



Mains Practice Question

Q. Instances of the prevalence of bonded labour system in India are noticed now and then even long after its abolition. What are the reasons that have kept the bonded labour system still alive? (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce bonded labour briefly
- Mention its historical background
- Highlight how bonded labour is still alive
- Give way out to abolish the bonded labour system
- End with a suitable conclusion

Introduction

The Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976 defines bonded labour system as the system of forced labour under which a debtor enters into a relationship with a creditor that he would render service to him either by himself or through any member of his family for a specific or unspecific period either without wages or nominal wages. Bonded labour is found mostly among lower castes, indigenous peoples, minorities and migrant workers – groups that also suffer from discrimination and social exclusion.

Body

Government of India has adopted a three-pronged strategy for the abolition of bonded labour system:

- The Constitution of India vide Art. 23 prohibits forced labour.
- Central Government enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 to identify and rehabilitate bonded labourers.
- Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour is under implementation since 1978.
- Despite all the measures, instances of bonded labour system continue to grow even after its abolition. The root of the problem lies in the social customs and economic compulsions.
- The main causes of origin, growth and perpetuation of the bonded labour system are economic, social and religious factors which are explained below-
 - The economic causes include extreme poverty of people and inability to find work for a livelihood.
 - Inadequate size of landholdings to support the family.
 - Lack of alternative small-scale loans for the rural and urban poor
 - Natural calamities like drought, floods etc.
 - Discrimination and social exclusion based on religion, ethnicity or caste.
 - Worker illiteracy and lack of access to information.
 - Employer monopolies on local financial and labour markets.
 - Workers are unorganized and have no bargaining position or power.
 - The inadequate education system, poor access to health facilities and unjust social relations, all exemplify such causes.

Conclusion

Bonded labour has changed over the years. It is no longer limited to the traditional power equation in agriculture, in which the lower castes are expected to perform menial tasks in exchange for guaranteed subsistence. The prevalent system today is one of debt bondage that perpetuates poverty. It is important to implement the act of 1976 labour law in its true spirit along with adopting measures such as economic rehabilitation, maintenance of minimum wage, training in arts and crafts, education, allotment of agricultural land, stringent health care system. So, India can free itself from the claws of unjust bondage labour.

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