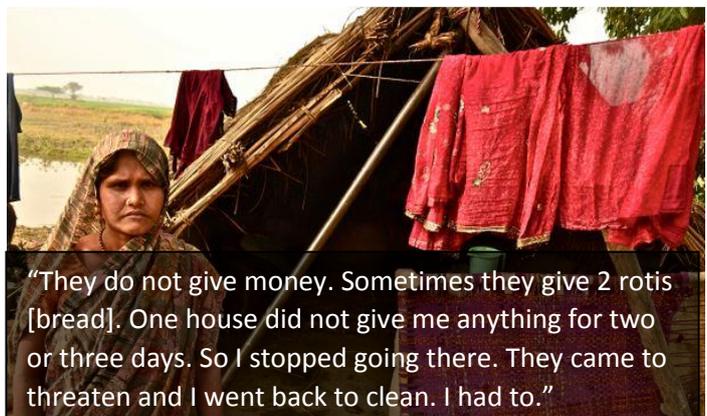
CRC, CEDAW, CESCR, CERD and the Special Rapporteur on Racism have all expressed concern over these caste-based systems of forced prostitution.



Manual scavenging

Manual scavenging, the removing of human excreta from dry latrines, railroad tracks and sewers by hand, is a caste-based form of slavery reserved exclusively for Dalits. It is estimated that around 1.3 million Dalits in India, with 98% of those being women, are forced into manual scavenging.

CEDAW, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the Special Rapporteur on Slavery have all expressed concern over Dalit women engaging in manual scavenging.

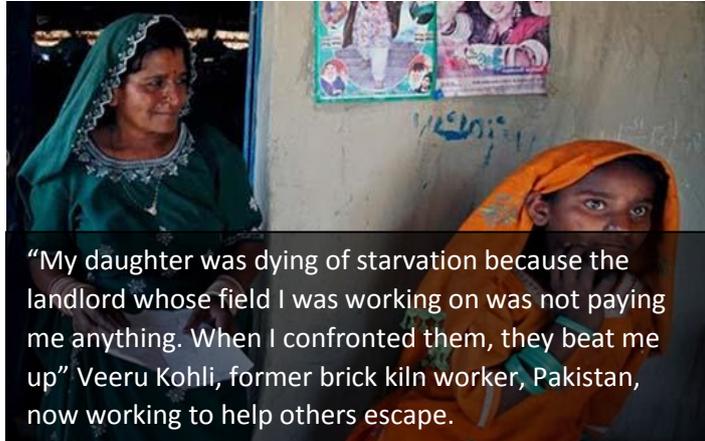


"Manual scavenging is not a career chosen voluntarily by workers, but is instead a deeply unhealthy, unsavoury and undignified job forced upon these people because of the stigma attached to their caste." Navi Pillay, Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Brick Kilns

In Pakistan and India thousands of Dalit women are working in indirect bonded labour in the Brick Kiln industry.

Studies have shown that these workers are predominantly Dalits or from minority groups. Women and girl children are typically considered the property of brick kiln owners and may suffer from sexual abuse and violence. Whole families are enslaved and work long days with little or no compensation.



“My daughter was dying of starvation because the landlord whose field I was working on was not paying me anything. When I confronted them, they beat me up” Veeru Kohli, former brick kiln worker, Pakistan, now working to help others escape.

Textiles - Sumangali Scheme

Teenage girls, predominantly Dalits, are lured to work in South India’s cotton spinning mills under the so called ‘Sumangali Scheme’ (marriage scheme), where they are promised a lump sum for their dowry after completing three years of work. They live in very basic company-run hostels and face threats and violence from factory supervisors. The girls are often trapped in a 68-hour working week, with no contracts or payslips, and being locked inside factory and dormitory compounds during working and non-working hours.



“I do not like the hostel; there is no entertainment and no outside contact and it is very far from the town. It is like a semi-prison.” Young girl working under the Sumangali scheme at a spinning mill in Tamil Nadu

“Caste-based apartheid underpins the ‘camp coolie’ and sumangali systems allowing the powerful to enslave, with impunity, vulnerable workers, often young Dalit women and girls, for the manufacture of textiles and garments for northern hemisphere markets, and hence to derive considerable profits from their enslavement.” Aidan McQuade, Director, Anti-Slavery International

Quotes: Caste and Forced & Bonded Labour

“Slavery emerges at the conjunction of individual vulnerability, social exclusion and failure of rule of law. So it should be no surprise that those countries that tolerate systemic and often institutional discrimination against their citizens on spurious grounds such as caste should also be the ones with the most extensive enslavement of their citizens. Slavery is one of the cruelest manifestations of caste discrimination.” [Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International](#)

“Almost all bonded labourers in South Asia... belong to a minority ethnic group or caste... It is crucial to understand that there remains a stratum of human beings in South Asia who are deemed exploitable and expendable by society at large.” [Siddharth Kara, Expert on Slavery](#)

“Caste discrimination is one of the most pernicious forms of discrimination, as it condemns individuals from birth to a life of marginalisation. The links between caste, social hierarchy and slavery are strong ... In India, the overwhelming majority of bonded labour victims in agriculture, brick making, mining and other sectors are from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.” [Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Ms. Gulnara Shahinian](#)

“While legislation has been adopted to eradicate bonded labour and manual scavenging, reports and interlocutors indicate that there is a consistent failure in the implementation of such laws and a tendency to minimize the significance of the problem.” [UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, 2014 report on India](#)

“Traditional caste rules mandate forced labour from certain communities. Caste is one of the foundations of the bonded labour system and remains a key feature of bondage even in non-agricultural industries today. The lack of access to their own land, combined with this expectation to perform free labour and the threat of violence and economic boycott against those who challenge their expected social roles, keeps many Dalit families in bondage and a perpetual state of poverty.” [India Exclusion Report 2014](#)

“Because India’s jurisprudence remains ill-equipped to stringently provide legal protection for Dalits, human traffickers easily kidnap and lure vulnerable Dalit women and girls into prostitution and child marriage and men and children into bonded labor in factories and on farms.” [Keshar Patel, World Policy Institute, 2014](#)

“A weak rule of law, widespread corruption, and poverty reinforce political, social, and economic structures of modern slavery in Pakistan. Underpinning this are culturally accepted practices that are tantamount to modern slavery... This reinforces perceptions that lower caste groups are not equal citizens and subsequently limits policy and service provisions tailored to their needs.” [2014 Global Slavery Index by the Walk Free Foundation](#)

“Most bonded labourers were Dalits. Dalits who asserted their rights often were attacked, especially in rural areas. As agricultural laborers for higher-caste landowners, Dalits often worked without remuneration.” [US State Department India Report, 2013](#)

“Manual scavenging is not a career chosen voluntarily by workers, but is instead a deeply unhealthy, unsavoury and undignified job forced upon these people because of the stigma attached to their caste. The nature of the work itself then reinforces that stigma.” [Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, 2013](#)

“Millions of children, particularly from vulnerable Dalit, tribal, and Muslim communities, facing discrimination, inadequate support in government schools, and pressures to earn money, soon drop out and start working.” [Human Rights Watch World Report 2015](#)

“Every single child labourer that I have documented comes from a highly impoverished family unit and belongs to a low-caste or minority community.” [Harvard Child Labour Expert, Siddharth Kara](#)

“Caste-based apartheid underpins the ‘camp coolie’ and sumangali systems allowing the powerful to enslave, with impunity, vulnerable workers, often young Dalit women and girls, for the manufacture of textiles and garments for northern hemisphere markets, and hence to derive considerable profits from their enslavement.” [Aidan McQuade, Director, Anti-Slavery International](#)

“During their years of bonded labour, the women were subjected to serious workplace abuses, severe restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and death. The majority of sumangali-bonded laborers came from the SCs [scheduled castes – Dalits] ... most sumangali workers did not report abuses due to fear of retribution.” [Human Rights Watch World Report 2015](#)