Debt Bondage Slavery in Contemporary India:
Sociopolitical Factors and Possibilities of Change

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ABSTRACT

Debt Bondage Slavery in Contemporary India:
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Debt bondage slavery in India has been moderately researched in recent years, yet much of the data has not been aggregated. This paper aims to assemble historical and contemporary research on the practice of debt bondage as well as factors that may be considered conducive to the continued practice of debt bondage slavery, such as caste-based inequality, land distribution, and political corruption. The efficacy of factors that may be considered deterrents from debt bondage will also be examined, such as democracy, antislavery laws, and the work of non-governmental organizations. Recommendations will be made to eradicate caste discrimination and for the Government of India to revise its budget expenditures to increase funding for social programs and meet the human rights standards of all citizens, including bonded laborers.
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Introduction

The magnitude of slavery in India has not received the attention it deserves in the global arena. There have been multiple investigations in recent years to determine the incidence and prevalence of modern slavery worldwide, and it has been discovered that debt bondage in India is the most prevalent form of slavery in practice today. Although there is an abundance of data to support these findings, the Indian government has not allotted sufficient effort to end the practice of debt bondage. It is apparent that India has unique attributes that have allowed slavery to persist over a great length of time, and allowed slaves to exist in greater numbers than any other country on Earth.

The objectives of this paper are to outline the sociopolitical context in India that has allowed for the continuation of slavery, describe the practice of debt bondage in India, identify the current antislavery laws and organizations, and recommend interventions that may improve the present set of circumstances.
1. Understanding India

1.1 India’s Unique Identity

India has the world’s second largest population in excess of 1 billion people; therefore it is conceivable that some unlawful practices have managed to elude the Indian government system. Additionally India has one of the youngest and most vulnerable populations, with 446,960,000 people under 18 years old (126,642,000 of whom are under 5).¹ There is an incongruous economic environment in India, in that over 75% of its people live on under $2 per day yet it has one of the fastest-growing economies (GDP growth was 9% in 2007)² and is emerging as a world leader. These factors demonstrate that India has a unique demographic which is difficult to supervise; and is susceptible to the coercion and will of deceitful slave brokers, landowners, and business owners.

The Indian government has reached a point at which decisions must be made in order to strike a balance between the welfare of its people and rapid economic growth. In the current climate it seems a small percentage of citizens have benefited from India’s progress, while the majority have been excluded. India presents the world with two faces: one is a flourishing economy made up of industries ranging from textiles to computer software; the other is a network of destitute slums and rural villages whose residents are without assets and access to resources.

1.2 The Caste System

It is imperative to examine the caste system in order to achieve an understanding of the social structure in India. This system of social hierarchy is one of the most important contributing factors to debt bondage slavery. The caste system has been described as “uniquely Indian”\(^3\) and it is unlikely that slavery would exist without it, since the majority of slaves are Dalits (the lowest group, actually outside the traditional Varna system of caste).

Caste is one of the oldest customs in India, the roots of which date back more than three thousand years. In theory, the hierarchy consists of four tiers, or varnas. These varnas include the Brahmins, the highest caste traditionally of priests and scholars; the Kshatriyas, who were warriors and rulers; the Vaishya, merchants; and the Shudra, peasants, laborers, and servants. The Dalit have been known as the “Untouchables” (including Scheduled Castes/SCs and Scheduled Tribes/STs, which will be referred to as Dalits for the purposes of this paper) and were not part of the original ranking system. Technically speaking they remain outside of the varna structure today.\(^4\) Currently there are many Brahmins who are typically land or business owners, and profit from the labor of the Dalits.

In reality, the varna model of caste is not as black-and-white as many westerners believe. M.N. Srinivas, a “founding father” of Indian sociology and social anthropology wrote, “The varna-model has produced a wrong and distorted image of caste. It is necessary for the sociologist to free himself from the hold of the varna-model if he wishes to understand the caste system.” In most locations the Brahmins are placed at the

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top and the Untouchables at the bottom, but the castes in between are largely ambiguous. Srinivas has also reported that the dominant caste usually takes precedence over the higher caste, as long as the dominant caste is at least of median status. For example if there are Brahmins living in a village that is predominantly made up of Vaishyas, it is likely that the Vaishyas will hold the positions of economic and political power.\(^5\)

British Parliament passed the Government of India Act (1935) with the intention of balancing British and Indian economic interests, yet according to Jawaharlal Nehru the reality was that it strengthened the roles of elites (both British and Indian) while excluding the possibility of interference by representatives of the Indian people.\(^6\) There was a broad separation of Brahmin and “non-Brahmin” castes included in the Act, presumably to simplify the structure of the caste system for British understanding. The “non-Brahmin” groups became classified into the categories of “backward classes” and “depressed classes,” which later became “Scheduled Castes.”\(^7\) It is important to remember that individuals are “born into” their caste status; therefore caste affiliations have little to do with life choices and are largely beyond one’s control.

British colonial rule enforced the continuation of the caste system, in a manner that was concurrently synthetic and genuine. Jawaharlal Nehru, a leader of the Indian independence movement and first prime minister of India, believed that prior to British rule the significance of the caste system had begun to decline. It may be deduced that British colonialism severely hindered India’s path of natural development, and emphasized outdated ideals that continue to plague the present. In *The Discovery of India*.

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\(^5\) Srinivas, 169.
\(^7\) Srinivas, 245.
India, Nehru suggested that India’s social development was “arrested by the British power” and that the British authority:

Based itself on force and encouraged groups and classes which had ceased to have any real significance. Indian life thus progressively became more artificial, for many of the individuals and groups who seemed to play an important role in it had no vital power...They became straw-stuffed symbols or protégés of foreign authority, thereby cutting themselves further from the living currents of the nation.⁸

The importance placed on the caste system by the British has had dire consequences. Inequality was ingrained in British-ruled India. Nicholas B. Dirks has posited that “Caste became the colonial form of civil society; it justified the denial of political rights to Indian subjects (not citizens) and explained the necessity of colonial rule.”⁹ India is deeply steeped in tradition, and caste has been socially accepted and tolerated throughout history especially since its reinforcement during the British Colonial era. Although the Indian Constitution (passed in 1950) includes numerous articles that serve specifically to terminate all forms of “Untouchability,” discrimination, and exclusion according to caste (as well as race, sex, or religion), the reality is that caste is still a detrimental and obstructive factor for the “weak” or lower classes.¹⁰

In 2009, the U.S. Department of State published its annual Human Rights Report for India (USHRRRI). There were many cases of violence, rights violations, and discrimination against the Dalits, regardless of the laws, policies, and constitutional rights to the contrary. It can be inferred from this report that many individuals of middle or higher caste status in India, as well as law enforcement officials, do not value the Dalit as fellow human beings. The USHRRRI made the following statement:

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⁸ Nehru, 385.
⁹ Dirks, 16.
The law provides that the practice of untouchability…is a punishable offense. This type of discrimination remained ubiquitous, however. Although the law protects Dalits, in practice they faced significant discrimination in access to services such as health care and education, attending temples, and marriage… Most bonded laborers were Dalits. Dalits who asserted their rights were often attacked, especially in rural areas. As agricultural laborers for higher-caste landowners, Dalits often worked without remuneration. Crimes committed by upper-caste Hindus against Dalits often went unpunished, either because the authorities failed to prosecute or because victims did not report the crimes for fear of retaliation.\footnote{U.S. Department of State, Human Rights Report for India, available from http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136087.htm: accessed 5 April 2010.}

Although the U.S. Government issues such alarming reports each year little progress has been made in terms of ending caste discrimination. India’s Dalit remains an oppressed group, many of whom experience debilitating fear that discourages individuals from meeting their constitutional rights and basic human needs.

Human Rights Watch, an international human rights advocacy organization, has also done thorough investigations of various contemporary social issues in India. A 2007 report entitled “India: ‘Hidden Apartheid’ of Discrimination against Dalits” included numerous accounts of caste-based discrimination. These acts of discrimination were commonly done by the Indian Police as well as individual citizens of higher caste, and often ignored and/or condoned by the government. Human Rights Watch also reported that it is common for police to witness atrocities against Dalits without retribution, and officers have been known to engage in such acts alongside the perpetrators.\footnote{Human Rights Watch, “India: ‘Hidden Apartheid’ of Discrimination against Dalits.” Human Rights Watch 19 (2007): 8.} Acts of discrimination came in various forms: arbitrary detention, rape, torture, murder, withholding of resources (including disaster relief), and segregation or complete exclusion from schools, religious services, housing, public services, and private
businesses. A particularly notable point included in this HRW report was a quote from India’s Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh:

Dalits have faced a unique discrimination in our society that is fundamentally different from the problems of minority groups in general. The only parallel to the practice of ‘untouchability’ was Apartheid in South Africa. Untouchability is not just social discrimination. It is a blot on humanity.

To help illustrate the conditions the Dalit are subjected to, many documents published by NGOs, government agencies, Indian newspaper articles, etc. include detailed reports of acts of violence by higher castes and police. In many cases of discrimination, the motives were retaliatory. One report stated that a girl resisted rape and lost her arm as a result. A case from Andhra Pradesh reported that one Dalit argued with an upper-caste farmer, then a group of upper-caste individuals attacked 80 Dalit families and initiated a Dalit boycott, which completely barred their access to basic means of subsistence. Most of the reports of violence against Dalit go unpunished because they are underreported, due to fear of further retaliation.

When considering the frequency of crimes committed against Dalits, it is important to bear in mind the magnitude of the population in question. In 2001 India’s Census reported that Scheduled Castes (SCs) accounted for 16% of the population at 166,635,700 people. When combined with the number of Scheduled Tribes (84,326,240) the number of Dalits in India climbs to 250,961,940. This number is larger than the population of Indonesia (at 240,271,522 in 2009), meaning if the Dalit population formed its own country it would replace Indonesia as the 4th most populous.

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16 Government of India (2001), *India Census*.
country in the world. The extent of caste discrimination is not a matter to be taken lightly, yet it seems that Western alienation from this population has resulted in its dismissal on the whole.

1.3 Social Mobility

Within the confines of the caste system there are limited possibilities for social mobility, which are related to the fluidity of local politics and the acquisition of land. Few measures have been taken by the government to provide Dalits with access to opportunities for upward mobility. Technically, it is required by law for a percentage of political seats to be reserved for members of the Dalit. Political reservations have been largely ineffectual in promoting equal opportunities for Dalits because they are only valid in the formal public sector. More than 90% of Dalit work in the private sector, and therefore remain unprotected by government sponsored affirmative action programs.

There is also pervasive caste discrimination within the political sphere. In an example from Tamil Nadu, a few Dalits were successful in acquiring leadership roles within a local panchayat (village council). Members of the local higher caste murdered the Dalit leaders, despite their seats being reserved for Dalits in the constitution.

Land acquisition is another potential means of upward mobility for Dalit, but in reality it is nearly impossible. The system of land distribution in India has been classified as a farce, because land reform laws have neither been implemented nor enforced. Throughout agrarian history upper castes have been the primary landholders in India. There were periods of semi-feudal land management and tenancy structures until the

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18 Srinivas, 187.
arrival of British colonists. The British did not understand the Indian system of land distribution that seemed to have multiple proprietors per plot, so a more Western system was implemented which tied one person to a plot of land. In the new system the British assigned individual zamindars (landlords) to act as intermediaries between the cultivating peasants and the British authority figures. The zamindars had no legal ownership of the land, yet the British were unaware of this from the beginning. Once the British became aware of the traditional hierarchical agrarian structure they realized that it was common for landlords to abuse their power, and that the laborers’ rights must be protected.

During the period of British occupation emphasis was put on the advancement of agricultural production through the use of Western technology. Progress was limited and concentrated in few isolated areas; which left most of the agricultural sector to operate under traditional means of production. India’s National Commission on Human Rights has concluded that “agricultural labour bondage was higher in states and districts characterised by a high percentage of rural labourers, low irrigation and agricultural productivity and poor infrastructure,” which are side effects of the botched land reform movement.

The period of post-independence agrarian reform included eight “Five Year Plan[s]” between 1951 and 1990 to change the land distribution process in rural India. Multiple issues were addressed in these plans, including abolition of intermediaries (landlords), establishment of a ceiling (upper limit) for landholdings, infrastructure

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24 Bandyopadhyay, A-152.
improvement (i.e. roads, irrigation), and ensuring speedy implementation of such reforms. In spite of the substantial governmental effort for agrarian reform, it has been noted that, “After more than four decades of planned efforts the basic nature of land system has at best undergone only a marginal change.”26 When the government issued recommendations for land reform measures, they were “resisted, circumvented, diluted and denied by persisting coalitions of landholding interests.”27

Currently, there are still landlords who do not have legal rights to the land they claim as their own. This creates an interesting dichotomy because the landlords do not actually cultivate the land, and the cultivators have no rights to own the land. There have been peasant movements to shift a percentage of land ownership or crop to the cultivators, which have not made significant progress.28 During the late 1970s into the 1980s there were noteworthy conflicts in rural areas throughout India due to discontent within the agrarian system. There was widespread violence as laborers began to mobilize against their landlords, as well as dissatisfaction on behalf of landlords and laborers with the inconsistent implementation of land reform efforts. The reports of rural hostility reached the central government, and were effective in deterring officials from further reform actions.29

Discrimination and corruption are largely to blame for restricted access to land ownership for the Dalit. Acts of discrimination often involve violence, and police corruption is an important element of the continuation of such practices. Relationships

26 Bandyopadhyay, A-155.
27 Jannuzi, 168.
29 Jannuzi, 174.
between rural landlords and law officers are rather common, as most landlords are well connected in local politics, police, etc. Such relationships involve police officers receiving payoffs from landlords in exchange for “protection” from the law (i.e. impunity).\textsuperscript{30} There is often a conflict of interest in providing the Dalit with access to land because, “Political leaders are either landowners themselves or have close political and social links with land-owners, and those relying on cheap or bonded labor, including child labor.”\textsuperscript{31} Dalit landlessness is related to the lack of access to land, inability to own land, and forced evictions, all of which are enforced by the overt oppression of higher castes and local police.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} E. Benjamin Skinner, \textit{A Crime So Monstrous: Face-to-Face with Modern Day Slavery} (New York: Free Press, 2008), 223.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Human Rights Watch (2007), 37.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Human Rights Watch (2007), 11.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
2. Debt Bondage Slavery in India

2.1 Background and Conditions of Debt Bondage

Debt bondage is commonly referred to as “forced labor” or “bonded labor;” terms that can be classified as euphemisms for slavery. The current research on the prevalence of slavery in India is quite disparate. Kevin Bales, a leading researcher of modern slavery, estimated that the total number of slaves in India is between 18 and 22 million (the highest concentration of slaves in the world).33 A 2003 report by Human Rights Watch proposed that there are between 20 and 65 million bonded laborers in India. The same report stated that between 2000 and 2002 the Indian Government reported that 1,795 bonded laborers had been identified.34 The International Labour Office published a study by Ravi S. Srivastava that outlined the available information on the incidence of bonded labor by province, including data dating back to the 1970s, and did not attempt to consolidate the data into a total number of bonded laborers.35 These differences show that there is not a definition of debt bondage or bonded labor that scholars have agreed upon, and that the number of slaves is highly disputed.

Agricultural debt bondage slavery is directly related to land possession. In India families who were once free (typically landless) farmers fell upon hardship and saw no other choice but to take out a loan from a local landlord in order to keep working the land. Without any form of assets or belongings the debtors (and their families, if

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35 Srivastava.
applicable) pledge their own lives and labor as collateral against the debt to the landlord. Having bonded laborers instead of paid employees is advantageous for Indian landlords because their profits can exceed fifty percent, compared to less than one percent if paid minimum wage.\textsuperscript{36} The debts are not considered legitimate by any governmental authority, yet are upheld by the landlord often over many generations. Working to pay off debt without receiving wages leads to the trap of bondage. During the period of bondage families accrue more debt when there is a need for medical care, additional foodstuffs, to hold a ceremony (i.e. wedding or funeral), if a worker is fined for absence or stealing, etc.\textsuperscript{37} The landlord, or creditor, tacks the cost of such necessities onto the debtors existing debt. Additionally, the standard operating procedure for Indian landlords is that all of the workers’ labor is applied against the only interest of the debt (interest rates can amount to over 100\%)\textsuperscript{38} and the principal must be paid in cash.\textsuperscript{39}

Once a contract is established with a landlord it is nearly impossible to break it. Technically a slave is free once he pays off his debt, but the landlords do not allow the debtors to accrue any capital. Most landlords provide their slaves with meager rations to meet only the minimum level of subsistence. Any “wages” earned for daily labor are applied towards the interest on the debt, which is certainly an inaccurate figure concocted by the landlord. Since the majority of slaves in India are illiterate and innumerate agreements between slaves and landlords are typically verbal, and therefore difficult for debtors to contest because the landlords are the supreme authority. All bonded laborers work under the threat of imminent violence, which makes resistance to authority

\textsuperscript{38} Skinner, 205.
\textsuperscript{39} Bales (1999): 203.
improbable. Debts are passed to the wives and children of slaves in the event of death, escape, imprisonment, etc. In the event that a new landlord or business owner acquires the establishment from the previous owner, the debt “accounts” are sold to the new proprietor rather than canceled. These debt transfers are one of the only ways to change employers once a loan is taken.40

Existing research on the origins of debt bondage slavery is neither detailed nor widely available. Bales has theorized, “What we often call the beginnings of human history are also the beginnings of bondage. About 11,000 years ago this settling began in…the plains of India.”41 In a separate work Bales also suggested that debt bondage in India is at least 1,500 years old.42 According to Krishna Upadhyaya bonded labor was first identified in Bihar in 1858.43 Although Indians have diverse ethnic origins and speak a vast number of languages and dialects, it has been hypothesized that “there are very few things that are common to all of India, but bondage might be one of them.”44

Eighteen states throughout India have documented cases of debt bondage: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttrakhand, and West Bengal (see Appendix).45 Debt bondage is the most common form of slavery in the world, and an estimated 80% of bonded laborers in India

42 Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, eds., To Plead Our Own Cause: Personal Stories by Today’s Slaves (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 42.
work in the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{46} As reported by Antislavery International, other Indian industries that employ bonded laborers include brick kilns, stone quarries, silk farms and industries, rice mills, salt pans, fisheries, mines, forestry, match and firework industries, tea and cardamom farming, shrimp farming, bidi (cigarette) industry, domestic work, and textiles.\textsuperscript{47}

There are various negative effects of bonded labor on individuals. The most obvious are personal injury or death inflicted by landlords, but there is an array of industry-specific ailments that are likely to afflict people who spend nearly all of their waking hours performing the same task. An example of a quarry related disease is silicosis, often referred to as “Shankargarh-wali TB” (tuberculosis of Shankargarh) by bonded laborers in stone quarries of Shankargarh, Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{48} Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by inhalation of dust containing free crystalline silica, which causes other respiratory conditions such as tuberculosis and emphysema. Silicosis is irreversible and continues to progress after exposure to the contaminant stops, eventually resulting in death.\textsuperscript{49} Not only does the practice of enslavement destroy individuals’ livelihoods, there are also significantly damaging side effects from the nature of the work itself.

The conditions of agricultural debt bondage are so inhumane that thousands of farmers, when faced with the possibility of a lifetime in bondage, have chosen to commit suicide instead.\textsuperscript{50} A recent article reported that over 180,000 Indian farmers have

\textsuperscript{48} Skinner, 212.
\textsuperscript{50} Skinner, 215.
committed suicide since 1997 because of their formidable debts. The Indian government attempted to cancel the farmers’ debts with a 13 billion dollar bailout, which was unsuccessful since an estimated 88% of debts were owed to private creditors (landlords). This practice illustrates the magnitude of desperation experienced by millions of landless low-caste individuals in rural India. Choosing to take a loan truly is a matter of life and death, and thousands have accepted death as a more favorable option than embarking upon a life of slavery for oneself and one’s family.

2.2 Children in Debt Bondage

A significant number of bonded laborers in India are children. As with the aforementioned estimates of the number of slaves in India the number of children in bonded labor is also in disagreement, yet Human Rights Watch has reported that it is at least 15 million. Child labor has become a controversial issue that has drawn global attention in recent years. Much of the focus has been on “sweatshops” where children assemble apparel and other commodities for well-known multinational corporations to distribute overseas, yet little popular attention has been called to the more grievous problem of child slavery. Since few slave-made products are exported from India the incidence of slavery in India has remained internationally unknown, with few exceptions such as scholars, investigative agencies, journalists, etc.

In India, children most often fall into debt bondage because of the actions of their parents. Debt inheritance is a common way for children to become indebted to a landlord. In rural areas the landlords expect the debt to be worked off by any means

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51 Deutsche-Presse Agentur, “Over 30 Indebted Farmers Commit Suicide in Western India.” Published 4 April 2010, Retrieved from LexisNexis Academic 4 May 2010.
necessary, and there are some villages with families who have been in bondage for 200 years, over eight generations.\textsuperscript{53} Child debt bondage also occurs when money is borrowed (usually by parents, sometimes by children) from a business owner or landlord. Parents knowingly send their children away to work (often in another state) in order to receive an advance on the children’s wages, in which case the children are comparable to commodities exchanged between the parents and the employers.\textsuperscript{54} The cash advance is often considered a loan, and accrues interest over time. Some parents send their daughters to work in order to earn money to pay for their weddings, in which case the girls are known as \textit{Sumangali}. Antislavery International reported that many parents do not receive payment until their children have worked for three years.\textsuperscript{55}

Employers subject child slaves to especially hazardous work conditions, perhaps because children are unlikely to defy orders given by a threatening adult authority. Many industries that employ child slaves occupy dimly lit buildings with poor ventilation, leading to damaged eyesight and the spread of infectious diseases. In the silk industry children work with boiling water that causes severe burns, scars, and removal of skin on their hands and feet. Children are especially susceptible to various forms of maltreatment because of their inherent vulnerability. Verbal, physical, and sexual abuse are not uncommon in cases of child slavery.\textsuperscript{56} Children working in stone quarries are made to handle explosives because their small bodies are better fit for tight cracks in the stone.\textsuperscript{57}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Skinner, 211.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Human Rights Watch (2003): 16.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Upadhyaya, (2008): 8.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Human Rights Watch (2003): 8.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Skinner, 204.
\end{itemize}
2.3 Factors Conducive to Debt Bondage

2.3.1 Multifaceted Caste Discrimination

Debt bondage slavery is a practice that has a longstanding history in India, with its roots in the caste system. Reports of debt bondage have mostly been cases in which wealthy landlords of higher castes give small loans to destitute individuals and/or families without assets, whose labor is their only means of repayment. There is some dispute among scholars pertaining to the role of the caste system in the circumstances of rural debt bondage. One argument is that the landlords are in a position of wealth and power, which is the basis of their ownership of the land and their ability to force others into slavery. Another view upholds that since debt bondage in rural India is an ancient practice, the roles of master and slave predate current wealth and power and are more closely tied to their traditional roles within the caste system. It seems that the latter is more accurate, since it has been disclosed by a bonded laborer in Uttar Pradesh “Kol people like us have always been bonded to Brahmins like my master. That’s the way it has always been around here.” 58 A survey taken of the province of Madhya Pradesh found that, “80 percent of the state’s half million farm workers had sold their freedom for less than $11. Ninety percent of them were Dalit, or what used to be called ‘untouchable.’” 59

The caste argument is more plausible than the more simplified land ownership argument because the circumstances of land ownership are closely tied to one’s caste. Land ownership, wealth, and power are interrelated to higher caste status, and it is unlikely for these factors to independently of one another (especially in rural areas).

59 Skinner, 211, 240.
Dalits have been coerced and in many cases forced into working the land of others, because they have no opportunity to purchase land of their own. By and large, the only asset belonging to the Dalits is their labor. Many Dalit families currently residing in rural India began as migrant laborers and settled upon finding agricultural or quarry work. Employment agencies have often been used to help migrant workers find employment for upper-caste landlords, and in such circumstances the fee paid by the landlord to the agency becomes the workers’ debt.  

Without the caste system it is unlikely that debt bondage would continue as a socially accepted reality, and would be more widely challenged as a violation of fundamental human rights.

Weak rural infrastructure is a central factor of the continuation of debt bondage, and is related to caste discrimination. Fewer Dalits would be forced to take loans from landlords if their access to vital resources was supported by higher castes. Without continuous access to education, land ownership, food security, potable water, health care, choices in employment and housing, etc., many Dalits will continue to take loans as a means to fulfill their needs in times of desperation. Widespread discrimination against the Dalit has undermined their human rights and hindered rural development overall, as only higher castes are permitted to advance.

The right to education is vital for advancement, yet discrimination against Dalit children in rural schools discourages them from attending. Documented discrimination against Dalit children in schools has included establishing schools in areas less accessible to Dalits, as well as physical and verbal abuse from both teachers and students. Education is fundamental to the achievement of equal opportunities through knowledge.

60 Bales (2005), 61.
of human rights and basic laws; knowledge that many Westerners take for granted as “common sense.” The continuation of inequality in the educational sphere is likely to remove the possibility for further development of India’s Dalit population.

Rural labor market discrimination in India is yet another caste-based obstacle to social and economic freedom for the Dalit. A 2003 study of three rural villages in Orissa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra reported that there are several levels of labor market discrimination that range from “complete exclusion of low-caste persons from employment by the [higher-castes],” to “selective inclusion” in employment, to debt bondage slavery, described as “forced work for low-caste Untouchables, imposed by traditional caste-based obligations leading to overwork and loss of freedom.”62 The traditional view of the “Untouchables” as impure and contaminated is a serious hindrance in terms of employment options. It seems that the Dalit will never be hired for positions that could be filled by higher castes, which may guarantee the reproduction of the caste system for generations to come.

Barred access to land control is correlated with bonded labor. Acquisition of land is arguably the most prudent way for Dalits to become upwardly mobile; therefore it is necessary to ensure clear passage through this channel. Land has been identified as the most important asset in agrarian economies because, “Its possession…is a symbol of entitlement, power and privileges and is synonymous with not only the economic status of a household but its social status as well.”63 In addition to status, employment options (especially self-employment) in rural areas are heavily contingent on land ownership. In


rural India the number of Scheduled Castes who cultivated their own land (about 20% of rural SCs) amounted to less than half of the number of higher castes who owned and cultivated land in 1994. Bonded labor is certain to persist so long as land rights are systematically denied to Dalits.

An underlying factor of caste discrimination is the widespread social acceptance of individual caste status as the foundation of personal identity. An article written by Sukhadeo Thorat in 2002 provides an insightful summation of the societal effects of the caste system:

The unit of society is not the individual. Even the family is not regarded as a unit of society…The primary unit of society is caste. There is no room for individual merit and the consideration of individual justice. Any rights that an individual has are not due to him personally; it is due to him because he belongs to a particular caste.

Thorat’s analysis makes clear that while the caste system continues to prevail, Dalits will never experience social justice. Under the caste system India has evaded the Western model of individualistic society. Embracing individualism and/or egalitarianism is not essential, but finding a balance between the two is necessary in recognizing the human rights of Dalits.

### 2.3.2 Political Corruption

Jayaprakash Narayan, Indian physician and public servant, has identified the criminalization of politics as the “soft underbelly of [the Indian] political system.”

Criminals and mafia dons who have used illegitimate funds to campaign for election have

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turned politics into a business. Caste and religion have become tools used by political candidates to assert leadership roles over their castes or religious groups and win their electoral support. Narayan has acknowledged that the rule of law has disintegrated in India to the point at which it is nearly impossible to “do business or protect rights through peaceful and lawful means,” because the role of criminals has risen over legitimate authority (especially in urban areas).  

Justice is also blocked by the severely congested Indian Court System. It was reported that “In September 2008 Supreme Court Chief Justice Balakrishnan reported that 610,000 cases were pending in the lower courts, and the Delhi High Court had 330,000 pending cases.” Narayan has indicated that there are actually 25 million cases pending in courts and most cases decades to reach resolution, therefore millions of cases never reach courts because people have “no realistic hope of justice through formal mechanisms.” The fundamental problems of the judiciary are the lack of access to a speedy trial, low rates of conviction, high rates of prison overcrowding due to “undertrial” (individuals imprisoned while their trials are in progress), and administrative corruption, apathy, and nonperformance.

Political corruption discourages unconnected individuals from running for public office, filing incident reports with police, and bringing claims to trial. It has become ingrained within public sentiment that justice is not likely to be met through legal means, so it is improbable that the Dalit will experience social justice and equality via complaints

67 Narayan, 100-101.
69 Narayan. 100.
made to the judicial system. Without the support of local public servants (i.e. politicians and/or police), bonded laborers have virtually no outlet within the Indian government to seek refuge from tyrannical landlords. Corruption within the political and judicial spheres has perpetuated the quiet acceptance of forced bonded labor and social inequality in India.

2.3.3 Police Corruption

Police corruption is a rampant crisis throughout India. Kevin Bales has suggested that in the West:

> Slavery happens in spite of the efforts of the police, but in many countries slavery flourishes because of the work of the police. Almost everywhere you find slavery in the developing world, you find police or government officials on the take, turning a blind eye.\(^{71}\)

Comparable to the survival of the caste system and debt bondage, many problems within the Indian Police can be attributed to the legacy of British colonialism. The concept of arrested development is as omnipresent within the police as it is in rural agriculture. Human Rights Watch published an investigation of the many problems within the Indian Police in 2009. The four most significant human rights abuses identified in the report were: arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions, failure to investigate crimes, extrajudicial killings, and custodial torture.\(^{72}\) HRW also reported that after independence from Britain, the Indian Police “failed to develop the public service orientation of modern policing,” as well as “failed…to devote resources to investigative units and crime prevention strategies.”\(^{73}\) The widespread corruption and brutality of the

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\(^{71}\) Bales (2007), 17.
Indian Police today are related to these failures to properly train police officers, who are not instilled with the knowledge and mindset needed to protect all citizens.

Corruption within the Indian Police Service (IPS) is inevitably linked to the corruption of government officials, as the IPS operates within each state and paramilitary police forces operate under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Jayaprakash Narayan has stated that,

“It is common knowledge in [India] that not a day passes without some politician or other interfering unlawfully in the investigation of a crime in almost every police station in the country! The criminal understands…that once he enters the political arena…the very policemen who controlled and terrorized him earlier now dance to his tune. The criminal in political garb is not only generally immune to the investigation of his crimes, but also gets physical protection from, and can bank on, the police for support of his nefarious activities.”

As reported in Transparency International’s 2003 Country Study Report of India, individuals with criminal backgrounds have actually been elected to public office while their court cases were still of pending status. Indian law allows elected officials to remain in office despite ongoing court proceedings because of the “innocent until proven guilty” principle. This practice enables criminal politicians to pursue their self-interests without interruption, including passing new legislation. The TI report stated that no branch of the Government of India is free of corruption; therefore to a certain extent the IPS must draw corrupt influence from high-ranking officials.

It was reported that in 2002 an attempt was made to improve the image of Uttar Pradesh by lowering the “official” crime rate, at the expense of the Dalit. “Chief Minister Mayawati allegedly signed a secret executive order directing police to refuse to

74 Narayan, 103.
76 Jain, 17.
register [First Incident Reports] for complaints alleging violation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,” and although this order was subsequently lifted it continues to influence local police.\textsuperscript{77} This ordinance was particularly discordant because Mayawati is known for her “Backward” caste background, and upon her election to the seat of chief minister of UP in 1995 she had “vaunted [the people of UP’s] social and cultural origins, using them openly to challenge the dominance of upper castes.”\textsuperscript{78} This example shows that officials may develop a willingness to participate in politically corrupt activities whether or not their initial intentions were pure.

The Indian government has allowed the police to fall into a serious state of disrepair rather than improve upon its infrastructure to ensure proper functioning. In addition to compliance with corrupt government officials, insufficient police training and funding are among the most significant causes of police corruption in India. Police officers are given few incentives to follow ethical standards because of the poor working (and for some, living) conditions within the police force. Bribes demanded by police are partially due to the lack of government funding for police departments. Police demand victims to cover the costs of investigation because the alternative is paying out of one’s own pocket. Police officers demand bribes in order to register individual complaints, as well as for “the costs of investigation that victims are expected to cover on behalf of the police.”\textsuperscript{79} HRW reported that basic resources such as electricity and transportation and necessities such as stationery are insufficiently available to police units.\textsuperscript{80} Poor working conditions are not an acceptable cause for police atrocities and discrimination against

\textsuperscript{77} Human Rights Watch (2009): 46.
\textsuperscript{80} Human Rights Watch (2009): 22.
lower classes. However for individuals to be faced with daily occupational frustrations without having been provided with the proper training to manage them, aggression is not an implausible outcome.
3. Inhibiting Factors of Debt Bondage

There are numerous elements within Indian past and present that should serve to prevent the incidence of large-scale slavery. The following entities are a few examples of factors that may be considered inhibitors of debt bondage slavery because their purpose is to either promote equality and freedom for all (a foundation for abolition), or to explicitly abolish slavery. While many of these factors may represent significant accomplishments in some respect, none of them has succeeded in the task of complete abolition. This chapter is intended to show that while many tools for abolition are in place, their practical implementation has fallen short.

3.1 India’s Independence Movement

India, like many other formerly colonized countries, has experienced a significant nationalist movement. At the core of the nationalist movement were leaders who were passionate about freedom and equality for all Indians. Among the most notable leaders of the independence movement were M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and B.R. Ambedkar. Although these men mobilized millions towards independence from the British they had different visions of post-independence India. Gandhi was a devoted Hindu and believed that India’s identity rested upon Hindu nationalism, while Nehru and
Ambedkar were modernists who emphasized the importance of economic development and industrialization.\(^81\)

All of the aforementioned leaders of the independence movement recognized the necessity of doing away with the caste system as an integral step in forming a successful democracy. Individually, each leader took a different approach to understanding the significance of the caste system and the steps needed for its eradication. Ambedkar was a Dalit himself and consequently the most dynamic anti-caste advocate. He did not see a place for caste within the structure of Indian democratic society and said in a speech; “To leave inequality between class and class is to…build a palace on a dung heap.”\(^82\)

Ambedkar went on to head up the drafting team of the Indian Constitution and wrote in the system of reservations for SCs and STs, so that there was a representative distribution of employment positions available for individuals of all caste and class groups.\(^83\)

Gandhi’s opinion on the caste system changed over time. His early views held that the caste system was useful in that it provided an implicit structure for society to follow, and that hereditary occupations prevented competition for employment. During the nationalist movement Gandhi expressed his nonviolent outlook and was described by Nehru as “an intense nationalist…a man who felt he had a message not only for India but for the world, and he ardently desired world peace.”\(^84\) Gandhi later realized that there was a great possibility for caste-based political and social conflicts, and that the caste

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83 Dirks: 278.
84 Nehru: 336.
system was fundamentally harmful to spiritual and national growth. Jawaharlal Nehru downplayed the importance of caste as a mainly economic issue imposed by the British, and thought that it was likely to fade out on its own with the growth of industrialization and development. He too realized that it was essential to India’s future to break down the divisions within the population to foster social and political growth.

There is no role for bonded labor in a vision of independence based on freedom and equality for all Indians. British emphasis on caste and the zamindar system of landlords should have collapsed with the growth of the independence movement. It is paradoxical for a society founded upon the egalitarian ideals of Nehru, Gandhi and Ambedkar to allow forced labor to persist in any capacity. The sense of Indian nationalism once felt by all has faded since independence, as power has shifted from the masses to a much smaller group of elites within the central government. It may be necessary to restore Indian nationalism if the Indian people are to be united as equals rather than divided into the caste structure.

3.2 Democracy

Since becoming independent from the British in 1947 India has attempted to reconstruct its identity, from a traditionally collectivist society to a liberal democracy. The underlying commonality of the aforementioned “contributing factors” to debt bondage is the current state of India’s democracy. Many notable scholars have offered their critiques of Indian democracy on various issues including corruption, social inequalities, social movements, marginalized groups, terrorism, education, economic

85 Dirks: 234.
86 Omvedt: 155.
issues, government operations, and more. The consensus among scholars is that “Indian democracy has come a long way, but still has a long way to go.”

That India boasts its identity as the world’s largest democracy is problematic because there is a significant discrepancy between democratic ideology and the reality in India. Democracy can be characterized by two main components: freedom and equality for all citizens. However, caste remains a defining feature of Indian society while having been recognized as its most “undemocratic” feature. India’s democratic system is the most significant factor affecting debt bondage, in terms of current facilitation and future eradication. Its very existence provides a sense of optimism for future equality in India, yet the current focus on industrial and economic development has significantly slowed progress in the sphere of social equality.

The reality of Indian democracy is that every citizen is guaranteed many rights on paper (in the Constitution of India) that are not honored in reality, including bans on bonded/forced labor and trafficking in persons. It seems that the role of government in India has led to a separation between the people and the state and to an extent the government turns a blind eye to certain domestic issues (i.e. slavery), which has left citizens to question the efficacy of democracy. Indian democracy has its roots in the independence movement from the British, and from the beginning the Constitution-makers were influenced more by “fear and trepidation than in hope and inspiration” in trying to avoid internal disturbance and maintain peace. In doing so the government

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88 Omvedt, 146.
remained largely elitist and took for granted the respect of the lower-class masses.\footnote{Valerian Rodrigues, “Two Discourses on Democracy in India.” In \textit{Challenges to Democracy in India}, edited by Rajesh M. Basrur. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009): 33.} A democratic environment is conducive to greater opportunities for freedom and equality, yet if the government is not directly involved in realizing its citizens’ needs (often obstructing legal rights from being met) those possibilities become extraneous.

\subsection*{3.2.1 The Anti-Caste Movement}

One of the few perceived successes of Indian democracy is that it has provided a forum that has allowed civilians the freedom to assemble, and has therefore facilitated formidable social movements. The anti-caste movement has been deemed as the most “politically fresh” movement currently in progress, is integral to human rights issues concerning the Dalit, and is therefore relevant to the rights of bonded laborers.\footnote{Omvedt, 146.} It has been suggested that, “The defiance of inherited social restrictions, necessary to overcome at least some disabilities, is crucial for people to demand and achieve equality.”\footnote{Javeed Alam, \textit{Who Wants Democracy?} (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004): 43, quoted in Valerian Rodrigues, “Two Discourses on Democracy in India.” In \textit{Challenges to Democracy in India}, edited by Rajesh M. Basrur. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009): 37.} The success of the anti-caste movement is heavily reliant upon the actions of Dalits, and will undoubtedly have positive effects on slaves being held by debt bondage because the majority of slaves are Dalit.

Unfortunately the anti-caste movement has been focused mostly on the system of reservations within the public sphere. Reservations were meant to serve as the government’s affirmative action program for lower-caste members. Having a certain number of jobs reserved for individuals outside of the traditional caste structure has caused animosity and resentment between classes. There have also been cases in which
higher-castes have falsified their identities in order to usurp a reserved job. It is important to note that reservations will never provide equal opportunities for over 250 million Indians. Reservations are inadequate compensation for Dalits who have been terrorized and ostracized by higher-castes for generations; therefore India has a desperate need for a multidimensional affirmative action program.

3.3 Abolition Efforts in India

One significant act that was amended into the Constitution of India is the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 (BLSA). It was a shining moment for Indira Gandhi’s administration, considering that she also supported a mass sterilization program. The BLSA applied to all of India, clearly defined terms relevant to bonded labor, and outlined what was to be forbidden. It was implicitly stated that upon the commencement of the act every bonded laborer was to be released and any agreements were to become void, and that after its commencement any such agreements to render individuals as bonded laborers would be prohibited.

Comparable to many other human rights/antislavery laws, the BLSA has been poorly enforced. Upon its commencement there were thousands of bonded laborers identified, released, and rehabilitated by the state, but Antislavery International has reported that, “Since the 1990s the process of identification and release has dramatically slowed and government authorities have downplayed the extent of bonded labour in India and failed to recognise new forms of bonded labour.”

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96 Upadhyaya (2008), 16.
bonded laborers has been highly disputed and is imprecise, but even the lowest estimated number of bonded laborers offered by researchers (approximately 8 million) dwarfs the number reported in 2009 as having been “identified and released” by the Indian Ministry of Labour and Employment, documented at 288,098 people. The 2008-2009 Annual Report put out by the Ministry of Labour and Employment also noted that in May 2000 the central government would provide funding for programs directed at the identification, rehabilitation, and education of bonded laborers. It is apparent that any actions taken by the central government under the BLSA are outdated and it is possible that they have not been active for nearly a decade.

Aside from the actions of the Indian government an organization called Sankalp has actively provided bonded laborers in Uttar Pradesh with education regarding Constitutional human rights, and helped them organize to rebel against their landlords. In an online newspaper article Sankalp was reported to have taken a multidimensional approach in aiding communities afflicted by debt bondage, including fighting for fair wages, forming workers' co-operatives, applying for mining leases, release from bonded labor, advocating adult literacy, education for children, and eliminating child labor. Sankalp works largely in Uttar Pradesh and is expanding to other states, yet its actions will not be sufficient to release and rehabilitate all individuals enslaved through debt.

There are many other organizations in India that have bonded labor on their agendas such as the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the Centre for Education and Communication

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(CEC). The NIRD has recognized that individuals often fall into bonded labor because they are forced to take loans to survive the “lean season,” when food is scarce during July and August. In Maharashtra, the Academy of Development Science (ADS) has established grain banks in conjunction with NIRD to ensure that SC and ST families in rural areas have access to grain during the lean season without taking loans from landlords. Borrowers must contribute grain to the bank throughout the year, and must repay their loans over a four-year period. The grain bank program is one example of a positive step for rural development and a legitimate alternative to falling into the trap of debt bondage.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was founded as part of the 1993 Human Rights Act. The NHRC has a complaint mechanism for citizens to register complaints of human rights violations, and bonded labor is on a list of the major types of recently filed complaints. Seemingly the most active and effectual body against debt bondage in India, the NHRC has done numerous reports and investigations as recently as April 2010. Their actions have ranged from liberating groups of bonded laborers to legally challenging decisions made by state governments on bonded labor issues. One of the NHRC’s current projects involves establishing human rights “cells” or offices throughout India, which is an important step in addressing human rights violations on a large scale.

The mission of the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) is to provide education relevant to Indian workers. The CEC has a specific focus on understanding the

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The evolution of labor relations in an increasingly globalized world, defending labor rights and democratic rights, as well as providing a means for organizing workers’ trade unions and peoples’ movements.\textsuperscript{101} Spreading information on debt bondage slavery can be considered taking action against it, and the CEC has taken the initiative to publish many documents and maintain a website (bondedlabour.org) that address the practice of forced/bonded labor in India. The CEC is the most laudable organization working for labor rights in India especially for its efforts to provide a store of reliable information pertaining to debt bondage, and for partnering with numerous NGOs and other organizations (i.e. National Campaign for Labour Rights, Campaign Against Child Labour, Campaign Against Child Trafficking, and Indian Social Institute) to accomplish their goals.

All of these organizations are working towards fulfilling human rights initiatives and eliminating debt bondage slavery. The steps taken by the CEC, NHRC, and NIRD to improve upon human rights and labor rights standards for India’s working poor represent significant accomplishments. Their basic limitation is that they are small organizations that are not likely to have the capacity to extend their positive influence throughout all of India. For this reason these organizations cannot be classified as “inhibitors” of debt bondage slavery in and of themselves, because this practice continues despite their combined efforts. It is important for the CEC and NHRC to disseminate the majority of information in print rather than electronically, since only 6.9\% of Indians have Internet access.\textsuperscript{102} Expansion of these organizations will be a key to future success, as

\textsuperscript{101} Website of the Centre for Education and Communication, available from \url{http://www.cec-india.org}; accessed 15 April 2010.
establishing a presence in multiple locations will spread awareness of their plight against debt bondage.

3.4 International Pressure

What is unique about slavery in India is that it continues to exist in spite of many political and social abolitionist movements and the establishment of antislavery laws, in both domestic and international contexts. There are antislavery and labor laws that have been established in India since the 18th century, yet those laws have not yielded significant results. The Indian government has signed various international human rights agreements, including (but not limited to) the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR). It seems inappropriate for the Indian government to have approved many rights-based covenants while the its own governmental shortcomings and the caste system continue to trivialize the concept of individual human rights.

Considering the advances in human rights that have taken place throughout the last century it may be assumed that if a report was issued of a country with over 250 million people (comparable to the Dalit population) being persecuted by a more powerful country, there would be an influx of foreign assistance to support the vulnerable population. Scholar C.J. Nirmal has recognized that:

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The danger remains in talking about constitutions, covenants, commissions, declarations, and treaties as if they existed only on paper in a semantic mode. More than twenty-two treaties against prostitution have not changed the reality on the ground. Our failure to act is caused not by the lack of knowledge, but also a kind of immunity to realities.\textsuperscript{105}

Official action to aid humanitarian crises in developing countries is often avoided by foreign governments not because of ignorance, rather due to concern for jeopardizing their economic investments. Developed countries share a history of exploiting developing countries for natural resources and cheap labor, which India has provided on a larger scale since its 1991 economic reforms.\textsuperscript{106} The United States has not actively intervened in India’s slavery issue, which shows an “immunity to realities” because taking action against India would likely result in negative effects on the government’s economic interests to be described in the next section.

3.4.1 The Tier System

The U.S. Department of State releases a Trafficking in Persons Report each year to document the status of modern slavery worldwide. Each country included in the report is given a ranking (Tier 1, 2, 2WL, and 3) according to their governmental efforts to combat severe trafficking in persons. The tier system is assigned through the provisions of the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000). Tier 1 is for countries whose government fully complies with the TVPA minimum standards (i.e. prohibition and punishment of trafficking in persons, punishment sufficient to reflect the heinous nature of the crime, and serious and sustained efforts to eliminate all forms of

\textsuperscript{105} Nirmal: xxvii.
Trafficking in Persons). \(^{107}\) Tier 2 status is given to governments that do not comply with the TVPA minimum standards but are making significant efforts to meet those standards. Tier 2 Watch List is for Tier 2 countries that are making efforts to combat slavery yet the number of reported trafficking incidents is rising, or Tier 2 countries that have not reported increased efforts to combat slavery from the previous year, or Tier 2 countries that have a plan of action that is not immediate but will be executed over the next year. Tier 3 status is for governments that do not meet the minimum standards and have not disclosed any plans to do so. \(^{108}\)

The TVPA and Tier System is potentially the most effectual way to monitor and combat modern slavery, because countries designated as Tier 3 status face possible economic sanctions. Once a country is placed at Tier 3 the United States government will no longer provide nonhumanitarian/nontrade-related financial assistance to that country, and will recommend that participants in organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) vote against loans and/or grants otherwise designated for the country in question (except funding for humanitarian or trade-related assistance) for the next year or until the country has provided evidence for their compliance with the minimum standards. \(^{109}\) While foreign trade relations are technically unaffected by the Tier System, Tier 3 countries are likely to experience significant blows to their budgets without the multi-billion dollar financial assistance packages upon which developing countries are dependent.

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Tier 3 status is not only detrimental to financial stability and economic development; there is also a sense of shame and embarrassment for those governments which can be enough motivation to make changes necessary to meet the TVPA minimum standards. It was reported that:

In 2004, the president of Guyana flew to Washington to…beg his country up from its Tier Three ranking. The previous year the Kazakh foreign minister responded to his country’s demotion by offering a half-hour televised speech against trafficking.

Efforts such as these may be superficial and inadequate to meet the minimum standards of compliance to the TVPA, but it is important to note the effect that the Tier System has on a country’s reputation. Developing countries with poor reputations (i.e. countries with exposed internal issues such as poverty, corruption, civil unrest, unstable currency, etc.) often lose the economic support of foreign investors and governments due to fears of instability and increased risk. Economic development is one of the most significant factors influencing a country’s policymakers, therefore any threats to such progress may be sufficient incentive to make changes in accordance with foreign expectations.

India is classified as Tier 2 Watch List: having recognized that slavery persists within its borders yet having made little progress in combating the situation. The Tier System cannot be considered an immediate deterrent from engaging in the bonded labor system at the individual (landlord/master – laborer/slave) level, but if India were to be demoted to Tier 3 status it may lead to a revolutionary “government-centric” abolition effort, or at least a renewed sense of responsibility for abolition. An abolition effort of

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such magnitude would presumably impact debt bondage systems in rural India over time; the provisions of which will be outlined in the following chapter.

The U.S. Department of State has not assigned India to Tier 3 status because it may jeopardize trade relations between the two countries. The United States is the world’s second largest importer of Indian goods (the U.S. imported $21.2 billion worth of Indian goods in 2009) and India is among the “Top 15 Trading Partners” of the United States.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, “Foreign Trade Statistics: Trade in Goods (Imports, Exports, and Trade Balance) with India,” available from \url{http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5330.html#2009}; accessed 12 July 2010.} If the U.S. were to intervene and disallow India from receiving foreign aid it would have serious consequences for current development projects, for example nonhumanitarian aid implemented by USAID regarding economic development in the areas of financial institutions and small enterprises. The Indian government would be unable to provide financial support for U.S.-funded programs if the funds were withdrawn, which would result in an adverse trade relationship between the U.S. and India.
4. Possibilities for Change

4.1 Caste Annihilation

Without addressing the issue of persistent economic and social discrimination the “democratic experiment” in India will undoubtedly fail. Slavery continues because of profound social inequalities and the shortcomings of India’s democracy. The potential for successful abolition of debt bondage lies within India’s democratic structure, and the missing link between possibility and accomplishment is proper implementation. In this case it may be wise to start with a broad scoped-program (i.e. caste annihilation), assess the breadth of positive effects, then narrow the focus as necessary to reach those unaffected by the initial efforts (i.e. specific regions, villages, etc.). There has not yet been a large-scale antislavery movement in India, but in many ways the anti-caste movement may act as a catalyst for a future abolition movement. As most bonded laborers are Dalit, caste annihilation is first on the abolition agenda.

4.1.1 Caste as Apartheid

Caste discrimination has been compared to South African Apartheid, so it may be valuable to uphold this comparison and utilize the end of Apartheid as an effective model for the dissolution of caste. Lindsay Talmud, a South African peace worker involved in the Israel/Palestine conflict, has recognized “Six South African Lessons” from the fall of Apartheid that he believes may be useful for Israel/Palestine.112 Some of the fundamental

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similarities shared between the South African and Israel/Palestine conflicts are also shared with the caste conflict in India: all have had a longstanding social conflict based upon differences in personal identity (i.e. race, ethnicity, caste), elitist governments, widespread violence, and oppression of the group perceived as being of lower status (i.e. blacks and Dalits).

Among the six lessons identified by Talmud there are a few that may have resonance for the dissolution of caste in India. Talmud first acknowledged that, “The South African model suggests that the decisive factor is the readiness to engage in the process of change, not the promise of a particular result.”\textsuperscript{113} The Indian government would be wise to follow this advice and take steps towards reform because it is time to make significant changes to the current system, rather than show hesitation due to fear of failure or possible adverse outcomes (as in the last five decades of botched land reform plans). Although the collapse of Apartheid marked the failure of one system it signified the birth of a new political system, which meant positive changes for the country overall. At present it seems improbable that the Indian government will admit fault for the continuation of caste but it is important to take responsibility for the welfare of its people and make changes accordingly.

An important South African lesson to be applied to the dissolution of caste in India is that accomplishing change through negotiation must be favored over resorting to violent means. Higher castes have often been successful in keeping lower castes down through the use of violence, which perpetuates the current conflict and inhibits social progress. In his work \textit{Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)} Gandhi said, “A non-co-operator is nothing if he cannot remain calm and unperturbed under a fierce fire of

\textsuperscript{113} Talmud, 96.
A country with national ideals loosely based on the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi should embrace the practice of nonviolence and achieve conflict resolution through peaceful means. Nonviolent negotiation is an invaluable skill for “non-cooperators” of the caste system because civil conflicts are not effectively solved through irrational outbursts of physical violence.

In contrast with the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, the Constitution of India already outlaws “untouchability.” The South African lesson with the most salience for the Indian government is that:

Real change became possible only after both sides admitted that they faced a lose-lose situation. Change is possible only when you realize that the path you are on is leading nowhere or perhaps to catastrophe…Conversely, the struggle will continue as long as one side believes that it can win and impose its will on the other side.115

It is apparent that regardless of the existing legislation against caste discrimination, it has been largely ineffectual. A necessary step in the annihilation of caste is for the upper-caste Hindus to recognize that caste is an unsustainable practice, and it will be more effective to coexist with those perceived as “untouchable” instead of the current practice of oppression and obstruction of human rights. Upper-caste Hindus believe that they can “win” the battle of caste because so far, they have generally succeeded in doing so. The caste struggle will continue until the upper-caste perpetuators are made to understand that Dalits share the same constitutional rights as every Indian citizen.

115 Talmud, 98.
4.1.2 Government Involvement

In order to embark upon the long arduous journey toward the annihilation of caste it will be necessary to appoint leaders of the “New Anti-Caste Movement.” Due to India’s size it is recommended that each state appoint its own Dalit leader (preferably educated individuals involved in humanitarian affairs who have successfully risen through the reservation system) who may then report to a respected Dalit official within the central government, perhaps within the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. A higher-caste representative would also be appointed by each state to report to Prime Minister Singh’s office. PM Singh would be an effective upper-caste leader and anti-caste spokesperson because he has previously spoken out against the system and compared it to Apartheid.116 Singh is a respected individual and one may presume that his opinion would have resonance throughout India.

The two respective leaders may draft a more effective affirmative action program than the current system of reservations. It has been made clear in recent reports that Dalit access to many resources (other than employment) has been interrupted, so the new affirmative action program should be focused heavily on securing human rights for Dalits rather than just employment opportunities in the public sector. Such a comprehensive approach is not the traditional form of affirmative action programs, but it may be argued that the set of circumstances currently plaguing India are beyond traditional measures.

A mass media campaign (via radio and television) to broadcast discussions between the appointed Dalit leader and PM Singh will be beneficial to raise awareness of the increased attention on caste relations and the welfare of Dalits. The leaders, especially PM Singh, should express their ardent disappointment of caste discrimination.

announce more stringent penalties for discrimination, and stress the importance of a more unified Indian community. These broadcasts may also be an effective outlet to spread education to many Indians on human rights issues that are otherwise unknown. The phrases “Out of sight, out of mind” and “Ignorance is bliss” will no longer be acceptable ways to approach the tribulations endured by Dalits. The Indian people must be made aware of the widespread suffering of their fellow citizens, and the use of respected spokespeople to deliver the message will be an effective tool to ensure that the truth is heard.

4.1.3 People’s Movements

It is ultimately up to the people of India to follow the guidelines imposed by the government to end caste discrimination. Ambedkar was an active anti-caste political leader who suggested two conditions for the annihilation of caste: intermarriage between castes and religious reform. The government cannot force intermarriage on society, but it can support and promote intermarriage as a means of challenging tradition and dissolving the caste system. Caste is founded upon “Brahmanical Hinduism,” a mixture of religion, philosophy, history, tradition, custom, and social structure that included virtually every aspect of Indian life and was a precursor to Indian nationalism. Dalits have been excluded from the Brahmanical caste system, and have therefore recognized that they have no place in Hinduism. Religious reform may have been an effective way to denounce caste in the past because many Indians have abandoned Hinduism and converted to Islam or Christianity.

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117 Omvedt, 162.
118 Nehru, 92.
119 Omvedt, 162.
However, the traditional foundation of caste has “imploded…it is as if the caste system survives like a patient on a deathbed, surviving on the artificial system of life-support.” New caste relations have evolved from religious status and are now based on economic status. As aforementioned social mobility is related to the acquisition of assets and/or political power, so it is unlikely that Ambedkar’s proposed solutions would hold weight in contemporary India. Intermarriage between status groups still has relevance theoretically, but is somewhat implausible in terms of the likelihood of marriages occurring between Dalits and individuals of high socioeconomic status.

There is a need for alternative people’s movements to spread equality for all Indians. Education will be necessary to raise awareness of caste-based rights violations in order to fuel social movements related to securing assets and occupational opportunities for Dalits. The Indian people must assert their democratic rights and become more involved in government programs. Although government land reform plans have been ineffective in the past, it is possible that joint land reform efforts supported by both the government and rural communities may have positive impact as a result of collaboration. If land reform plans are successful social status is raised through the acquisition of land, and employment will be secured for many farmers otherwise forced to work for landlords.

4.2 Government Reform

The “democratic project” in India is still underway and if it is to succeed there must be a shift in direction. Nehru has said of democracy in India:

In the past, democracy has been taken chiefly to mean political democracy, roughly represented by the idea of every person having a vote. It is obvious that a vote by itself does not mean very much to a person who is down and out and starving. Such a person will be much more interested in food to eat than a vote. Therefore, political democracy by itself is not enough except that it may be used to obtain a gradually increasing measure of economic democracy. The good things of life must become available to more and more people and gross inequalities must be removed.\textsuperscript{121}

The obstacles facing democracy in India are vast, yet may be addressed beginning with expanding opportunities to all citizens. A bottom-up approach to fulfilling human rights should be taken to remove inequalities and ensure universal access to basic life-sustaining resources before citizens become involved India’s in political democracy. Central government reform is imperative in producing lasting social progress in India. A turning point has been reached at which the Indian Government must make changes to directly benefit its population as a whole. Funding has been amply provided for economic development and defense programs, but much of the Indian public continues to suffer in conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation. Reform efforts must be made to address the inadequacies of social programs related to limited funding and poor implementation, including the India Police Service, Supreme Court, land reform programs, and various ministries and departments within the central government.

\textbf{4.2.1 Budget Expenditures}

Within the Government of India there are ministries/departments dedicated to social issues such as Labour and Employment, the Election Commission, Home Affairs (Police), Law and Justice, Social Justice and Empowerment, the Supreme Court,

Minority Affairs, Panchayati Raj (local/village governments), and Rural Development. All of these departments, if in working order, should function to combat issues of extreme poverty, caste discrimination, human rights violations, corruption, obstruction of justice, unfair elections, etc. Aside from the Ministry of Rural Development each of the aforementioned departments is grossly underfunded in comparison with the activities of other ministries directed towards economic prosperity or national defense.

The budget expenditures for the Government of India in 2007-2008 show that the ministries with relatively low levels of perceived efficacy have been insufficiently funded. The total budget expenditures for FY (fiscal year) 2007-2008 amounted to Rs. 712671.21 crores (one crore equals 10 million), roughly $152.9 billion. Ministerial departments related to economic development, i.e. Economic Affairs and Defence Services, garnered Rs. 197523.69 crores and Rs. 91681.06 crores, respectively. In combination, these departments accounted for approximately 39% of the total budget for 2007-2008.

In stark contrast the Ministries/Departments of Labour and Employment, Election Commission, Home Affairs, Law and Justice, Social Justice and Empowerment, Supreme Court, Minority Affairs, Panchayati Raj, Drinking Water Supply, and Rural Development together only accrued approximately Rs. 60928.39 crores, accounting for 8.5% of the total 2007-2008 budget. Of that total the Ministries of Rural Development and Home Affairs accounted for 4.04% and 2.7% of the budget expenditures respectively, leaving the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Election Commission, Law and Justice, Social

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123 Ibid.
Justice and Empowerment, Supreme Court, Minority Affairs, Panchayati Raj, and Drinking Water Supply to share 1.76% of the total budget.

This data alone may explain why India’s economic and social inequalities continue to grow. The government has allowed the budget to become severely imbalanced between funding for economic development and defense, and programs for social development. This disparity has caused stagnation for ministries and departments that have potential to make a positive impact on society (i.e. improvements to the supreme court, fair elections, anti-corruption measures, empowering Dalits, etc.) while departments related to defense and finance have been allotted funding sufficient for advancement.

Revisions to the state budget must be made for social progress to thrive. The Government of India relies heavily on foreign financial assistance for social programs, and it may be argued that if budget redistribution occurs the government would become more involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of such programs. More funding for social programs would allow for a broader sphere of influence and benefits to reach larger numbers of citizens. For example, if the government allotted the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment a larger budget their programs for Dalit welfare assistance may reach a larger proportion of the population. It is recommended that the Government of India redirect an additional 5% of its annual budget expenditures from defense and finance programs to the ministries and departments involved with social welfare in order to benefit the entire population more directly.
4.2.3 Anti-Corruption Measures

Governmental reforms are unlikely to have notable effects without addressing corruption. The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and state-run Anti-Corruption Bureaus (ACBs) are government agencies designated to receive and address complaints of corruption in India, yet no significant headway has been made in doing away with corruption completely. A commonly suggested solution to curb corruption in India is to remove the responsibility from the central government and create a private anti-corruption agency, since corruption is anchored in politics and policy.¹²⁴

Researchers have contributed mixed reports in terms of whether India will ever be free of corruption. It is necessary to adopt a sense of realistic optimism when considering possible anti-corruption interventions, because to admit defeat and maintain the current system is reprehensible. Other countries (i.e. Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and China) have reduced corruption through the privatization of their anti-corruption agencies,¹²⁵ so the same action is recommended for India. Without support from the central government foreign financial assistance may be required to effectively shift control of Indian anti-corruption agencies to a private party.

4.2.4 Judicial Reform

India’s Supreme Court is congested largely due to the culturally imposed attitudes held by judges, as well as insufficient funding from the central government. The judiciary is considered by many to be an elitist and anti-democratic institution, because a

¹²⁵ Quah, 253.
few arbitrarily appointed individuals make important decisions, and can then avoid accountability by hiding “behind the apron of electoral democracy”. It was reported that the rules of the judicial institution “emphasize restraint rather than activism” and that:

Judges realize that their decisions may not be enforced, and they will not be there long enough to ensure compliance. Hence, they only pick battles that they can win – less complex issues that pit the court against private providers rather than the government.

The fear of dissent that was present during the drafting of the Indian Constitution has become pervasive throughout the central government since independence. A democratic environment should be conducive to suggestions and inquiries from internal officials, yet in India it seems that many officials are uncomfortable challenging the status quo. To address the pervasive problem of delayed litigation in Indian courts, it is recommended to establish a greater number of “fast-track” courts that have been prescribed to individual states by the Supreme Court in times of emergency proceedings.

4.2.5 Police Reform

The lack of government law enforcement inevitably falls partly on the shoulders of the police. That the police force exists should be a deterrent from participation in caste discrimination and the bonded labor system, yet as previously discussed corruption plays a major role in this relationship. A structural overhaul of the India Police Service is a

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crucial element in the enforcement of constitutional rights and the elimination of caste discrimination and debt bondage. Ineffective allocation of resources is a key underlying factor in the foundering of the India Police Service. In order to make efforts toward police reform it is necessary to address the current issues facing the police: poor infrastructure, inefficient deployment of personnel, inadequate training, poor living conditions, and human rights violations by police.\textsuperscript{129}

The Police Department is housed within the Ministry of Home Affairs, and was allotted a budget of Rs. 25439 crores in FY 2008-2009. Most of the budget (combined total Rs. 15553.5 crores, approximately 61\%) was designated to the Central Reserve Police, Border and Security, Modernisation, and the Delhi Police. Only Rs. 52.84 crores were allocated to Education, Training, and Research, and Rs. 44.99 crores were allotted to Criminal Investigation and Vigilance\textsuperscript{130} (combined 0.3\% of the Police budget). To make improvements to the IPS, it is clear that the budget must be revised. Increased funding must be allocated to the branches related to Education, Training, and Research, as well as Criminal Investigation and Vigilance. These two branches seem most responsible for the current failures of the IPS. Proper education, training, and research would help to address the issues of poor infrastructure, inefficient deployment of personnel, inadequate training, and human rights violations by police. Increased funding for the Criminal Investigation and Vigilance branch of the Police would aid in registering incident reports properly.

If the police were to implement reforms to the current structure it is likely that the reputation of the police would become more favorable, which may provide incentive for

\textsuperscript{130} Government of India (2009), Notes on Demands for Grants: No. 53, Police. Ministry of Home Affairs.
individuals to become police officers. There are an inadequate number of police officers in India, which is why “inefficient deployment of personnel” is an issue. Improved reputation may also increase general public opinion of the police, leading more crime victims to report incidents and meeting human rights standards. Police officers should be trusted rather than feared by citizens. Proper police training should inform trainees of their legal rights to protect and serve the citizens of India, rather than bribe and discriminate against them.

Improvements upon police training practices are imperative for a successful abolition movement regarding both slavery and caste. One of the most significant barriers to the fulfillment of constitutional human rights is the lack of effectual law enforcement. The Indian government has passed legislation to outlaw “untouchability” and bonded labor systems, yet lack of police enforcement has rendered such laws immaterial. Many police officers interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported that their training was inadequate, officers do not always receive additional training after promotions, and many were not familiar with special protective laws i.e. the Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act. This report provides additional evidence for the Indian Government to consider shifting grants from the practical aspect of police work to the theoretical side for police education.

4.2.6 Land Reform

Research suggests that land reform in Asian countries has resulted in higher productivity and an increase in non-agricultural development. Most bonded laborers in

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India are dependent on agriculture and are likely to fall back into slavery if not provided with alternative employment options. Land reform is a necessary step toward realizing rural development since no progress can be made while rural landlords control the majority of arable land. The successful implementation of land reform plans in rural India will provide families with a vital productive asset and freedom to choose employment beyond agriculture.

There has not yet been a successful land reform plan in India due to inadequate implementation and enforcement. Scholars have shown that approximately 90% of SC/ST Indians work in the private sector, and over 75% of SC rural households are either landless or “near landless” (owning less than 1 acre). It would be beneficial for the Indian government to execute a comprehensive registration and titling program in each state to expand the formal economy into the informal/private sector and provide India’s poor with increased life chances (a Weberian concept meaning one’s chances of acquiring social, physical, or human capital to determine class status). Formalization is not a realistic option for all of the private sector, but it is one approach to eradicating the zamindari system of land ownership.

There have been scattered formalization efforts implemented by individual states and international and domestic development agencies, such as the World Bank-funded program to computerize land records in Karnataka. The World Bank reported that this program succeeded in making over 20 million land records available online, and helped

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6.7 million farmers.\textsuperscript{134} In another example bonded laborers were empowered by Sankalp (NGO headquartered in Uttar Pradesh) to assemble and apply for bank loans to acquire quarry leases at auction, previously held by landlords.\textsuperscript{135} State governments have potential to effectively implement land reform plans if officials expand their influence throughout rural areas. The prospect of higher agricultural productivity is justification for states to revise budget expenditures in order to increase funding for land reform.

4.3 NGO Involvement

The ILO has said of forced labor: “Arguably, for the national and international agencies concerned with the eradication of extreme poverty by the year 2015, there can be no greater challenge in the world today.”\textsuperscript{136} In order to combat forced labor in India it is necessary to first address social inequalities through programs of large scope implemented on small scales in individual states, with the aid of NGOs. NGOs may provide humanitarian assistance to India through external funding, program implementation and monitoring, sustainability initiatives, labor rights education, social empowerment, and media campaigns. It may be argued that NGOs are more critical in project implementation and evaluation (and therefore more efficient) than the biased Government of India because NGOs are more reputable, free of corruption and leaders with self-seeking agendas.

There are various organizations established within India that may assume responsibility for the implementation of social projects. Examples of such organizations


\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Skinner, 239.}

include the previously referenced Sankalp, CEC, NIRD, and ISI (Indian Social Institute). The CEC has potential to become an intimidating force in the eyes of rural landlords and adopt a more constant role as an investigative body for labor rights. Establishing additional office locations outside of New Delhi will be a necessary step for the CEC to continue reaching out to rural communities currently plagued with bonded labor, especially so landlords in those regions feel their presence and may be deterred from holding bonded laborers.

So far, Sankalp has made the most quantifiable progress against bonded labor in India. A main flaw of the other NGOs in question (i.e. ISI and CEC) is that their primary function is to provide education, which is commendable and necessary but may be more effectual if advocacy was included in their mission. Sankalp has used education to empower individuals and show them how to use that education as a means to advance beyond their current set of circumstances. A recommendation to the education-based NGOs is to use their vast stores of information and direct that knowledge into a nationwide media campaign in order to spread awareness of the impact that social inequalities have across India. Simple public advertisements via print ads and television and radio commercials may peak individuals’ curiosity and provide motivation to mobilize and become involved in campaigns for social equality and human rights.

4.3.1 Microfinance Programs

Kevin Bales, career abolitionist, has written of microfinance programs that have proven effective in combating slavery. He provided an example of women enslaved in debt bondage in Uttar Pradesh who formed a credit union with the help of a Sankalp worker who deposited their savings into a local bank. Through this credit program the
women were able to pay off their debt bonds one at a time, and when other enslaved villagers saw their success they simply renounced their debts as well. The education and support provided by Sankalp to these bonded laborers were integral tools for empowerment that resonated throughout their community.

The ILO (International Labour Office) considers microfinance initiatives as potentially preventative measures against debt bondage. The ILO’s Social Finance Programme released a working paper that stated:

Microfinance is not sufficient to prevent bondage, but a group-based savings and credit delivery mechanism can be an excellent vehicle to provide other essential services for economic and social empowerment…Related activities should strengthen the capacity of households to generate a livelihood, contribute to the reduction of expenses that can push them into bondage, reduce their economic and social dependence on the employer, and support their greater social inclusion in the community.

Microfinance is the most plausible way for bonded laborers to build capital for personal use and lift themselves out of the desperate financial circumstances that drive individuals to take loans. NGOs will be the driving force behind rural microfinance programs, since Indian banks have a history of imposing drastic increases on loan interest rates and confiscating land and homes from rural farmers. Having the ability to save money will provide means to establish a financial safety net and increase potential for social mobility, if the money is used to purchase productive assets such as land or establish a small business.

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4.4 Education

“In India…learning and erudition have always stood high in public esteem, for learning was supposed to imply both superior knowledge and virtue. Before the learned man, the ruler and warrior have always bowed.”\textsuperscript{140} – Jawaharlal Nehru

Education is traditionally of the utmost importance to Indian culture, yet its role has been somewhat neglected. The Constitution of India has included since its inception in 1947 a provision to provide free and compulsory education for children to be passed within ten years of commencement. However, the eighty-sixth amendment to substitute for this provision was not passed until 2002\textsuperscript{141} and the Right to Education Act was not passed until April 1, 2010. Assessments of the act have shown that it is intrinsically flawed and will not be enough to accomplish the goal of universal primary education for children between ages six and fourteen. Currently there are not enough schools in each state to support the number of villages in need, and the act has not been granted adequate funding to fulfill its commitments.\textsuperscript{142}

Universal education is among the most significant tools in the plight against slavery and inequality worldwide. Benjamin Skinner has hypothesized that if more schools were established in rural areas, there would be a lowered incidence of slavery because many parents give up their children to brokers or employers under the pretense that they will be educated. Skinner gives an example of Haitian parents who cannot afford to feed their children or send them to school, in which case the empty promise of education and subsistence in a distant city is better than watching their own children die

\textsuperscript{140} Nehru, 51.
Parents in India also partake in this type of agreement because they believe that their children will have a chance to earn money for the family, when in reality the cash advance from the employer initiates the process of debt bondage.

Increased funding to develop the education infrastructure in India is necessary to provide education to every child. Schools must be built, teachers must be hired, books and educational materials bought or donated, food and potable water provided for midday meals, etc. Educated children will have more options for future employment, and are less likely to become involved with dubious employers and coerced into taking loans. A generation of educated children will eventually become parents who should have options aside from sending their children away to work in dangerous conditions while being held by debt. It is recommended that Indian school curricula include vocational education and/or training in order to provide students with realistic skill sets to prepare them for employment.

4.5 Conclusion

“The eradication of slavery requires ripping away its foundations: economic and social vulnerability, corruption, lack of education, and government indifference or lack of resources.” – Kevin Bales

For any social reform efforts to be successful in India it will be necessary to take a systematic state-by-state approach to implementation, in order to ensure manageability. Restructuring of the central government budget is recommended to distribute additional funding to social programs and promote equality, as opposed to excessive financing for economic growth in the current manner. State governments must be in full compliance with the agenda of the central government if programs are to produce sustainable results.

143 Skinner, 8.
throughout India. NGOs will also take on a vital function to challenge the government’s accountability and responsibility in the plight to achieve equality for all Indian citizens. Government action plans must be made public knowledge via media campaigns so citizens may be held accountable for full compliance.

An essential point to make is that any social program directed at Dalit equality may have positive effects for bonded laborers. It may be more effectual to launch programs for caste annihilation, rural development, and human rights rather than focus exclusively on bonded labor since the Government of India has not made significant progress to identify, release, and rehabilitate individuals under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act. Anti-caste, anti-corruption and police reform efforts are of the highest priority in the plight toward socioeconomic equality and law enforcement, as these are strategic tools to eradicate debt bondage slavery.
Appendix

Table 1: Bonded Laborers Identified, Released, and Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the State Governments</th>
<th>Number of Bonded Labourers</th>
<th>Annual assistance provided (Rupees in Lakh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identified and Released</td>
<td>Rehabilitated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>37,988</td>
<td>31,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>3,526</td>
<td>2,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>14,351</td>
<td>13,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
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<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
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<td>57,185</td>
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<td>Kerala</td>
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<td>710</td>
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<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
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<td>12,392</td>
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<tr>
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<td>46,9001</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>West Bengal</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>2,88,098*</td>
<td>2,68,136</td>
</tr>
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</table>
References


Deutsche-Presse Agentur, “Over 30 Indebted Farmers Commit Suicide in Western India.” Published 4 April 2010, Retrieved from LexisNexis Academic on 4 May 2010.


