



Bonded Labour

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The **Haryana Human Rights Commission** flagged a case of a 14-year-old allegedly held as **bonded labour** and abandoned after a serious injury, calling it a violation of human dignity and sparking discussion on bonded labour.

Bonded Labour

- The term 'bonded labour' has been defined by the [National Commission on Labour](#) as "labour which remains in bondage for a specific period for the debt incurred". Individuals are forced to work for creditors, either without pay or for minimal wages.

What are the Key Constitutional and Legal Frameworks Prohibiting Bonded Labour in India?

- **Constitutional Dimensions:**
 - **Article 21:** Guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which includes living with dignity.
 - **Article 23:** Explicitly prohibits human trafficking and forced labour, declaring it unconstitutional.
 - **Article 24:** Prohibits employment of children below 14 years in factories, mines, or hazardous occupations.
- **India's Legal Framework:**
 - **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976:** Abolishes bonded labour, frees bonded labourers from obligations, and criminalises such practices.
 - **Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (amended 2016):** Prohibits children under 14 from working, and restricts adolescents (14-18 years) from hazardous occupations.
 - **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:** Provides for care, protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of children in need.
- **International Legal Obligations:**
 - **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989:** Article 32 mandates protection of children from economic exploitation and hazardous work.
 - **International Labour Organization Conventions:** [Convention 182 \(Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999\)](#) – ratified by India.

What are the Systemic Drivers Behind Bonded Child Labour in India?

- **Mnemonic: BONDAGE**
- **B - Bureaucratic Inefficiency:** Poor enforcement of laws and regulations makes bonded labor

persistent.

- Labour trafficking spans states, but enforcement is localized with no real-time tracking or sharing of missing children databases across states.
- **O - Overwhelming Poverty:** Families living in extreme poverty often resort to bonded child labour as a means of survival, driven by the need to **meet basic economic demands**.
- **N - No Education:** Lack of education opportunities forces children into labor instead of schooling.
 - Additionally, child work is often seen as acceptable in rural settings, especially if disguised as **“apprenticeship”**.
- **D - Debt Traps:** Families often fall into debt, and children work to repay loans with high interest rates.
- **A - Agricultural and Allied Sectors:** Large informal sectors like agriculture exploit children for cheap labor.
- **G - Gender Discrimination:** Gender inequality exacerbates the exploitation, as girls are often more vulnerable to bonded labor.
- **E - Exploitation by Employers:** Employers in unregulated sectors exploit weak laws and poor enforcement, forcing children to work in harsh and exploitative conditions.

What Measures are Needed to Effectively Curb Bonded Child Labour?

- **Mnemonic: RESCUE**
- **R - Revive Law Enforcement:** Strengthen enforcement of the **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976**, by mandating **State Governments to establish Vigilance Committees** with legal authority and digital tracking of complaints.
- **E - Educate Children:** Ensure access to education for all children, as guaranteed under [Article 21A](#) of the Constitution, preventing exploitation and promoting dignity.
 - Provide **vocational education and skill development programs** to offer viable employment alternatives.
- **S - Support Families:** Expand welfare schemes like [Public Distribution System \(PDS\)](#) and [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\)](#) to provide financial stability to vulnerable families.
 - Implement **direct cash transfers to reduce reliance on children's income** and break the **cycle of debt bondage**.
- **C - Create Awareness:** Raise awareness about human dignity and the legal prohibitions on child labor and exploitation, as outlined in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948**, which prohibits slavery and servitude in all forms.
- **U - Unite Communities:** Build community awareness by **encouraging collective responsibility so exploitation is socially unacceptable and harder to hide**.
- **E - Empower NGOs:** Collaborate with **NGOs** to implement the [Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded laborers \(2021\)](#), focusing on the social and economic reintegration of freed bonded laborers.

Related Keywords for Mains

- **“Childhood, Not Chains”:** End bonded labour and protect minors’ rights.
- **“Dignity Over Duty”:** Treat humans as ends, not tools of profit.
- **“Education, Not Exploitation”:** Ensure every child’s right to learn.
- **“Protect Today, Prosper Tomorrow”:** Safeguard children to secure society’s future.
- **“Laws in Action, Not Just Words”:** Enforce anti-bonded labour and child protection laws.
- **“Justice for All, Inequality for None”:** Break cycles of caste and social exploitation.
- **“Care, Not Cruelty”:** Society must uphold the duty of care to vulnerable minors.
- **“From Slavery to Freedom”:** Abolish bonded labour, empower communities.

Bonded labour and exploitation of minors violate human dignity and perpetuate social inequality. Discuss.

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