

CEC Working Paper

Report On Bonded Labour in Karnataka

*Analysing the Effectiveness of the Programmes for the Eradication of
the Bonded Labour System*

H.Y Gauramma

2007

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PREFACE

Although policy makers, administrators, academics, trade unions and NGOs may differ on the concept, approach and extent of bonded labour in India, one point which all of them currently agree about is, "Labour bondage still persists!" A country poised to emerge as the next economic superpower still faces the challenge of liberating millions from the scourge of bondage into which they have been pushed by poverty, hunger and social exclusion. Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that the process of globalisation, kick started by economic reforms, far from reducing the magnitude of bondage has reinforced it further through the process of informalisation.

The Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976, which reflected the commitment towards 'Liberty' made in Article 23 of the Indian Constitution, surely brought a ray of hope for many toiling under this inhuman practice for mere survival. Yet, our experiences in the past 30 years of intervention suggest that this progressive tool has inherent constraints in eradicating the bonded labour system.

Against this backdrop, in 2004, the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) and Anti Slavery International (ASI) decided to initiate action research in selected states and sectors to assess whether the programmes initiated by the government, international organisations and NGOs have been effective in eradicating the bonded labour system and, if not, why these have not been effective.

The Indian project was part of a South Asia regional project on bonded labour, coordinated by the Anti Slavery International. The Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) coordinated the project in Pakistan and the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) coordinated the project in Nepal.

In India, the states covered in three years were Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh in sectors ranging from traditional agriculture to the export-oriented garment industry. The series of working papers is an outcome of these studies, which we hope, will serve as a tool for policy framers as well as grass-root activists to understand the changing dynamics of labour bondage in India in the present context.

The desk research and field studies in Chhattisgarh and Orissa were done by Mr. Abhay Xaxa; field research in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Delhi was carried out by Dr. R.S. Gautam, Ms Gauramma, Prof. Manjit Singh, Ms Anjali Deshpande, Dr Mohanasundaram and Ms Sujata Madhok, respectively. Initially, Prof. Gopal Iyer and then Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka provided valuable guidance and intellectual leadership to the researchers throughout the study.

I gratefully acknowledge the support, encouragement and guidance provided by the Advisory Board of the Project, constituted by Prof. D.N. Dhanagare, Com. Suneet Chopra, Ms Manjari Dingwaney, Com. Amarjeet Kaur and Mr. K. Chandrasekar. We also acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the Regional Consultant Prof. Jan Bremen in the formulation of the research, the field studies and in the writing of the reports. We recognise the encouragement provided by Anti Slavery International, in particular, Krishna Upadhyay at all stages of the project. The studies would not have been possible but for the effective coordination provided by my colleagues Bansari Nag and Abhay Xaxa.

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July 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, BLSAA, 1976, made unlawful the practice of binding labour through the mechanism of debt. The practice of coercing workers through debt was institutionalised in most parts of the Indian subcontinent over a long period of time and under different local names. However, the system worked in a similar manner everywhere. It bound the worker with the creditor-employer until the outstanding debt was cleared. Given the abject state of poverty of those who entered the arrangement and the social disabilities imposed on them by the order of caste hierarchy, very few could get out of the arrangement. Those who worked in such arrangements invariably came from the 'depressed' caste groups. In the given state of affairs being tied to a specific employer became a fact of life and beyond for those belonging to the labouring classes in the subcontinent. Poverty and marginal status kept the workers perpetually indebted. The debts were transferred from one generation to another. This form of slavery came to be known as 'bonded-labour'.

The legal abolition of 'bonded labour' in 1976 was a progressive legislation and an important landmark in the history of contemporary India. It offered a ray of hope to India's most deprived and marginalised citizens. More importantly, it recognised that Independence and the introduction of democracy had not necessarily brought freedom to all. Even industrialisation and the introduction of new technology in the agrarian sector, which led to the growth of the market economy, and the development of capitalist agriculture, did not release labour from the traditional modes of bondage and patron-client relations everywhere.

The passing of the 1976 legislation straightaway meant that workers bound by an outstanding debt no longer needed to keep working with the creditor-employer. It made the binding of labour against a debt a legal offence. It also made it legally binding on state governments to identify all the bonded labourers in their states, organise their release from the wily employers and provide them with a viable rehabilitation package. To accomplish this, the state governments initiated several measures and instituted new administrative set-ups. Official surveys enumerated the incidents of bonded labour and special commissions were set up to formulate strategies for the eradication of the system.

Much has changed in India since the legislation was enacted more than three decades back. Though agriculture continues to employ a large proportion of active workers, its place in India's economy is not predominant. While the impact of legislation and state action against bonded labour has been limited, the social relations of production on the ground have undergone many changes. The opening up of labour markets, the increasing linkages with towns and the growing political consciousness have made it difficult for employers to bind labour for generations. In some instances, employers, in order to circumvent the law, have found other ways of subjugating labour.

Besides state interventions, the different regions of India have been witness to social movements and civil society interventions supporting the bonded labourers and favouring their release. Several non governmental organisations (NGOs) used the available legal provisions to support individual labourers in their struggle against their powerful employers. As a consequence of all these measures, the old system of generational bondage has slowly declined almost everywhere in India.

The decline of the old system, however, did not translate into any kind of substantive empowerment of the labour class. In some cases, it just meant a greater degree of casualisation, or simply, unemployment. However, this is not to suggest that the traditional relations of patronage and clientele were better for the poor labourer. Freedom without economic security means little and brings other forms of vulnerabilities. Today, labour has to

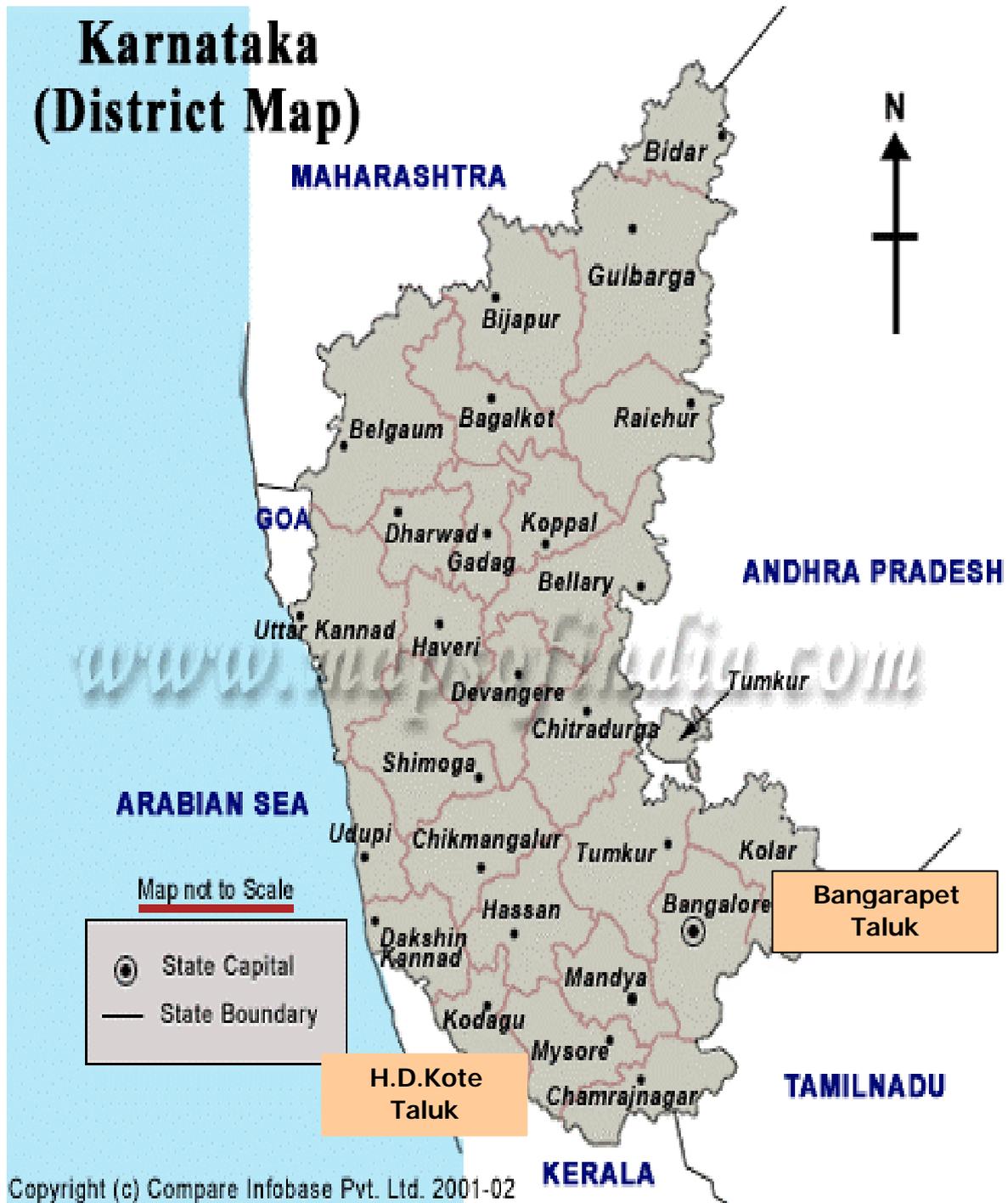
struggle to find employment despite being much more mobile. Travelling and sustaining themselves in an alien setting is difficult. Migrations of the poor invariably occur through intermediaries of different kinds. Such migrations, sometimes, also involve the payment of some advance to the labourers or their families, which, in turn, leads to the institutionalisation of newer forms of relations based upon dependency. This has been found to be a pattern in many industries. Dependencies institutionalised through debt have also continued, albeit in newer forms in the agricultural and several other sectors of employment. The payment of an advance to secure labour supply at depressed wages is commonplace in many sectors. The liberalisation or globalisation of the Indian economy has further reinforced this process.

Though bondage relations mediated through debt continue to be practiced very widely, they no longer work within the older frames of permanent relations between workers and employers. The generational and family bondage has given way to more individualised and relatively temporary, or sometimes, seasonal bondages. While things have changed on the ground, state policies have not. The old framework of identification, release and rehabilitation no longer seems meaningful. In fact, official surveys no longer report the existence of bondage in most parts of India and the official machinery no longer feels obliged to do anything for the poor labourer.

We are at a stage where we need to make a concerted effort to understand and conceptualise the newer, and increasingly elusive, forms of bondage relations. The studies being conducted by Centre for Education and Communication in collaboration with Anti-Slavery International are an attempt in this direction. It is only through participation and dialogue with the organisations of civil society that we can hope to initiate the process of formulating new legislations that can truly empower the poor labourers and bring them dignity and citizenship rights.

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July 2007

Karnataka (District Map)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bonded labourers in Karnataka are called *Jeethas* who mainly belong to the scheduled caste (SCs) communities (Adi Karnataka). The major factors that perpetuate the bonded labour system are poverty, caste discrimination, illiteracy, unemployment and social customs. Seasonal migration is quite common in the study area because of drought conditions for the past four to five years. The daily wage workers do not get adequate work so they migrate to nearby cities and towns. Having lost almost everything these people are undergo economic vulnerability, social apathy and mental agony.

The initial survey of bonded labourers was begun in one taluk during 1988 and action on rehabilitation of the bonded labourers at that taluk level was initiated in 1990. Till February 28, 1995, 61,532 bonded labourers were identified in Karnataka, and the number of bonded labourers identified till March 2000 was 61,709. Between 2000 and 2005 the number of bonded labourers identified by the Government of Karnataka was only 2,063. The government also sent reports to the Government of India and the NHRC denying the existence of bonded labour in the state until 2000.

Between the years 2000-01 and 2004-05, only 2,063 bonded labourers were identified and released. Again between 28-2-1995 and 1-1-2001 only 213 cases were identified and released. This shows that the work of identification and release between 1995 and 2005, that is, during the last one decade, has been very slack, showing a lack of concern about bonded labour.

The analysis of trends reveals that out of ten bonded labour prone districts, three are developed, four have been placed in the medium level of development and the remaining three are relatively backward districts. This leads us to infer that the incidence of bondage exists in districts with different levels of development. Among the districts with a lower incidence of bondage, three are developed districts, two are at the medium level of development and five have been placed in the backward level of development. There is a possibility of having higher figures of bondage in the remaining ten districts as well, irrespective of the level of development.

Although the government implemented several anti-poverty and rehabilitation programmes for the released bonded labourers, between 1976 and 1993, after 1993, the programmes have not shown the desired results. The study also finds that there is no implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and the Employment Guarantee Scheme. As a result, the labour class is working for lower wages and does not get employment around the year. Therefore, these Acts should be implemented seriously.

During 1992-2004, JEEVIKA an NGO working on the issue along with the Government of Karnataka organised a joint survey for the identification of bonded labour in the state. The joint survey identified 18,000 cases of bonded labour, but the government did not accept the figure. After the Hangarahally episode the government accepted the existence of only 1,800 cases. However, the state could actually rehabilitate a mere 300 cases.

Presently, JEEVIKA has created social pressure on the issue of bondage in two different ways: Primarily, through an extensive survey taken up in the initial stages covering nearly 48 taluks representing different geographical regions in the state ? northern and southern Karnataka. The organisation has proved the existence of over 20000 bonded labourers in the state. According to JEEVIKA's estimation, the number of bonded labourers in entire Karnataka would be more than one lakh. This needs to be proved through rigorous empirical

investigation. One of the indicators as per JEEVIKA is that agricultural labourers do not get even 50 per cent of the minimum wages.

JEEVIKA also hints at the changing nature of bondage today. "What we have today is a kind of voluntary bondage in the form of contractual agreements in the place of customary practices." As a result the dalits no longer constitute the reservoir for drawing the labour force under the bonded labour system. People from the lower economic classes also constitute bonded labourers.

The government has made no serious effort to totally eradicate the bonded labour system or to rehabilitate the released bonded labourers. Even the existence of bonded labour is denied by officials. If they accept that there is bonded labour, it exerts pressure on the landlords and the officials.

Through the NHRC's efforts, the Vigilance Committees have now been formed at district and sub-district levels, which was not the case prior to 2001. The NHRC also recommended the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour by suitably amending the PRIs Act to achieve this objective.

It has become very clear from the field study that the problem of bonded labour is not a mere economic issue, but it also has a social dimension. Therefore there is a need for initiating development activities and economic programmes, simultaneously unionising and organising the communities, who are more vulnerable to the problem of bonded labour.

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), a New Delhi based organisation has taken up the present study on “*Analysing the Effectiveness of the Programmes for the Eradication of Bonded Labour in India*” in the state of Karnataka.

1.2 Objectives of the study

- Highlight the role of NGOs in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers. (Hence, JEEVIKA's intervention in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour in the state of Karnataka from 1990 to 2005 has been one of the primary focuses of the present study.)
- Examine the interventions made by the government and other agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission, Vigilance Committees and the Judiciary etc.
- Since the 1990s, JEEVIKA (Jeetha Vimukti Karnataka) is one of the main organisations involved in the identification and release of bonded labour. To explore whether bonded labour still persists?
- Examine the status of rehabilitated bonded labourers in terms of improvement in their socio-economic conditions.

1.3 Methodology of the field research

Apart from primary data, secondary data were also collected. These included the following:

- Published statistical material and other socio-economic data.
- Published and documented studies on areas such as bonded labour, land reforms, agrarian relations, rural development.
- Interviews with elected representatives, professionals and officials.
- Interviews with bonded labourers. For interviewing bonded labourers, an Interview Schedule guide was prepared with the specific aim of collecting qualitative information on the socio-economic condition of bonded labourers. In addition, case studies were undertaken to elicit information on the conditions of bondage, and the impact of release and rehabilitation.
- *Selection of the study area.* The selection of the study area was guided by the following criteria:
 - District block and village with high incidence of bonded labour
 - Districts, block and villages where the NGO (i.e. JEEVIKA) is active.

The districts of Mysore and Kolar were selected for the study as they satisfied the above criteria. The empirical study was conducted from October 2004 to January 2005. In the four selected villages, 44 bonded labourers were interviewed, apart from a few case studies. (Please see list of interviewed persons in the Annexure.)

1.4 Definition of Bonded Labour

The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his Report (1971-72 and 1972-73) has defined the bonded labour system as ‘the practice under which a man pledges his own person or a member of his family against a loan. The pledger or his nominee is released only on its discharge. Until then, the man himself or member of his family is required to work for his creditor against his daily meals or low wage’. He has to depend upon someone in the family, since he can save very little money, to procure the sum required for his release and this, of course, is rarely available. The bonded labourer lacks freedom to move or to seek alternate employment.

Jharanappa Lingappa Hanilpurker (1989) in his book “*Changing Aspects of Bonded Labour in India*” explains the meaning of the bonded labour system in Karnataka. According to him

people under the bonded labour system are variously called agricultural serfs, plough-servants, bonded and forced labourers, debt servants, *Bagela* labour, *Jita* (Jeetha) servants and tied labourers. In spite of different nomenclatures they share common problem and they are the same.

Bonded labourers in the state of Karnataka are called *Jeethas* and are employed on an annual basis mainly for agricultural operations. Loans are advanced to the labourers. The labourer has to repay the loan along with interest, and therefore, it becomes necessary for him or her to be attached to the lender. Under the terms of the agreement, which may be written or unwritten he must work for the lender up to the end of the year or until the loan is repaid. Under the agreement, cooked meals, free accommodation, clothing and nominal wages are also paid to the labourer. No leave of any kind is admissible. In case of absence, either a substitute has to be arranged by the labourer or the labourer has to agree to do extra work to compensate for the absence.

1.5 Description of the bonded labour system in Karnataka by other scholars

Professor M. N. Srinivas, the eminent sociologist, has attempted to trace the causes and effects of the particular type of agricultural labour corresponding to the *Bagela* system of Hyderabad. He calls it '*jita*' system, which was prevalent in the farthest parts of south India. *Jita* system, in his view, is in many aspects different from the *Bagela* system, although at the core it is the same. Under the '*Jita*' system usually there is a written contract entered in to by the master and the *Jita*. The debtor in lieu of his debt becomes a *Jita* and works in the master's fields for a fixed season or for a year. The period of contract may be extended for several years, until the loan is repaid. The master advances a certain sum of money towards the wages at the commencement of the season. According to Srinivas, the *Jita* system gradually degenerates into the bonded labour system, because before the expiry of the season under contract, the *Jita* proper or any of his relatives borrows a further sum at the time of need, on the condition that the *Jita* will continue to work during the subsequent periods. In this way, although the *Jita* system is a seasonal contract, it gradually leads to permanent debt-bondage.

Tripathy (1989) observes that the system of bonded labourer existed in Karnataka in the form of attached labour. Poverty and backwardness were the main causes for bondage. Most of the SC landless agricultural labourers mortgaged their services to the village landlords for mere existence. In the system of *Jeetham*, popularly known as '*Jeetha*' the victims belonged to the SC (Adi Karnataka). Often, it was hereditary because the wife and the father of the *Jeetha* also served the creditor in lieu of the repayment of loans. About four decades back, the *Jeetha* servant of the family was acknowledged as '*hale-mamaga*' (old son), *manemaga* (family son), *alu (a)-maga* (ruling son) etc. Such dignified names were attached to the *Jeetha* servant in order to extract greater allegiance to the patron family. This candidness was due to the ignorance and economic inability on the part of the *Jeetha* servant. The *Jeetha* used to take pride in the wealth and power of his master and consciously or unconsciously accepted the system instead of challenging it.

A *Jeetha* starts his career at the early age of eight to twelve years. The parents who are unable to feed their sons prefer to keep them in a landowner's house to perform odd jobs including looking after the cattle. In return the *Jeetha* receives his daily food and a pair of clothes every year from the master. In certain parts of Karnataka, labourers are appointed on daily wages, and if necessary on monthly and annual basis too. There are two types of contracts in North Karnataka -- '*one-sambala*' (without meal) and '*unda-sambala*' (with meal). In the former system, the wages are higher than in the latter. Usually, the annual contract labourers are given meals and other facilities and are considered full-time servants of the patron family (see Tripathy, 1989).

Chinchalkar (1976) notes that bonded labour exists in non-agricultural sectors also, like hotels and in domestic service, where young boys and girls are made to work for low wages.

1.6 Incidence and profile of bonded labour in Karnataka: Review of studies

The Survey Report (1979) of the *Gandhi Peace Foundation conducted during 1978-79* estimates the number of bonded labourers in Karnataka at approximately 1,93,000 comprising 7.6 per cent of all agricultural labourers. The report also reveals the substantial concentration of bonded labour in Bangalore, Shimoga, Bijapur, Chitadurga, Gulbarga, Kolar, Raichur, Dharwar and Hassan. Male labourers account for 91 per cent of the total bonded labour of the state.

Of these bonded labourers, 84 per cent belong to the SC, nine per cent to the backward communities, 2.7 per cent respectively to other Hindu castes and Muslims, while 0.5 per cent are Christians.

Kamble (1982) took up a study in Tumkur district in Karnataka covering 20 randomly selected villages. According to him bonded labourers borrow sums of money from some landlords and are compelled to pay off old debts by working for the master. The bonded labourer continues to be under the burden of debt all his life.

The main findings of the study are: The masters do not enter into written agreements with the bonded labourers. The bonded labourers silently bear the burden of their bondage because of the fear of incurring the master's displeasure. *This shows how poverty compels a person to accept terms determined by his master and to accept slavery.* The bonded labourers get wages much below the subsistence level. Being poor, most of them stay in huts constructed by the masters. Lack of mobility and contact with the outside world prevents them from getting information about the changes taking place around them. Many of them are not aware of the 1976 Act banning the bonded labour system in India. The study points out that many masters are also village sarpanches and members of the gram panchayats. The younger generation is gradually getting rid of bondage because of the opportunities for migration to work elsewhere. The study says that there is an absence of political will to tackle the problem. Moreover, most of the members of the state legislatures and parliament have vested interests in private property and perpetuating bondage.

JEEVIKA's state co-ordinator, Kiran Kamal Prasad, completed a two-year survey of bonded labour in Anekal taluk, Bangalore Urban district, in Karnataka (*Human Rights Watch*, 1996). The survey findings are given below.

A total of 786 bonded labourers were identified in 120 villages (out of the total of 298 villages in the taluk), as many as 690 belonged to dalit communities (SCs), 21 to other lower castes while 11 belonged to dominant castes and nine were Scheduled Tribes(STs). Nineteen of the 786 were women. The ages of 35 were below 10 years, 147 were between 11 years and 15 years and about 300 of them were below the age of 20. In the case of children, a majority were pledged by their fathers and by their mothers. In 279 cases, the loan was taken by the adult bonded labourers themselves. 40 were pledged by other members of the family, including elder brothers, grandfathers, uncles and fathers-in-law. In four cases, women had been pledged by their husbands. According to the survey, the 786 bonded labourers belonged to 719 families. In 691 of the 786, cases a yearly advance had been given. Most of the loans were below Rs. 2,000. The most common reason cited for taking the advance and entering into debt-bondage was to meet normal subsistence expenditures. The survey indicates that *rural underemployment was a major factor forcing family members into bondage.* The overwhelming majority of families (85.9%, or 596 families) were involved in daily wage labour and agricultural (non-bonded) labour. In general, 98.5 per cent of families had members who performed work that did not fall under the category of bonded labour.

JEEVIKA also conducted an investigation into the statistics submitted by the state government to the Ministry of Labour regarding the incidence of bonded labour from 1976 to 1992. The state claimed to have identified 62,389 bonded labourers by 1992.

Characteristics of bonded labour in the state were:

- A majority of the bonded labourers belongs to the SC and ST (64.7% and 9.6%, respectively) and 3.6 per cent belonged to the Muslim community.
- 91 per cent of the bonded labourers were males, and six per cent were females.
- 74 per cent of the bonded labourers in Karnataka never had any chance of going to school, and only 5.4 per cent were able to study up to the 4th standard. The study also pointed out other important social characteristics of the bonded labourers.

40 per cent of the bonded labourers had been in bondage since one year. About 32 per cent have been working as *Jeethas* for five to 10 years and 13.6 per cent from 10 to 15 years. 40 per cent of the bonded labourers had been placed in bondage by their fathers while 28 per cent of the bonded labourers had chosen bondage as the only alternative for economic survival. The bonded labourers had taken loans mainly because of poverty, hunger and starvation. An overwhelming 84.9 per cent were working in agriculture and 13.3 per cent were engaged as domestic labour. The majority of them were landless and only 18 per cent possessed land between one to three acres. 68 per cent of the bonded labourers did not own any animal. 41 per cent of the bonded labourers did not have their own houses. Only 58.2 per cent had shelters of their own.

The social profile of the masters indicates that 75.4 per cent belonged to high-caste Hindus. 86 per cent of the masters were agriculturists, and 13 per cent were engaged both in agriculture and business. On an average 80 per cent of the masters kept only one bonded labourer, 14 per cent of the masters kept upto 10 bonded labourers in their farms, and six per cent kept more than 10 bonded labourers. In Karnataka, the masters of bonded labourers possessed, on an average, eight animals (like cows or bullocks). Ten per cent of them owned more than 10 animals. 96 per cent of the bonded labourers had not received any land from their masters. Only four per cent had got some land, which they could work on besides working for the master. 97 per cent of the bonded labourers stated that they had to serve the landlord due to 'debt-bondage'.

Kulkarni (1989) observes that the landless labourers and marginal farmers needed to borrow money for social functions, such as marriages, and even for normal expenditure during seasonal unemployment. Many landowners who were in need of agricultural labour were keen to advance loans and securing pledges of labour, in lieu of interest until the amount borrowed was repaid, or towards repayment of the loan during a specified period. The person whose labour was thus pledged became a 'bonded labourer' committed to provide service exclusively to the lender and not free to participate in the labour market. The bondage often continued for a long time and in some cases was passed on from one generation to the next.

The study covered four districts namely, Mysore, Shimoga, Bangalore and Hassan. The study interviewed about 100 released labourers, who were given assistance, from each of these four districts. A three-stage sampling procedure was adopted – taluk, hobli and village. The data was collected between May and August 1987. The lists of labourers who were given assistance in the selected villages were obtained from the Block Development Offices. The beneficiaries were contacted and interviewed in or near their houses without the presence of government officials and, as far as possible, without the presence of village leaders. Around 411 persons who had been given assets under the rehabilitation scheme were interviewed.

The study found that the system of bonded labour is generally called the *Jeetha* system, and the bonded labourer called the *Jeetha* worker. Most of the bonded labourers in this region came from the weakest sections of the society. Over three-fourths of the rehabilitated labourers in the sample belonged to either SCs (72.7%) or STs (5.6%) and 18 per cent belonged to backward communities. Most of the bonded labourers were illiterate; only about 13 per cent had some schooling and even among them a majority had not completed the fourth grade. The living conditions of the bonded labourers before their release were quite poor. Most lived in small mud huts with thatched roofs. About half of the bonded labourers (45%) belonged to landless households, and only about a fifth owned any livestock. Thus, most of the labourers had neither modern skills acquired through education, nor assets, such as adequate land or livestock, to eke out a good living. Most bonded labourers lived in abject poverty.

The bondage was mostly in the form of labour on annual contract. A poor family, with some male member (rarely did women work in bondage) capable of working full time, would enter into an agreement with a landlord for the labour of such a member for one year. The payment of money, which was made to the head of the household, can more correctly be described as 'advance wage' rather than as a 'loan'. No interest as such was charged on this advance. Most of those who worked on an annual basis often renewed the contracts at the end of the year and thus worked for a number of years in this manner. The advance was taken generally for routine expenditure and the amount was not large. In the study sample, about 70 per cent received Rs. 400 or less for a year's service as bonded labour in the 1970s. Almost all the bonded labour received at least two meals a day and some clothing from the landlord for whom they worked.

The bonded workers were expected to do any work assigned by the landlord. Naturally, this was mostly related to agricultural operations and animal husbandry. There were no fixed hours of work; many workers stayed in the landlord's house and thus their services were used whenever necessary, even at odd hours. The workers were not free to seek work elsewhere during the period of contract (see Kulkarni, 1989, for details).

The process of release from bondage was generally trouble free. However, about half of the workers were released only after the completion of the annual contract and thus their release amounted only to non-renewal of contracts for the subsequent year. Moreover, the bonded labourers have not totally disappeared. Although at the time of the survey, only three of the 411 workers were found continuing in bondage even after their formal release, in *about eight per cent of the households of the released bonded labour someone (a younger brother or a relative of the released bonded labour) was working in bondage.*

The next stage in rehabilitation is the provisioning of income generation assets to the released labourers. In Karnataka this task is entrusted to the Department of Rural Development and PRIs. The Block Development Officer (BDO) is responsible for preparing a list of potential beneficiaries, suggesting suitable schemes for them and, after approval by the districts and state-level officers, making arrangements for the distribution of assets. The schemes suggested are:

- a) Land based schemes -- land development
- b) Rearing of milk cattle, sheep, etc.
- c) Skill/craft based scheme -- generally called the ISB (Industry, Service and Business schemes)

With difficulties in procuring land for allotment to the labourers, pairs of bullocks, *milk cattle and sheep/goats constituted the bulk of the assistance.* This study indicates that the share of purely land-based schemes was only 15 per cent, and another eight per cent were given both a pair of bullocks and milk cattle. Above 40 per cent were given milk cattle (buffaloes or cross breed cows), 25 per cent were given sheep or goat units and eight per cent were given

a mix of these, that is, a pair of bullocks with smaller sheep/goat units. Very few were given assistance under skill-based schemes. The ceiling on the value of the asset was Rs. 4000 per beneficiary until 1986, which was subsequently raised to Rs. 6,250.

In the selection of schemes, individual preferences played some role. Among those contacted in this study, there was no overwhelming preference for any single scheme. *Bullocks and sheep/goat units were preferred by about 18 per cent and buffaloes and cross breed cows by about 11 per cent.* Others preferred a combination of these i.e. land and ISB schemes; and many (27%) -- did not have any specific preference. Of those who expressed some preference, *a majority (62%) received the preferred scheme.*

As suggested in the programme, generally assets were given rather than cash. In only about seven per cent of the cases was cash given, which was given mostly for the purchase of ISB assets. *Animals were purchased by the block-level purchase committees and handed over to the released labourers.* The animals were selected by the block office and the premium for the first year was paid directly out of the amount sanctioned for the asset. Costs on procurement (transport, agent's commission, etc.) were also deducted out of the sanctioned amount. Most of those who were given animals under the scheme felt that the *value of these animals was lower than the recorded value.* In a majority of cases, the difference in the value as assessed by the beneficiary and the recorded value was quite high.

The available data clearly show that *generally assets have, in fact, reached the labourers for whom these were procured.* The implementation of the rehabilitation scheme, over all, appears to have been done satisfactorily. The identification of bonded labourers was done quite vigorously, though there are reasons to believe that in certain areas (not included in the study), this was not the case. The officials at the block level took into account preferences of released labourers, local conditions, and their own assessments about the suitability of schemes in selecting the type of assets to be given. The distribution of assets was done in a proper manner though a more open procedure would have been helpful.

First, the *quality of assets was quite good.* At the time of procurement, *most of the milk cattle were either in lactation or expected to calve within a short time* and the work cattle were fit for agricultural operations. Animals not suitable to climatic conditions were avoided; for instance, in areas of heavy rainfall, sheep units were not given. *The owner-related factors were, however, not very favourable.* Though most of the released labourers had tended cattle during bondage, and therefore, were expected to be knowledgeable about routine upkeep of the animals, they might not have had experience in marketing and attending to the special needs of animals unless they had owned any cattle in the past. Only 17 per cent of those who were given cattle had owned such animals in the past. *The recipients of ISB assets were not given any training in the trades.* About one-third of those who received livestock did not have their own fodder and the ability to purchase special feed for animals was limited because of low incomes. Generally, no good cattle sheds were used. *A distress sale was quite likely due to acute poverty.* The availability of family labour was probably the only favourable factor.

Marketing and credit facilities were not widely available because milk producers' co-operative societies had not been formed in many areas; only 22 per cent of those who were given milk cattle were members of such societies. Institutional support was, however, good with respect to veterinary services, which were available in all the areas, in the same village or in a nearby village.

The findings of this study, suggest that the *percentage of those retaining an asset is fairly high among those who were given bullocks and milk cattle.* *Retention of the entire original asset is very low, except in the case of bullocks and cross breed cows.* However, many of those who were given buffaloes (usually two buffaloes) and a mix of buffaloes, bullocks and

sheep have been able to keep at least some of these animals. *The retention of bullocks and milk cattle appears quite satisfactory.*

The level of retention is very high in the case of bullocks -- over 80 per cent even at the end of four years, and moderately high in the case of milk cattle-both the cross-breed variety and buffaloes. Most of these who were given a mix of assets continue to retain these. The extent of retention is, however, low in the case of sheep or goats and ISB assets. Death of animals and inability to replace them is the main reason for the non-retention of animals. Even among the weakest groups, the retention rate is as high as 60 per cent. Net incomes generated due to various assets in the year 1986-87 are given. The average for all assets is Rs. 874. While many have not earned any income, some have earned over Rs. 2,000 in the year. Incomes from cross-bred cows and from the bullocks-buffalo combination are fairly high. In the case of sheep, levels of both retention and income generated are low. Most of those who have retained the assets have low incomes; about 19 per cent are above the poverty line as compared to nine per cent among the households of those who have not retained the assets. The tendency to retain assets is slightly higher among those with better endowments. Most of the released labourers continue to live in small mud huts. However, there is some improvement in that more houses have two rooms now than in the past. Also, many houses have better roofs (tiled) now. However, there has been only a marginal improvement in land ownership. On the other hand, there has been a remarkable rise in the ownership of livestock mostly due to the emphasis on livestock as an asset in the rehabilitation programme. About half of the released labourers had taken some loans since the release from bondage. At the time of the survey, only in about eight per cent of the households of released labourers was someone working as a bonded labourer.

Overall it can be said that there has been some improvement in the living conditions of the released labourers, although most continue to be poor. *The fact that the majority of those who were given the assets continue to retain them for a long time indicates a large degree of success. As pointed out earlier, the impact in terms of income has been quite small. The rehabilitated labourers generally continue to be poor even today. The incomes are low, housing poor, other living conditions not very good and reliance on wage labour heavy. Some of the improvements, however, may be attributed to the rehabilitation programme, but other factors have also contributed.*

Muthurayappa (1998) carried out a study on "Rehabilitated Bonded Labourers in Karnataka: Relapse Rate and Cause". The main objectives of the study were to ascertain the factors contributing to the relapse of bondage.

- To examine the nature of bondage of identified and released labour
- To study whether rehabilitation resulted in increases in the income and improvements in the living conditions of the freed labourers
- To estimate the extent of the rehabilitated labourers who have relapsed into bondage
- To investigate the reasons for relapse into bondage

The study was carried out in four districts (Bangalore, Hassan, Mysore and Shimoga) and 100 bonded labourers were interviewed. The main findings of the study are:

- There is no doubt that identified bonded labourers were very poor, with the majority of them having little or no land or cattle and poor housing.
- The study finds that all the respondents had received rehabilitation assets from the government.
- *Two per cent of the rehabilitated bonded labourers had relapsed into bondage due to their poor socio-economic conditions.*
- Although the government implemented rehabilitation programmes for ex-bonded labourers and a majority of them had low incomes and were below the poverty line, *even today the major source of income of these labourers was wage income. Most of them had taken loans either from banks, co-operatives or private persons. The*

reason for their indebtedness is the expenditure related to marriage, medical treatment and consumption.

- *Another important suggestion is in favour of provisioning of land rather than animals because of poor maintenance of cattle.* The ownership of assets, such as cattle, does confer higher status in agrarian society. Therefore instead of providing only animals it would be proper and useful if the *government provides both land and animals.*

Muthurayappa's study observes that *the programmes implemented for the released bonded labourers have not brought the desired results. Some of the rehabilitated labourers relapsed into bondage.* The rehabilitation schemes implemented were allotment of land, land development, provisions of agricultural inputs, supply of goats/sheep, piggery units, poultry, milch animals and supply of material to develop carpentry and leather works. *All the respondents had received rehabilitation assets from the government. The assets were retained by only 37.3 per cent of the respondents,* with higher percentage of retention being in the districts of Hassan (48.9%) and Mysore (43.3%) and lower retention rate being in Bangalore Rural (30.9%) and Shimoga (29.5%). Nearly 60 per cent of the bonded labourers own land. A majority of them own less than two acres. Over half of them have gained mostly through allotment of land under government programmes and, another one-third through encroachment on forestlands. Among bonded labourers who owned land, some of them also received land from their ancestors. Land allotment for ex-bonded labourers was more in Shimoga district compared to the other three districts.

Thus, the above studies suggest that *bonded labour still persists in Karnataka with the majority of them belonging to SC/ST communities. Their economic condition is pretty bad. In times of need they would borrow and in order to repay the loan would enter into bondage.* The bonded labourers are exploited in several ways. The rehabilitation is not adequate and effective. These facts have also been borne out by the present survey.

IDENTIFICATION, RELEASE AND REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOUR IN KARNATAKA

2.1 Introduction

As far as the Bonded Labour Act 1976 is concerned, the responsibility for the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour falls on the District Collector, and the Sub-District Magistrates. After the promulgation of the Bonded Labour Act 1976, the extent of bonded labourers across the states was as shown in the following table for the period ending March 1993.

Table 1: Number of bonded labourers as on 31.3.1993

No. Of bonded labourers as on 31.3.1993					
Sl. No.	Name of the State	Identified & released	Rehabilitated bonded labour	Not available for rehabilitation	Balance of bonded labourers
1	Andhra Pradesh	35,934 (14.31)	25,753 (11.49)	-	10,181 (76.49)
2	Bihar	12,986 (5.17)	11,479 (5.12)	1,116 (8.15)	391 (2.94)
3	Karnataka	62,708 (24.98)	54,078 (24.13)	6,180 (45.16)	2,450 (18.40)
4	Madhya Pradesh	12,804 (5.10)	11,814 (5.72)	936 (6.84)	54 (0.41)
5	Orissa	49,971 (19.90)	46,769 (20.87)	6,176 (45.13)	26 (0.20)
6	Rajasthan	7,478 (2.98)	5,804 (2.59)	1,533 (11.20)	141 (1.06)
7	Tamil Nadu	36,886 (14.69)	38,813 (17.32)	6 (0.04)	67 (0.50)
8	Maharashtra	1,382 (0.55)	1,300 (0.58)	82 (0.60)	-
9	Uttar Pradesh	27,489 (10.95)	27,469 (12.26)	20 (0.15)	-
10	Kerala	823 (0.33)	710 (0.32)	113 (0.83)	-
11	Haryana	544 (2.17)	21 (0.01)	523 (3.82)	-
12	Gujarat	64 (0.25)	64 (0.03)	-	-
	Total	2,51,069 (100.00)	2,24,074 (100.00)	13,685 (100.00)	13,310 (100.00)

(Source: Ministry of Labour, Government of India)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages.

As Table 1 reveals, the total number of identified and released bonded labourers in Karnataka is 62,708 out of 2,51,069 for the entire country forming 24 per cent of the total. Similarly, the total number of rehabilitated bonded labour is 54,078 out of the total of 2,24,074 for the entire country, constituting 24 per cent. While the total number of bonded labour not rehabilitated in the country stood at 13,310, it was as much as 2,450 in Karnataka, forming 18 per cent.

Table 2: Bonded Labour in Different Districts of Karnataka as on 28.2.1995

Sl. No.	Name of the District	Identified & released	Rehabilitated bonded labour	Not available for Rehabilitation	Balance bonded labourers
1	Bangalore Rural	6,132	4,788	1,263	87
2	Bangalore Urban	2,787	2,590	197	-
3	Bellary	602	575	27	-
4	Bidar	12	12	-	-
5	Bijapur	451	435	16	-
6	Chikamagalur	2,756	2,370	386	-
7	Dakshin Kannada	385	265	120	-
8	Hassan	4,819	4,204	615	-
9	Kodagu	57	50	7	-
10	Kolar	2,937	2,617	320	-
11	Mandya	5,217	4,998	219	-
12	Mysore	62708	61532	15206	-
13	Shimoga	9,236	8,357	850	21
14	Tumkur	2,046	1,730	316	-
15	Uttar Kannada	8	5	3	-
16	Chitradurga	1,252	1,180	72	-
17	Belgaum	19	10	9	-
18	Gulbarga	49	47	2	-
19	Dharwad	-	-	-	-
20	Raichur	123	103	20	-
	Total	61,532	55,046	6,376	102

(SOURCE: Department of RDPR)

There is some discrepancy in the total figures of bonded labourers identified, released, and rehabilitated in the Government of India and Government of Karnataka figures as indicated below.

Bonded Labour in Karnataka

Identified and Released	Rehabilitated
62708*	54078*
61532**	55046*

*Source: Govt. of India (31-3-1993)

**Govt. of Karnataka (28-2-1995)

The above Table shows that Shimoga, Bangalore Rural, Mandya, Hassan, Kolar, Chikmagalur and Tumkur districts reported the highest number of bonded labourers in the state. The districts with moderate incidence of bonded labourers were from Chitradurga and Bellary, while the remaining districts had the least number of bonded labourers. *During the 70s and 80s the major interventions were by the government, and the role of NGOs and civil society was negligible.*

However, when figures for 1995 are compared with the figures for 2001, a mere 213 additional bonded labourers were identified. *Hence, the government's role in the identification of bonded labour during this period is very negligible.* The role of NGOs and particularly JEEVIKA was crucial during the 90s till the present.

Table 3: Bonded Labour in Karnataka as on 1-1-2001

Name of the District	Identified & Released	Rehabilitated	Not Available For Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation Amount (Rs. in lakhs)

1	Bangalore Rural	6132	5004	1128	337.634
2	Bangalore Urban	2802	2604	198	139.325
3	Bellary	602	575	27	22.976
4	Bidar	12	10	2	0.400
5	Bijapur	591	557	34	5.433
6	Bagalkot	197	53	144	1.330
7	Dakshina Kannada	385	265	120	10.600
8	Udupi	-	-	-	-
9	Hassan	4910	4295	615	144.350
10	Chikamagalur	2756	2363	393	95.689
11	Kodagu	57	57	-	2.437
12	Kolar	2957	2637	320	110.945
13	Mandya	5352	5132	220	286.060
14	Mysore	15206	14151	1934	782.70
15	Chamarajnar	7438	6559	-	632.395
16	Shimoga	8851	8051	800	398.232
17	Tumkur	2046	1768	278	70.300
18	Uttar Kannada	8	5	3	0.125
19	Chitradurga	1074	1006	68	42.945
20	Davanagere	178	178	-	7.08
21	Belgaum	19	10	9	0.400
22	Gulbarga	49	47	2	1.190
23	Dharwad	-	-	-	-
24	Havri	-	-	-	-
25	Gadag	-	-	-	-
26	Raichur	106	88	18	4.120
27	Koppal	17	15	2	-
	Total	61745	55430	6315	2827.120

(Source; RDPR)

In Karnataka, out of the 20 districts, a substantial number of bonded labourers have been identified in only nine districts. Nearly 90 per cent of the released labourers were given assistance under the bonded labourers rehabilitation programme. The remaining released labourers could not be rehabilitated mainly because they were not traceable both in the places they were released and in their residential villages.

Most of the released labourers were given income-generating assets such as milch cattle, goats/sheep units, leather industry etc. Those who owned land were supplied with a pair of bullocks and agricultural inputs. *Although the government implemented several anti-poverty and rehabilitation programmes for the released bonded labourers, between 1976 and 1993,, the programmes implemented after 1993 for the released bonded labourers have not shown the desired results. The bonded labour system continues to play an important role in the exploitation of SCs, STs and dalits in society (Kiran, Integral Liberation Vol.5, No.2). JEEVIKA, an NGO, estimates that there are three to four lakh bonded labourers in Karnataka today.*

JEEVIKA has been taking up the cause of bonded labour in Karnataka. Some dalit youth under the banner of Jeetha Vimukti Sanghatane identified nearly 700 bonded labourers in the entire Anekal taluk from 1988 to 1990. The Minister while answering the question raised on the issue of bonded labour acknowledged the prevalence of bonded labour in Karnataka and promised to take action according to law. Thus, a process was initiated from the top level in Karnataka to identify fresh cases of bonded labourers. JEEVIKA has carried out

surveys in 48 taluks and identified nearly 20,000 bonded labourers. However, the government rejected the claims regarding bonded labourers identified by the local NGO. Till 2000, it claimed that there were no cases of bonded labourers.

2.2 After the Hangarahally episode

The state government denied the prevalence of bonded labourers in Karnataka by filing affidavits before the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission. *The discovery on June 22, 2000, of five chained bonded labourers in Hangarahally (Mandya district) refuted their position. Both the legs of the five bonded labourers were chained for periods ranging from 2 months to 2.5 years with thick chains weighing 15 to 20 kgs and measuring 2-3 feet. They belonged to a Scheduled Caste community (Bovi). They were working in a stone quarry owned by Puttaswamy Gowda. They were bonded for 5 to 6 years along with their families for the loans they had taken. They were chained and denied a conjugal life. After they ate their food, they were locked up in a room. A guard kept watch over them. After this incident, several incidents of bonded labour have come to light in the state (Kiran Kamal Prasad, 2001).*

The Chief Minister of Karnataka announced on July 1, 2002, *that the government would identify and rehabilitate bonded labourers in the entire state within the next three months.* The Chief Secretary in a meeting convened by him on July 10, 2002, passed a similar resolution. A State Level Conference on Bonded Labour was held on October 11-12, 2002, at the Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, and the government reiterated its resolve to identify and rehabilitate bonded labour in a matter of three months. JEEVIKA has been actively involved with the government in the process. It conducted trainings on the identification of bonded labour for all the revenue and rural development and Panchayati Raj officials in 70 taluks and for all the district level officials in 10 districts. Except for Yadagiri, JEEVIKA activists cooperated with the government officials in identifying bonded labourers in 15 taluks where it was involved. They cooperated in identifying bonded labour in another 8 taluks as well.

The number of bonded labourers identified by JEEVIKA since July 2000 is given in the following table.

Table 4: District-wise Information on Identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers in Karnataka State as on 31-03-2002

Sl. No	Name of the District	No. of Bonded Labourers Identified			No. of Bonded Labour Shifted to other States	No. of Bonded Labourers Rehabilitated	No. of Bonded labourers Identified & Released Earlier	No. of Bonded Labourers to be Rehabilitated
		2000-01	2001-02	Total				
		4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Bagalkot	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
2	Bangalore (R)	27	146	173	0	3	15	188
3	Bangalore (U)	8	0	8	3	0	0	5

4	Belgaum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	Bellary	2	1	3	0	0	0	3
6	Bidar	0	10	10	10	0	0	0
7	Bijapur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	Chamarajanagar	72	0	72	0	0	0	72
9	Chikamagalur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Chitradurga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Dakshin Kannada	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	Davanagere	3927	2785	6712	0	0	0	6712
13	Dharwad	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Gadag	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	Gulbarga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	Hassan	48	0	48	0	0	0	48
17	Haveri	312	0	312	0	0	0	312
18	Kodagu	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
19	Kolar	370	0	370	0	0	0	370
20	Koppal	49	1	50	44	0	0	6
21	Mandya	45	3	48	0	36	0	12
22	Mysore	516	185	701	0	0	0	701
23	Raichur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
24	Shimoga	13	0	13	13	0	0	0
25	Tumkur	361	0	363	0	0	0	363
26	Udupi	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
27	UK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	5754	3131	8887	70	36	15	8796

(Source: JEEVIKA, Bangalore)

The total number of bonded labourers identified between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 were 8,887, and of these, 6,712 belong to Davanagere district. Except in the case of Haveri, which has identified 312 bonded labourers, the other areas where a relatively larger number of bonded labourers were identified are from the districts where JEEVIKA is active, that is, *Davanagere, Kolar and Mysore*. In 10 districts there is no report of any incidence of bonded labourers. It is surprising that a majority of the non-reporting districts are in North Karnataka. Dharwad district has not reported any case of bonded labourer since the enactment of the Act. Haveri district, which was part of Dharwad district, reported 312 cases of bonded labourers. Dharwad and its offshoot Gadag continued to report the absence of bonded labourers. *The conclusion that can be drawn from these figures is (as reported by the government) that in several parts of the state, in the absence of NGOs, there is no pressure on the Karnataka Government to identify and release bonded labour. Apparently, the government becomes active only where pressure is exerted through the process of mobilisation. Regarding rehabilitation, except for the bonded labourers discovered in Hangarahally, hardly any bonded labourer has been rehabilitated during the last two years. Because of this, the identified bonded labourers have been put to a great deal of hardship. The former masters harass them. In some cases they have pressurised them to pay back their past loans and in some cases as a retaliatory action they were not called for any type of wage work. They have neither received their legitimate dues from the government to eke out an independent living nor is there any alternative option open to them. In quite a few cases they had to relapse into bondage, which portrays the apathetic condition in which they are placed.*

This is in spite of the sensitisation training workshop carried out for officials through JEEVIKA. The sensitisation training workshop carried out by JEEVIKA activists was appreciated by almost all the officials who took part in it, numbering thousands from district revenue officers and nodal officers from all the line departments. The meetings were held at 80 taluks and in 10 districts at the district level (Bangalore Rural, Mysore, Chamaraja Nagara, Uttara Kannada, Dharwad, Bhagal Kote, Tumakeu and Kolar). In spite of the resolve by the participants at the end of the training to undertake an honest survey of bonded labourers, according to JEEVIKA, the incidence of bonded labourers has not been reported in Uttar Kannada and Dharwad. Very few bonded labourers were reported in Bagalkot and Chamarajanagar. In the initial identification at the taluk level of Kolar district in July and August 2000, 1,850 bonded labourers were identified. This is not a large number given the size of the district in area and population. It has 11 taluks. *A re-verification was done, which scaled down the total number of bonded labourers in the district to only 370.* Only in Mysore district has the process of identification of bonded labourers been carried out consistently. It reported 701 cases of bonded labourers, the highest after Davanagere district.

The process of identification left much to be desired. In some areas, before undertaking the survey, the authorities publicised the provision of the Act; there is provision for punishment of masters engaging bonded labourer. *This put the masters on alert. They threatened bonded labourers, asking them to represent themselves as daily wage earners.* In some taluks, *the investigating authorities had given prior intimation to the masters of the impending survey and advised them to report cases of bonded labourer, if any, as wage labourers.* In border areas, like Anekal and Hoskote, a large number of bonded labourers from Tamil Nadu were found.

Table-5: No. of Bonded Labour Identified, Released and Rehabilitated during 1976-2005

District-wise statement showing the number of bonded labourers identified, released, rehabilitated and the Amount of rehabilitation incurred and the prosecutions made in Karnataka State during 1976-2005																										
S No	Name of the District	No of bonded labourers identified and released							No. of bonded labourers rehabilitated							Amount of rehabilitation incurred (Rs.in lakhs)					No.of Prosecutions made					
		Till March 2000	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total	Till March 2000	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total	Till March 2000	2000	2001		2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		0	21	22	23	24
1	Bagalkot	197	2	0	0	0	0	199	53	0	0	0	2	0	55	1.33	0	0	0	0.4	0	1.73	0			
2	Bangalore®	6132	27	144	3	0	0	6306	5004	0	0	0	186	0	5190	337.634	0	0	0	37.2	0	374.8	3			
3	Bangalore (U)	2802	8	0	0	16	0	2826	2604	0	0	0	5	0	2609	139.325	0	0	0	1	0	140.3	5			
4	Belgaum	19	0	0	0	0	0	19	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	0			
5	Bellary	605	2	1	0	0	0	605	575	0	0	0	3	0	578	22.976	0	0	0	0.6	0	23.58	3			
6	Bidar	12	0	9	0	2	0	23	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	0			
7	Bijapur	501	0	0	0	0	0	591	557	0	0	0	0	0	557	5.433	0	0	0	0	0	5.433	0			
8	Chamarajnagar	7438	72	20	0	0	0	7530	6559	0	0	0	92	0	6651	362.395	0	0	0	18.4	0	380.8	0			
9	Chikamagalur	2756	0	0	0	0	0	2756	2363	0	0	0	0	0	2363	95.689	0	0	0	0	0	95.69	0			
10	Chitradurga	1074	0	0	0	0	0	1074	1006	0	0	0	0	0	1006	42.945	0	0	0	0	0	42.95	0			
11	Dakshina Kannada	385	0	0	0	0	0	385	265	0	0	0	0	0	265	10.6	0	0	0	0	0	10.6	0			
12	Davanagere	3795	0	0	0	0	0	3795	3615	0	0	0	0	0	3615	185.891	0	0	0	0	0	185.9	27			
13	Dharwad	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
14	Gadag	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
15	Gulbarga	49	0	0	0	0	0	49	47	0	0	0	0	0	47	1.19	0	0	0	0	0	1.19	0			
16	Hassan	4910	44	0	0	0	0	4954	4295	0	0	0	43	0	4338	144.35	0	0	0	8.6	0	153	48			
17	Haveri	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
18	Kodagu	57	1	0	0	0	0	58	57	0	0	0	0	0	57	2.437	0	0	0	0	0	2.437	1			
19	Kolar	2957	370	0	0	0	0	3327	2637	0	0	0	370	0	3007	110.945	0	0	0	74	0	185	20			
20	Koppala	17	49	1	0	0	0	67	15	0	0	0	6	0	21	0.6	0	0	0	1.2	0	1.8	50			
21	Mandya	5316	45	3	0	0	0	5364	5096	0	0	36	12	0	5144	278.86	0	0	7.2	2.4	0	288.5	1			
22	Mysore	15206	516	272	0	1	21	16016	14151	0	0	0	783	0	14934	782.7	0	0	0	156.6	0	939.3	70			
23	Raichur	106	0	0	0	0	0	106	88	0	0	0	0	0	88	3.52	0	0	0	0	0	3.52	0			
24	Shimoga	5234	13	0	0	0	0	5247	4614	0	0	0	0	0	4614	219.421	0	0	0	0	0	219.4	2			
25	Tumkur	2046	361	0	3	52	4	2466	1768	0	0	0	351	64	2183	70.3	0	0	0	70.2	6.4	146.9	26			
26	Udipi	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.2	0	0.2	0			
27	Uttara Kannada	8	0	0	0	0	0	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.125	0	0	0	0	0	0.125	0			
	TOTAL	61709	1511	450	6	71	25	63772	55394	0	0	36	1854	64	57348	2819.47	0	0	7.2	370.8	6.4	3204	256			

(Source: Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj)

The above Table shows the total number of bonded labourers identified, released and rehabilitated across districts in the state of Karnataka during the period 1976 and 2005. Karnataka could identify 61709 bonded labourers till 2000, while in the subsequent years till 2005 it could identify only a negligible number, viz., 2063. *The figures suggest a lack of seriousness on the part of the government. Since identification was very poor, naturally, release and rehabilitation, too, are grossly inadequate. The Table suggests the need for a realistic identification of bonded labourers so that their release and rehabilitation could be speeded up.*

2.3 Role of Karnataka Government on Identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in Karnataka

[Incidence of Identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers in Karnataka (Based on Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Official Document)]

Since the inception of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 61708 bonded labourers have been identified and released in the state. *Most of the work of identification and release of bonded labourers was carried out in the seventies* when detailed lists of released bonded labourers were prepared in each district. Out of 61708 released bonded labourers, 55,358 persons i.e. 91-71 per cent have been provided with rehabilitation assistance under the centrally sponsored scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labourers.

The total expenditure incurred by the state under the scheme for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers is Rs 28.199 crores. Initially the rehabilitation programme was implemented by providing economic assets like sheep, goats, crossbred cows, buffaloes, bullock carts etc with an out lay of Rs. 4,000 and later Rs. 6,250 per case. From 1994 it was decided to provide assistance in cash (Rs. 6250) to these persons as rehabilitation assistance under the scheme. *This has since been raised by the Government of India to Rs. 10000 for each person.* Apart from this some released bonded labourers have been provided assistance to take up cottage industries, houses under HUDCO's assisted housing scheme, Ashraya and LAY.

During 1994-95 in Hassan district 91 bonded labourers were identified and they were rehabilitated; during 1995-96, in Mandya district 34 bonded labourers were identified and rehabilitated in 1996-97. During the recent survey of the bonded labourers in the districts, 19 cases were detected in Kolar district. These persons have been released by the Deputy Commissioner, Kolar and rehabilitation assistance has been provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Zilla Panchayat (ZP), Kolar. In December 1996, the Tumkur ZP traced 11 bonded labourers who were missing and they are being rehabilitated. *In Uttar Kannada district, 33 persons who were working with a contractor in Gerusoppa of Honnavar taluk and were stated to be in bondage have been released by the Deputy Commissioner Uttar Kannada in February 1996.*

JEEVIKA, a voluntary organisation gave a list of nearly 20000 bonded labourers in 10 districts to the Karnataka Government. These complaints were enquired into by the Deputy Commissioners of the districts. The Deputy Commissioners have reported that there is no prevalence of bonded labour in their districts.

In a Civil Writ Petition No. 3922/85 in the Supreme Court of India, directions were issued by the Supreme Court on 13.5.1994 to take steps for the abolition of the bonded labour system. On 19-11-1996 the Supreme Court of India gave directions to complete the survey work by the end of December 1996.

The Deputy Commissioners of the districts have reported that there is no prevalence of bonded labour in their districts, except in Kolar district where the Deputy Commissioner had

identified 19 bonded labourers and ordered their release. Rehabilitation assistance at the rate of 10,000/- per person has been provided by the Chief Executive Officer, ZP, Kolar.

Two affidavits have been filed before the Supreme Court, narrating the actions taken by the Government of Karnataka, namely:

1. Vigilance Committees have been reconstituted for all districts and Sub- divisions of the state.
2. Rehabilitation assistance has been provided to the released bonded labourers in Kolar district.
3. A criminal complaint has been filed against the ex employers of 19 bonded labourers in Kolar District.
4. Writ Petitions filed in the High Court of Karnataka by some voluntary organisations followed by the contempt of court proceedings were disposed off in favour of the Government of Karnataka.
5. *Complaints referred by JEEVIKA and the enquiries conducted by the Deputy Commissioners have revealed that there is no prevalence of bonded labourers except the detection of 19 cases in Kolar district.*
6. In January 1997, 19 cases of bonded labourers were identified in Kolar district.
7. Sri Muthurayappa, Project Director of Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) conducted a study in 1997-98 with the government's assistance to verify the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. *The study revealed that rehabilitation was not adequate and the assets provided to the released bonded labourers such as sheep, goats, bullock-carts and buffaloes have been sold off and in some cases the assets given were not suited to local conditions.*

The rehabilitation package in the form of economic assets has subsequently been discontinued by the government and it was modified to pay cash to the released bonded labour as a one time grant. It was earlier Rs. 6,250/- for each person, which has been enhanced to Rs. 10,000/- for each person. So far Rs. 28.29 crores has been spent towards rehabilitation of bonded labourers.

Sri Kapil Sibal, Amicus Curiae in the Writ Petition No. 3922/ 1985 in the Supreme Court of India has given certain suggestions and one of the points relates *to provide training and sensitisation programmes for the District Officers and police personnel on the issue of bonded labour abolition.*

A report made by the Labour Commissioner in 1998, has pointed to the existence of child bonded labourers in the industrial sector specially, in the silk reeling units in Magadi and Ramanagaram areas of Bangalore (Rural) district. The Labour Commissioner has reported the widespread prevalence of child labour in these units and some of these child labourers also fall under the category of bonded labour as they are working to clear loans borrowed by them/ their parents. So far 18 Deputy Commissioners have reported that they have completed the surveys and the cases of bonded labour detected during the surveys is as follows.

Bangalore (Rural) – 1508+1569 child bonded labourers = 3077
Tumkur – Two cases found

In the remaining 16 districts, it was reported that there were no child bonded labour and survey reports were yet to be received from the other nine districts. (Review of Approach to identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in Karnataka, Note prepared by Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka, Dated 1-7-2000)

Against this background, the case of chained bonded labour, which came to light in the Hangarahally episode in Mandya district, makes it imperative for the government to re-examine the approach adopted so far in the matter of identification, release and

rehabilitation of bonded labour. The Karnataka Government therefore recognised the necessity of involving common strategies to *identify bonded labour and child labour, both in the urban and rural areas.* The specific measures that are being considered by the Karnataka Government in this regard are outlined below.

- i. *Creation of a New Department of Human Rights under a Commissioner for Human Rights*
- ii. *Constitution of a State Level Committee on Human Rights.*

2. 4 Assessment of Karnataka Governments Intervention

What has happened to the interventions by Karnataka Government from 1976 to 2004? Soon after the enactment of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act, 1976, the Government of Karnataka tried to identify, release and rehabilitate bonded labourers in Karnataka. At the end of December 1979, 62, 389 bonded labourers were identified. This number rose to just 65,255 by the end of November 1992. Of these 65,255 only 1,242 (i.e. 1.9%) bonded labourers were identified in the eight northern districts of Karnataka, which are known to be very backward (Bidar 12, Gulbarga 65, Bijapur 352, Raichur 123, Bellary 662, Belgaum 19, Dharwad one and Uttara Kannada 8) and 64,013 (98.1%) bonded labourers were identified in the twelve southern developed districts. Of these Mysore alone accounts for 24,336 bonded labourers, followed by Shimoga (10,797) and Bangalore Urban and Rural districts 9.315. The figures in the other districts are: Mandya 5,212, Hassan 4,819, Kolar 2,895 Chikamagalur 2,756, Tumkur 2,041, Chitradurga 1,349, Dakshina Kannada 384 and Kodagu 59.

Being aware of these drawbacks and also being conscious of the continuing existence of bonded labour in Karnataka, Mr. M.Y.Ghorpade, the then Panchayati Raj and Rural Development (PR&RD) Minister acknowledged on June 15, 1990_on the floor of the Legislative Council that the bonded labour system was still alive in many parts of Karnataka and that the government was committed to identifying and rehabilitating them. Mr. B. Basavalingappa who was, the next PR&RD Minister made similar promises in the Legislative Council on Nov.24, 1990 and gave assurances that an integrated rehabilitation programme would be worked out for bonded labourers.

The PR&RD Secretary also sent several circulars to all the Deputy Commissioners of Karnataka, to identify, release and rehabilitate fresh bonded labourers found in their jurisdiction (on 23.3.92 and 28.1.94). *An organisation called Jita Vimukti Sanghatane had identified 656 bonded labourers in Anekal taluk of Bangalore Urban district in the course of two years from 1988. Of these 192 were identified by the Deputy Commissioner as bonded labourers and 12 lakh rupees were sanctioned for their rehabilitation. When the local MLA realised that he would not get a share in the disbursement of the money, he saw to it that not a single paise reached the hands of the people concerned. The organisation of bonded labourers filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court praying for the disbursement of the money allocated. On the orders of the Court, the government has so far identified only fifteen cases of bonded labourers and has recently disbursed nearly a lakh of rupees for their rehabilitation.*

JEEVIKA has submitted a list of 20000 bonded labourers in several districts of Karnataka. JEEVIKA believes that there may be more than one lakh bonded labourers at present in the entire state of Karnataka. A majority of these, anywhere between 80 to 90 per cent, belong to the SCs and STs.

The Karnataka Government's role on the bonded labour issue can be summed up as follows.

During the 70s the Chief Minister of Karnataka who was implementing progressive measures for the upliftment of the backward and scheduled castes, gave full support to the

implementation of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act in Karnataka. As a result of this, by the end of 1979, over 60000 bonded labourers were identified and they were rehabilitated over the course of the following years, but the process of identification of bonded labourers slowed down and by the end of 1992, the total number of bonded labourers identified by the government from the beginning was only 65,255, i.e., an addition of only 2,866. Rehabilitation has still to be worked out for 1809 bonded labourers. The remaining 8,508 bonded labourers have been declared as non-traceable.

2.5 When did the Karnataka Government awake from the stupor: After the Hangarahally episode

Though bonded labour is rampant, the Karnataka government has been denying the existence of bonded labour for a number of years and has been filing affidavits to that effect before the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission. **The exposure on 22 June 2000 of five bonded labourers who were chained for three years only confirms the anti-poor and anti-dalit stance of the government. JEEVIKA has been drawing the government's attention to the existence of bonded labourers with facts and figures since 1990.** From 1993 till the end of 1994, JEEVIKA carried out scientific surveys in 48 out of the 175 taluks in Karnataka and identified nearly 20,000 bonded labourers in agriculture alone. *From this we can infer that the number of bonded labourers in the whole state will be several times more.* The Karnataka government, which had been proclaiming that it had eradicated the evil of bonded labour, started issuing circulars for the identification of bonded labour from 1992, because of pressure from JEEVIKA. *Yet the officials concerned have consistently been sending false reports saying there is no bonded labour in their area.* The latest circular for the identification of bonded labour was on 14 October 1999. *The Tehsildar of Srirangapatna taluk, under whose jurisdiction Hangarahally village falls, had sent a report on 25 August 1999 that there was not a single case of bonded labour in his taluk! Later events revealed that even as he was drafting that report he was fully aware of the five chained labourers as well the other 70 unchained bonded labourers in a stone quarry illegally occupied by Mr Puttaswamy Gowda. The lofty statutes are brought to naught by the negligence of the very officials who are supposed to take action.*

The five bonded labourers whose legs were permanently soldered with thick chains weighing 15 to 20 kilograms and measuring two to three feet in length were Venkatesh, 55 years old and his son Gopal, 30 years old, Nagaraj and Venkatachala both 50 years old and Krishna 37 years old. They all belonged to the Bovi caste, a caste identified under the SCs of Karnataka. Venkatesh, Gopal and Venkatachal had been chained for the past two and a half years. Krishna had been chained for the past six months and Nagaraj only for the past two months. All of them were working in Puttaswamy Gowda's stone quarry for the past five to six years along with their families, after having taken huge loans from him. Only Venkatachala and Krishna were living there without their families. Venkatachala's wife and children were living in his native village Kyathanahalli. The quarry owner was planning to procure a wife for Venkatachala to look after him in the quarry. He had kept ready the *tali* and the marriage sarees, but the marriage had not yet taken place. *Though the wives of Venkatesh, Gopal and Nagaraj were around in the quarry, conjugal life was denied to them since they were chained.* After taking supper by 7 p.m., they were closeted in a room locked from outside. They had to answer nature's calls in tins. They had no privacy. There was always a guard around them while working or sleeping or eating. They could come out of the locked room only in the morning and they would start work by 6 a.m.

Apart from the five-chained bonded labourers there were another 18 families, altogether 70 people, who were working as bonded labourers in Mr. Puttaswamy Gowda's Chamundeshwari stone quarry. The owner had perfected the art of securing people in bondage. If anybody came to him asking for a job, he would not offer him a job straight away. First he would give him some money as a loan to look after his needs. As the loan amount grew, which could not be easily paid off by daily labour, he would ask him to work in

the quarry. Since there was a loan outstanding, even when the worker worked hard the whole day, full wages would never be paid. Even the work done was discredited. The wages for making a tipper load of small stones called *jalli* was Rs. 90 and for the tractor load, it was half that amount, i.e., Rs. 45. Now the wages have been increased to Rs. 110 and Rs. 55 respectively. A husband and wife pair could complete a tractor load in one day. It took two days for the same number of persons to complete a tipper load. The overseer would credit to the labourer's account only half the amount of work, discrediting the rest as powder and sand. There would be fines also. Ultimately, the labourers would get a pittance as their wages. This was hardly enough to meet their daily needs. Let alone paying off their old debts, they were forced to take extra loans. They could never question the overseer or the master. If at all any one among them dared to question, he was shown the bloated figures of his loans and asked to repay them by cash or else simply work in the hope of paying them off.

Let us take the case of Nagaraj. He hails from Krishnaraja Sagar, popularly known as K.R.S. He came to Hangarahally with his wife and a daughter in search of work. Puttaswamy Gowda did not give him any work at the outset. He gave him Rs. 500 for food for three months. After that Gowda asked him to work in the quarry. His father came to him asking for some money to carry out a religious ceremony. When Nagaraj asked Gowda for a loan, he was refused. He borrowed his sister's earrings and went to mortgage it with another sister in Bellur. *As he was waiting for a bus at the bus stop in Bellur, Gowda came by in a jeep and took him back to Hangarahally. He was later fined Rs. 2,500 for having gone away without permission. After about six months, he was fined another Rs. 1,000 for having gone to a hospital.* Nagaraj thought of repaying all the money claimed by the master and came to Chirukuruli in Pandavapura to procure a loan from one of his acquaintances. The master happened to come there too in a jeep with his son, Arun Kumar and his overseer, Muniappa. They took him in the jeep to Mysore where the master had another work shop making lamp posts. *There was a welding shop nearby where a thick chain was soldered on both of Nagaraj's legs and he was brought back to Hangarahally.* This happened just two months prior to the exposure of the whole affair.

Venkatesh's story is still more pathetic. Since 1974, he was doing various jobs on contract for the Public Works' Department. He was quite well off. He also owned a lorry. The lorry met with an accident and as a result he sustained a huge loss of Rs. one lakh. In 1996, he came to Hangarahally looking for some work. His six other family members also accompanied him, his first wife's son, Gopal and his wife, his second wife and their two sons, Krishna and Siddappa and Krishna's wife. They took a loan of Rs. 2,160. A major part of it was to repay an old loan of Rs. 1,300 from one Shivanna from Pandavapura, but the loan amount increased to Rs. 4,240 in just one year. Even when all the family members worked on the quarry, the overseer would make deductions on various pretexts. As a result, the debt kept mounting instead of decreasing. Venkatesh went to the master and demanded proper payment of wages. The master did not agree. Then Venkatesh told him that he would repay his loan somehow and asked him to let his family off. The master refused and insisted that the debt had to be repaid only by work. Seeing no future at the quarry, Venkatesh escaped with all his family members to a quarry owned by one Tomato Babu in Anajanapua on Kanakapura Road near Bangalore. Tomato Babu agreed to pay off the loan of Rs. 15,000 incurred by Venkatesh and his family members. Venkatesh gave this news to Puttaswamy Gowda. When Gowda came to Babu, Babu had no ready cash with him and he promised to send the money through Venkatesh. When the payment was delayed, Gowda again came to Babu's quarry with some henchmen *when Babu was not present and took away all Venkatesh's family members on a tempo. On reaching his quarry, Gowda chained all the three male members of Venkatesh's family.* A thin long chain was soldered on one leg and on the other end of the chain a 20 kilogram hammer was soldered. When Babu later sent Venkatesh to Gowda to find out what has happened to his family members, he too was caught and treated the same way. Just one month after this inhuman treatment, Krishna

and Siddappa escaped with the chains on their legs. Because of their escape, the other two remaining members were treated even more harshly. Both their legs were now soldered with a thick chain of only two to three feet long. They were also guarded very closely.

The chained bonded labourers had to do all the jobs connected to the stone quarry in spite of both their legs being chained. They had to hammer out thin, narrow holes in the rocks to fill them with dynamite for blasting. From the split rocks, smaller stones and *jallis* of various sizes had to be made. After filling the holes with dynamite and igniting the fuses, they had to run fast so as not to be caught in the explosion. Due to running with the heavy chains, they sustained deep cuts on their legs where both the ends of the chains were soldered on the legs. This was in spite of the fact that they used to protect their legs with a thick padding of rags. Apart from the physical torture, the mental agony they used to suffer was even more acute. Passers by and even their own acquaintances felt sorry for them. They were longing for an end to all their humiliation. *They used to wish they were dead instead of going through this shameful existence.* Just a few days before the activists from the Karnataka Raitha Sangha (KRRS) freed them, the five of them had planned to kill themselves. They planned to stay close by and allow themselves to be ripped off in the blast.

Puttaswamy Gowda belongs to the dominant Vokkaligga caste. He also had strong political links. He was once a corporator in the Municipality of Mysore Town and hence could exploit the government administration to his advantage. His house was in a village called Vontikoppal near Mysore. He had secured permission to quarry in an area of just three acres in Hangarahally, 12 kilometres away from Srirangapatna of Mandya district. *Yet, he had managed to illegally take control of 16 acres of prime land along the side of a metalled road. Even the permission to quarry on the three acres had lapsed in 1997 itself.* Stone quarrying is heavily dependent on the skills of the Bovi community, which has traditionally acquired the skills of cutting stones. There were 17 Bovi families on the quarry together with another six families from other backward communities. *Apart from the strangle hold of debt, Gowda had infused tremendous fear in all the workers as also the people from the neighbouring villages. If anyone asked for proper accounts or if anyone tried to escape from his hold, he would be tied to a tree just outside the quarry along the roadside. Sweet water would be poured over the person so that ants would come and bite him. This instilled fear in all the people of the villages around. The police were also in his grip. He used the police to bring back the runaway bonded labourers.* Those bonded labourers used to easily surrender to the police. He was able to exploit the police because they too were intimidated by him. Five years back, an honest sub inspector, Ayyanna by name, had refused to provide constables to Gowda to run his errands. Then Gowda devised a plot to trap the SI in a corruption case. He invited him to his quarry in Hangarahally and persuaded the SI to take Rs. 500 from him. The Invigilance Squad (Lok Ayukta) members, who had been invited by Gowda, implicated him in a case of bribery and he was penalised for it. Later the police officers quietly yielded to his pressures. The revenue officials were already completely under his control.

All this was effectively exposed by KRRS's intervention. During the ZP elections in early 2000, the supporters of Nanjundegowda, a candidate from KRRS, had gone to Hangarahally for canvassing. Venkatesh, a friend of Nanjundegowda, happened to notice Nanjundegowda's photograph on a pamphlet. Recognising his friend, Venkatesh sent word through Nanjundegowda's supporters to apprise him of the situation he and the four others were in. Nanjundegowda, on coming to know the heinous crime perpetrated on fellow human beings, systematically planned a course of action to liberate the bonded labourers and get them justice. He waited for the ZP elections to be over in February 2000. There were also elections to the Governing Body of a sugar factory in the locality to be held immediately afterwards. *Once these were over, he mobilised a group of nearly 100 activists of KRRS to storm Puttaswamy Gowda's fortress in Hangarahally.* The group also comprised of videographers, photographers and journalists. Till the group reached the stone quarry, no

one in the group, apart from Nanjundegowda, knew where they were going. The large group easily overpowered whatever resistance a few of Putteswamy Gowda's henchmen offered. *The five bonded labourers were physically lifted with their chains, put in the vans and jeeps to be taken directly to the police and revenue administration of the taluk for taking action according to law. This was on 22 June 2000. The news flashed across the front pages of almost all the dailies the following day. The rest is history.*

Before the Hangarahally episode came to light, there was a case reported in Times of India of an 11-year-old boy being chained for three days in Bangalore city. A case was reported on 29 March 2001 that a girl in Tumkur town had been chained for four years and another case was reported on 2 April 2001 again in Times of India where two bonded labourers from Karnataka were chained for six months by a master in Sangli in Maharashtra.

The Chief Minister of Karnataka announced on 1, July 2002 that the government would identify and rehabilitate bonded labourers in the entire state within the next three months. The Chief Secretary in a meeting convened by him on 10th July 2002 passed a similar resolution. A State Level Conference on Bonded Labour was held on 11-12 October 2002 at ISEC, Bangalore and the government reiterated its resolve to identify and rehabilitate bonded labour in a matter of three months.

2.6 Reports of Bondage Based on Newspaper Reports

A number of atrocities continue to take place in different parts of the state and the country. Some have come to light. Yet, a majority of them do not come to the public's notice. In another bizarre incident, which took place seven years back in Kotegana village of Anekal taluk in Bangalore Urban district, *a master had cut off a 13-year-old bonded child named Venkatesh's fingers of the left hand.* His case has come up for hearing in the Munsiff's court in Anekal after seven years in April 2000. *Two years earlier in an incident, in Kuthaganahally of the same taluk, a 17 year old bonded labourer, again named Venkatesh, was killed by his master and the body was cremated without informing his family and against the practice of the people in the area of burying the dead, to get rid of any evidence of the crime.* The reason for the murder was that the boy and the master's daughter were in love. Some of the recently reported incidents of atrocities on bonded labourers are listed below.

A local news paper called *Suddimula* in Gangavathi taluk of Koppal district reported a case in January, 2000 of *a bonded labourer named Gangappa in Basavanna camp of Karatagi who was tied to a post, beaten up and made to eat human excreta on the pretext that he had stolen some grain from his master.* In February, a local daily, *Bayaluseeme*, from Chennapatna taluk in Bangalore Rural district reported *an incident in B.V. Hally where Siddayya and his wife were tied to a post and beaten up, because they had refused to do bonded service on his farm.* In the same month in Hegganuru village of Heggada Devana Kote in Mysore district, Singayya, who had been a bonded labourer for a number of years with Mahadevu of the same village, after taking part in a one-day training conducted by JEEVIKA, had the courage to *tell his master that he would no longer work as a bonded labourer as he had realised that he must have paid back all his debt not once, but many times over.* *The master called for a village panchayat and saw to it that the panchayat gave a ruling that Singayya was bound to repay Rs. 13,000.* In all these instances, complaints have been lodged with the police and officials and in some cases the matter has come up before the courts. Yet to this date, not a single case has been dealt with satisfactorily, except in the case of Singayya, where the Deputy Commissioner of Mysore visited Singayya in his village and gave a ruling that he was not to repay any amount and that the master would be dealt with according to law if he resorted to any harassment of the former bonded labourer.

All the above-mentioned cases pertain to dalits. *Usually wherever tribals are found, it is found that their entire communities are forced to render bonded service to the dominant*

communities around them. In Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, *Koraga*, a tribal community of nearly 10,000 people is made to suffer from an inhuman and revolting bonded system called *Ajalu*. The struggle by the conscientised leaders of *Koragas* for the abolition of *Ajalu* is yet to bear fruit. *The Malekudiya tribal community, which comprises 35 per cent of the people in Belthangady taluk in Dakshina Kannada district, has been kept captive in the plantations of the masters called Hebbaras. The tribal members cannot go out of the gate of the plantation without the permission of the masters. They are deprived of all connections with the outside world. Any support from outside is effectively prevented. A few among them who attempted to live independently by cultivating their own gardens were punished by the masters who cut off the areca and coconut plants they had grown in their gardens. The tribal communities in Mysore and Chamarajnagar districts called Kadu Kurubas, Jenu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas, Soligas, Paniyas and Yeravas have come out of the situation of their entire communities being bound to the dominant communities. Yet there are many cases of individuals getting into bondage, just like the dalits in other areas. Quite a few of the children from these communities are almost sold to families in cities like Mysore, Bangalore, Mangalore, Udupi and Bombay. Many of these cases have been reported in the newspapers during the past one-year. Not much has been reported about the tribal communities in other districts so far.*

These atrocities are being continuously perpetrated on bonded labourers in different parts of the state. There are thousands and thousands of cases of bonded labourers in villages and towns who may not have been physically tortured, yet, whose situation is nonetheless abominable. Many boys and girls and adults are made to work day in and day out, not only in quarries, but also in brick kilns and silk industry, hotels and garages, road and construction works, as domestic servants and mainly in agriculture, without proper wages for having taken petty loans. *Though it is difficult to make a quantitative assessment at the state level of the continuing prevalence of bondage, yet a conservative estimate would easily put their numbers beyond one hundred thousand. Systematic surveys for the identification of bonded labour both in agriculture and non- agriculture are long due. On the pretext of paying off their debts, they are made to waste their lives without decent wages and without decent conditions of work.*

2.7 Hangarahally Episode: Precipitant for Government Action and Role of NHRC (Review of Approach to Identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in Karnataka: Report of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka).

On complaints received from activists of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, the Assistant Commissioner, Pandavapura sub division and the *local police authorities have on 22.6.2000 found and rescued 23 families of bonded labourers working in a stone quarry in Hangarahally village of Srirangapatna taluk. Five of the bonded labourers were kept in chains, some of them reportedly for about two years, apparently to prevent them from escaping the forced labour. The employer, Puttaswamy Gowda had kept these labourers in bondage after advancing loans to them, which had to be repaid by them through their labour.*

The released families of labourers, consisting of 31 men, and 26 women and 36 children below 14 years have all been temporarily housed in a chowltry in Ganjam village of Srirangapatna. The chained persons were freed from their physical bonds in the presence of the Hon'ble Minister of State for Finance. Hon'ble Home Minister visited the bonded labourers on 22.6.2000 and supervised the arrangements for temporary rehabilitation and protection to the released labourers. He also issued instructions for speedy investigation of the cases and prosecution of the accused persons.

Shri K.R. Venugopal, IAS (Retd), Special Rapporteur of the National Human Rights Commission also visited Ganjam and interviewed the labourers on 28.6.2000. The Chief

Executive Officer, Mandya ZP is working out a rehabilitation package for all the 23 families, besides commencing the construction of houses. Each released bonded labourer has been given assistance of Rs. 10000/-.

[Source: Proceedings of the meeting held on 28.07.2004 at 11.30 A.M. in the Chambers of Secretary to Govt, Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Dept. GOK, Bangalore under the Chairmanship of Sri. K.R. Venugopal, I.A.S. (Retd.) Special Rapporteur, NHRC, Hyderabad to review the action taken on bonded labour issues.]

The Special Rapporteur explained in brief about the seriousness of the bonded labour issue as well as the Hangarahally incident. *He expressed his unhappiness and concern about the way the Law Department was handling both the criminal prosecution against the accused in the Hangarahally incident as well as the disciplinary action against the Public Prosecutor who had colluded with the accused.* These officers were advised to take these cases seriously and expedite the action at their end.

The Special Rapporteur suggested that with constant monitoring of bonded labour issues at the grass root level there could be a notable decrease in the incidence of bonded labour. He also suggested that the state could declare the bonded labour free taluks after intensive action to eradicate the evil system one by one, as is being done by the Labour Department with regard to child labour. To achieve this, the quarterly progress report has to be prepared and submitted to NHRC for constant review.

The Special Rapporteur expressed his happiness over the various decisions taken by the High Power Committee and wanted this to be recorded in the proceedings. The Director (SEP) said that district level action plans are being received and a comprehensive rehabilitation plan would be prepared involving JEEVIKA, a NGO well versed with bonded labour issues. The Special Rapporteur suggested that the Secretary, RD&PR Department should personally discuss the details with this NGO before assigning the work.

The Special Rapporteur, while reviewing the district level rehabilitation measures taken up by the state, advised that 10 successful cases of rehabilitation of released bonded labourers be selected and a detailed write-up of the history and status of the bonded labourer before and after release and rehabilitation should be prepared along with relevant photographs and submitted to the NHRC.

The Special Rapporteur, requested the Additional Law Secretary to explain the status of the case on the prosecution of the accused of Hangarahally. *He questioned the Law Department, as to why the case was not booked under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act.* The Special Rapporteur said that it was only fear and compulsion and lack of proper protection that led the victims to turn hostile.

The Special Rapporteur once again requested the Law Department to speed up the enquiry. He wanted to know why the Public Prosecutor who had colluded with the accused had not been suspended. The Secretary, RD&PR Department seconded this suggestion. Both the officers of the Law Department agreed to re-examine this issue.

The Special Rapporteur did not agree with the compliance made on the role of the Vigilance Committee and suggested that a three member committee be formed at the district level involving the Adhyaksha of the ZP as Chairman, Deputy Commissioner as member and Chief Executive Officer of the ZP as Member - Convenor respectively. This Committee should make immediate arrangements for the relief work of released bonded labourers with the funds available in the district and get it reimbursed from the state under the centrally sponsored scheme. The Special Rapporteur commented that no concrete action had been initiated by SLBC except for having conducted sensitisation workshops in certain districts.

DEVELOPMENT, LAND REFORMS AND BONDAGE

3.0 Introduction

In this section an attempt has been made to relate development indicators and land reforms to the incidence of bondage in different regions and districts in Karnataka.

3.1 Inequality in Districts

Between 1973-74 and 1993-94, the proportion of population below the poverty line declined from 54 per cent to 33 per cent in Karnataka against a decline from 55 per cent to 36 per cent at the national level. In rural Karnataka, the decline is from 55 per cent to 30 per cent and in urban areas from 53 per cent to 40 per cent.

The degree of income inequality is high in urban areas, except in those districts where the landed gentry is dominant, in Bangalore, Belgaum, Bijapur, Chikamagalur, Coorg, Kolar, Mysore, North Kanara and Raichur districts, the urban income inequality is very high. In Mandya, Hassan, South Kanara, Bidar, and Bellary districts, the rural inequality is very high.

The percentage of people living in absolute poverty has been, by and large, lower in the rural area than the percentage of people living in absolute poverty in the urban area. *Bidar tops the list in absolute poverty in the rural area, and is followed by South Kanara, Chitradurga and Mandya. In urban areas, surprisingly enough, we find that the proportion of people living below the poverty line is substantially high in Chikamagalur, Gulbarga, Belgaum and Tumkur; and these are followed by Raichur, North Kanara, Kolar, Coorg, Chitradurga and Bellary.* The proportion of the people living below the poverty line is very small in the urban areas of Bangalore district.

Some of the developed metropolitan centres like Bangalore, Mysore, and Mandya do not have a significant proportion of people living below the poverty line. The poorest districts of Karnataka, namely, Bidar, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Kolar, Tumkur and Raichur have the largest proportion of their urban population living below the poverty line; in Bidar, the proportion in the rural areas is also significantly high. In the state as a whole, the highest proportion of the Muslim population is below the poverty line. The concentration of the poorest of the Muslims is high in the urban areas. This fact is explained by the large concentration of the poor Muslims in urban slums. In the remaining 11 districts, the Muslims dominate the absolutely poor. *A large proportion of the SC people live below the poverty line, both in Karnataka as a whole and in several districts, particularly in the rural areas. The least number of poor are among the high caste people - the Brahmins.*

1. The Poverty Scenario in the State reflects that!
2. Muslims and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes;
3. It is very high among the illiterates and very meagre among educated people.
4. Rural poverty is confined to agricultural labourers, marginal and small farmers, whereas urban poverty is confined to the urban non-agricultural labourers who are employed as factory workers and casual workers like porters and their urban dependants.

3.2 Regional Disparities

In this section an attempt is made to analyse the district and regions in Karnataka in various Development India and relate it with incidence of bondage.

The Malnad Region continues to have a higher per capita income. *The second position is held by the Coastal Region and has been maintained to date. The third and the fourth positions occupied respectively by the Southern Maidan and the Northern Maidan have also been maintained over the years. The per capita income of the Northern Maidan Region has consistently been lower. The Northern Maidan Region was the largest chunk of the new*

area added to the erstwhile Mysore State in 1956. This area was primarily dry, drought-prone and economically much less developed.

The four districts of Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur trigger off seasonal poverty levels. The decline in the incidence of poverty in the state in a short period of 10 years from 50.8 per cent in 1977-78 to 32.1 per cent in 1987-88 is remarkable. The incidence of poverty continues to be high in Karnataka and what is more, it is higher than the average for the country. Secondly, it may also be observed that the incidence is higher in rural than in urban areas, and the decline in poverty is much lower in rural areas when compared with the urban areas. Further, the incidence of poverty is higher among the SCs and STs. Thus, in 1983-84 these figures are 54.1 per cent (rural) and 36.6 per cent (urban) for SCs, 59.9 per cent (rural) and 45.2 per cent (urban) for STs.

The high incidence of poverty in Karnataka and its higher incidence in rural areas and among the SCs and STs calls for special poverty alleviation measures.

3.3 Development Disparities: General

Disparities in human development between men and women appear to be less in Karnataka than in some major states like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal or Andhra Pradesh. (See Table 7)

The indices developed for Karnataka are slightly above those applicable to the country as a whole. The gender-related Development Index of the state works out to 0.450. *Within Karnataka itself, the index is 0.630 for Kodagu district and 0.399 in Raichur. Dakshina Kannada, Kodagu and Bangalore Urban districts are the three that head the ranking. Uttara Kannada, Chikamagalur and Shimoga districts occupy the fourth, fifth and sixth places at both points of time. The Coastal and Malnad districts appear to offer their citizens a better quality of life than the Maidan (plateau) districts. The four districts of the Hyderabad-Karnataka cluster are at the bottom of the scale. Bombay-Karnataka appears to be slightly better than Mysore, Mandya and Kolar.*

3.4 Developmental Disparities: Based on Gender

GDI for the Karnataka districts have moved between 0.615 in Kodagu and a low of 0.376 in Raichur. *It is interesting to note that rankings in GDI almost follow the HDI rankings. The same trio of Kodagu, Bangalore Urban and Dakshina Kannada cluster at the top; Uttara Kannada, Chikamagalur and Shimoga follow them. The four districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka lie at the bottom of the list and Mysore, Kolar and Mandya districts trail behind most of the districts of Bombay-Karnataka. (See Table 7)*

Dakshina Kannada takes the lead in terms of gender equity in health. Bellary district with a GDI of 0.484 stood at the bottom. Districts with GDI values below the state average (0.546) are Bellary (0.484), Bidar (0.523), Bijapur (0.523), Gulbarga (0.530), Raichur (0.536) and Mandya (0.545). Dharwad district (0.546) has a value equivalent to the state GDI.

The dropout percentage in schools declined from 69 per cent in 1950-51 to 44 per cent in 1980-81 and to 17 per cent in 1993-94. It fell further to 16.5 per cent in 1997-98. The dropout rate for girls has also shown a dramatic decline from 73 per cent in 1950-51 to 18 per cent in 1993-94 and 16 per cent in 1997-98. *Raichur stands out as the district where enrolment of girls continues to be a matter of great concern. Bellary too has very poor girl participation. Mandya, Kolar and Mysore districts have girl participation rates much below the state average.*

An alarmingly high number of boys and girls are out of school. As many as 38 lakh children, i.e., 48 per cent of the children of that age group, were out of school. The percentage of girls out of school was as high as 55 with *Raichur having the dubious distinction of keeping 65 per cent of its girls out of school.* However, the percentage of children out of school has

dropped to less than 28 per cent in 1996-97. The percentage of girls out of school has dropped from 55 per cent to 33 per cent; the percentage of boys out of school has also dropped from 40 per cent to 23 per cent.

Gender, literacy, land ownership, employment status and caste are closely associated with poverty. According to the recent NCAER rural household survey, the incidence of poverty was 68 per cent among landless wage earners, 51 per cent among SCs and STs and 45 per cent among members of households in which no-one was literate.

3.5 Land Reforms in Karnataka: Tenancy Reforms

The agrarian systems in the Coastal Region have historically been much closer to the ideal of the *Zamindari* system. In Dakshin Canara over 50 per cent of the operational holdings of less than five hectares was cultivated by tenants as per the Agricultural Census. Over 60 per cent of the area of operational holdings of over two hectares in Uttara Kannada was cultivated by tenants. In contrast, the agrarian system in Old Mysore historically had a very limited role for tenancy. In the 1971 Agricultural Census the area under tenancy in most districts of old Mysore was well below 10 per cent, with this figure dropping to less than two per cent in Chitradurga. There was no marked concentration of tenancies in small farms. *Indeed, in districts like Kolar, Bangalore, Hassan, Mandya and Mysore, the proportion of the area under tenancy, increased in the larger size classes of operational holdings reflecting the phenomenon of reversed tenancy.*

In the Bombay–Karnataka region the agrarian system was dominated by a very large proportion of tenant-cultivators. The high levels of indebtedness in the dry land region had two effects. At one level the moneylenders took over the land of smaller cultivators, reducing the latter to landless labour. At the same time moneylenders preferred to lease out land to agriculturists rather than cultivate it themselves. This meant that tenants belonged to all size classes. *The phenomenon of smaller cultivators losing their land meant a greater predominance of large farms and the existence of a very large agricultural labour force.* The area under tenancy was higher than prevalent in old Mysore, but below the levels in coastal Karnataka. As per the Agricultural Census, 1971 the area under tenancy increased quite sharply in the larger size classes (Marindya Pani, Sage Publications, vol 4, pp 37-42).

During the period 1974 to 1984 the implementation of land reforms aroused intense political fervour and this was backed up by efficient administrative support (cf Sudhir Krishna, p 18, in 'Land Reforms in India' Karnataka', Vol 4, Sage, 1997), Mentioning the achievement of tenancy reforms, Sudhir Krishna states that 8.19 lakh applications for grant of occupancy rights over land measuring 42.48 lakh acres were involved. By mid 1993 over 98 per cent of these claims were settled accepting 4.84 lakh claims acrossing 20 lakh acres. Thus a little over 47 per cent of the land claimed was found to be tenanted and handed over to the tillers (p.20).

The two coastal districts of the state rank high in the implementation of tenancy reforms (See Table 8). Inspired by the socialist ideology of Ram Manohar Lohia, Dinkar Desai organised the tenants' movement in North Canara district. The people were aware of their rights in the coastal area. The other contributory factors were high rates of literacy and the land records were maintained properly in this region. Belgaum and Dharwad districts in Belgaum division (Ex- Bombay Area) have also done well in the implementation of tenancy reforms. The tenants were well to do landed gentry. Absentee landlordism was rampant on account of the migration of the educated class for employment to Bombay and the land records were maintained with a fair degree of accuracy. The remarkable degree of achievement of tenancy reforms in *Shimoga and Chikamagalur districts* could be attributed to the socialist movement in this area led by late Shantahaveri Gopala Gowda and his followers. The fair degree of success of tenancy reforms in Mysore and Mandya districts is due to the fact that

ex tenants themselves belonged to the landed class and were socially and economically advanced (cf Gopal Krishna Gowda), in 'Land Reforms in India,' Vol 4, Sage, P 129).

The Post Tenancy Reforms situation of the 90s reflects that the incidence of concealed tenancy ranged from six to eight per cent of the total operated area in the Northern Dry Region, four to six per cent in the Central and Coastal Regions, and two to four per cent in the Southern Region. (See Iyer, K.Gopal "Empirical study on Tenancy Reforms", in Sudhir and Aziz (ed) 'Land Reforms in India' Vol 4, Sage, 1997)

The data indicated that 54 per cent of the tenants were subjected to frequent change of plots. The existing statutory provisions do not recognise tenancy. *The case of Uttara Kannada shows that the poor peasants, when led by dynamic leaders, can take a rebellious course and reap the benefits of tenancy reform. Thus the case of Uttara Kannada shows that both the peasant movement and reform have greater possibilities of success in a region characterised by the predominance of small and non-cultivating absentee landlords. In brief, the peasant movement was a vital force for change in Uttara Kannada.*

3.6 Impact of Land Ceiling

Over 85 per cent of the surplus land determined till the end of June 1982 was accounted for by the six North Karnataka districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Bidar, Gulbarga, and Raichur (Narendra Pani, Sage, Vol 4, P 42). The ceiling was of a type, and at a level, that did not directly affect the agrarian system in the rest of Karnataka. *The ceiling legislation had little effect with very little land being found to be surplus. Evidently, fragmentation had reduced the size of large holdings. The Left parties, which had some influence as a political force demanding land reforms, have lost much of that influence in the post-reform phase.* And second, the decline of the Left has coincided with a greater proportion of the vote going to parties such as the BJP, which did not have a professed agenda of land ceiling laws.

The anticipated surplus land was of the order of four lakh acres, but in reality only 2.76 lakh acres were acquired indicating a short fall of about 30 per cent of the anticipated surplus. Even out of this only a little over 1.28 lakh acres of surplus land has been distributed to over 30000 beneficiaries. The only gratifying aspect is that a major part of the surplus land has been given to the SCs and STs. There is a gradual decline in the number of large holdings and a rise in the number of small holdings. There is also a gradual decline in the proportion of land controlled by large landholders and a gradual rise in the land controlled by small landholders. It would be incorrect to attribute the entire change to land reforms legislation alone. It is also due to natural changes on account of inheritances, land sales and so on (Abdul Aziz, Sage, Vol. 4 P 57).

An empirical study on land ceiling conducted in the 90s has the following observations on the Land Ceiling Programme's impact (Iyer, K. Gopal, Vol 4, PP 116- 118).

1. A major concentration of surplus ceiling owners were from the Northern Dry Region. The total area owned by the 140 ceiling surplus owners is 30.139,46 acres, of which 80 per cent is concentrated in the Northern Dry Region (Sub region 1).
2. *The average area per ceiling surplus owner is the highest in the district of Belgaum (1,055.98 a.) followed by Dakshina Kannada (396.85 a.)*
3. *The incidence of absentee landlordism was still quite high in the districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Rural Bangalore, Hassan, Mandya, and Uttara Kannada.*
4. Some of the large landowners in possession of over 50 acres have been netted within the ceiling surplus cases, indicating partial effectiveness in implementation.
5. Most of the land ceiling cases were instituted between 1971 and 1980, indicative of the political and administrative will during that decade.
6. The percentage of area declared surplus constitutes only 1.02 per cent of the net sown area in the state.

7. The implementation of the land ceiling legislation is lopsided; *88 per cent of the surplus declared is accounted for by the six districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Bellary, Gulbarga, and Raichur, i.e. the Northern Dry Region.* The other three regions account for a minuscule proportion of the total surplus declared.

3.7 Land Reforms, Caste Dynamics and Politics

In Karnataka, agriculturists, mostly belong to the *Vokkaliga community are concentrated in the southern and the Lingayat community are concentrated in the northern regions of Karnataka. Cultivation, which is their traditional occupation* combined with their numerical strength, gave these communities a dominant position in the villages. Within these communities, there were owner-cultivators and tenant-cultivators. Land ownership by Brahmins endowed them with some degree of social status in the village. The Havanur Commission has shown that the proportion of Lingayat and Vokkaliga elected representatives in the Legislative Assembly has been well over 60 per cent (Govt. of Karnataka, 1975, pp. 822-23). *The preponderant position of these communities in the legislature naturally enabled their members to capture the post of the Chief Minister and other important cabinet positions, which qualitatively added to the strength of the already powerful political leaders of the dominant communities.*

The abolition of personal and religious Inams in a sense passed off unsung and was not of any consequence for political configuration. It was during this period that the phenomenon of *benami* transfers became very rampant as a means of escaping from the clutches of the impending land reforms law. A majority of the members of legislature were those who came from the dominant communities, which incidentally belonged to the landed interests (Govt. of Karnataka, 1975, pp. 822-23). The fact that a majority of members of the legislature were found to be agriculturists by profession also strengthened the convergence of interests of the politicians and the landed interest groups. This enabled them to easily pressure the politicians into shaping a land reform legislative measure, which was the least hurtful. This point is vindicated by the results of the Land Reforms Act that was passed in 1961.

Thus, landed interests succeeded in getting a high ceiling fixed on land holdings as high as 27 standard acres per family of five members, which in terms of dry land would be equivalent to 216 acres. In addition, there was a provision of extra acreage for each additional member over and above the standard family of five to a maximum of 432 acres for a family of 10 members. Besides, full advantage was taken of the exemptions. *The victory of the landed interests over those who professed egalitarian ideology is clearly visible in these liberal ceilings provisions.* Besides, the prolonged "life-cycle" of the 1965 Land Reforms Act is perhaps a clear testimony to the strategy adopted by the landed interests to buy time for whittling down the original intent of the legislation.

The stiff tenancy provisions are a gift given by the political leaders to members of their own communities who were tenants. Thus the diluted land ceilings and the stiff tenancy regulatory provisions were well-calculated strategies worked out by the political leaders of the dominant communities to confer benefits on themselves and on members of their own communities. The liberal and diluted ceiling provisions enabled the landed interests to keep their large land holdings to themselves; the stiff tenancy provisions enabled them and other people from their castes to wrest concessions from the Brahmin absentee landlords.

The political configuration, which had emerged during the Urs regime, with its weightage in favour of the non-landed interests and backward communities, slowly began to disappear. *It opened up channels for the dominant landed interests to get into positions of power and influence in a big way.* A national daily, the Indian Express, serialising the working of the Tribunals (October 1981,) highlighted the *slow pace of disposal of tenancy applications and attributed this to political interference by the landed interests.*

During the Urs regime, the minority and backward communities wielded political power and influence for the first time. The new power structure, no doubt, enabled Urs to formulate land reforms legislations, which were most favourable to the poor and the landless classes. With the exit of Urs from the seat of power, the minority and backward communities began to lose their power and influence, slowly giving way to the dominant landed interests. *That sounded the end of the radical land reforms. That proved that a weaker section-oriented political configuration is a necessary condition for formulating radical economic measures; but that by itself does not appear to be a sufficient condition. The sufficient condition appears to be the stability of the political configuration.* The process and functioning of the rural power structure is always closely associated with caste. The dominant communities, Vokkaliga and Lingayat, dominate the rural power scene. *The hegemony of dominant castes in the local power structure persists.* The caste composition reveals that the non dominant castes have hardly made a significant dent.

3.8 Region wise Analysis of Bondage

As per Karnataka Government's statistics the highest incidence of bondage is in the Southern Maidan Region (70.96%), followed by Malnad Region (26.87%) and very low in the Northern Maidan Region (1.61%) and Coastal Region (0.63%). JEEVIKA has exposed the myth of low incidence of bondage in the Northern Maidan Region. The Southern Maidan Region is economically relatively backward and yet has a high incidence of bondage. The Northern Maidan districts are placed at a medium level of development economically and have a relatively successful record of the implementation of the land ceiling programme. Yet, empirical studies adduce evidence to the prevalence of the high incidence of absentee landlordism and concealed tenancy. Hence, there is a possibility of the prevalence of bondage in the districts of Northern Maidan Region, which needs to be probed through a fresh survey. Similarly Malnad Region is not only a highly economically developed district, but the implementation of the land reforms programme is weak in this region, with several exemptions on land ceiling to plantations and others. In view of large land concentration in Malnad region there is the possibility of the prevalence of bondage in this region, which also needs to be probed through an empirical study. The two districts of the Coastal Region are relatively well developed and have also witnessed successful tenancy reforms along with peasant movements. There are pockets with medium incidence of conceded tenancy and absentee landlordism, which can be probed to find out the incidence of bondage.

Table 10: Classification on various indicators

Sl.No	Region	Per capita income	Rank (High to low)	Poverty	Concealed Tenancy	Land ceiling	Incidence of Bondage %
1	Coastal Region	5129	3	Low	Medium	Not successful	0.63%
2	Malnad Region	8292	1	Low	Low	Not successful	26.87%
3	Northern Maidan	7663	2	Medium	High	Successful	1.6%
4	Southern Maidan	4418	4	High	Medium	Not successful	70.92%

3.9 District wise Incidence of Bondage

Mysore has the highest incidence of bonded labour and it is one of the medium developed districts as discerned from several indicators. Shimoga has the second highest incidence of bonded labour and is a relatively developed district. Bangalore (rural) has the third highest incidence of bonded labour and is a medium developed district. Mandya has the fourth highest incidence of bondage and is a medium developed district. Hassan has the fifth

highest incidence of bondage and is a medium developed district. Kolar has the sixth highest incidence of bondage and is a backward district. Bangalore (urban) has the seventh highest incidence of bondage and is relatively a developed district. Chikamagalur has the eighth highest incidence of bondage and is a relatively developed district. Tumkur has the ninth highest incidence of bondage and is comparatively a backward district. Chitradurga ranks 10th in the incidence of bondage and is a relatively backward district.

The analysis reveals that out of ten bonded labour prone districts, three are developed, four are placed in the medium level of development and the remaining three are relatively backward districts. This leads us to infer that the incidence of bondage exists in the districts with different levels of development. Among the districts with a lower incidence of bondage three are developed districts, two are at the medium level of development and five are placed in the backward level of development. There is the possibility of having higher figures of bondage in the remaining ten districts as well, irrespective of the level of development. This is substantiated by the fact that JEEVIKA has identified a substantial number of bonded labourers in the districts of Raichur, Bidar and Gulbarga, which as per government data have a low incidence of bondage with a relative ranking of 14, 18 and 16 respectively. JEEVIKA had submitted a list of bonded labourers in these districts to the Karnataka government, but as usual the Deputy Commissioners of the districts reported no case of bonded labour. The Hangarahally episode has exposed the lies. *Hence, a fresh survey of bonded labour needs to be conducted in all the districts of the state with a team of academicians, NGO and government experts.*

A BRIEF PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA AND BONDED LABOURERS

4.1 Location of Boundaries

The state is situated on the Deccan plateau where the Western and Eastern Ghats range converge into the Nilgiri Hills complex. The state is bounded by Maharashtra and Goa in the north and northwest; by the Arabian Sea in the west; by the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south and by the state of Andhra Pradesh in the east. The state extends about 760 kilometres from north to south and about 420 kilometres from east to west.

4.2 Administrative units

(i)	No of districts:	27
(ii)	No of villages:	27.066
(iii)	No of blocks/taluks:	175
(iv)	No of villages electrified:	27.066

Karnataka has a total area of 1,91,791 sq kilometres. It accounts for 5.83 per cent of the total area of the country (32.88 lakh sq km) and ranks eighth among the major states of the country in terms of the size and population. As per the 2001 Census, the state has a population of 527 lakhs, 5.1 per cent of the total Indian population. The density of population as per the 2001 census is 275 persons per sq kilometres, which is similar to the All India density of 273 (in 1991) (excluding Assam and Jammu & Kashmir). The literacy percentage is 67.04, male literacy is 76.29 per cent and female literacy is 57.64 per cent. The sex-ratio is 964/1000. Scheduled castes constitute 16 per cent and STs two per cent of the total population. Workers comprise 44 per cent of the total population. Of the total workers 34 per cent are cultivators and 29 per cent are agricultural labourers. The BPL comprise 35 per cent of the total population.

4.3 Mysore District Profile

The present study focuses on two districts in the state, namely, Mysore and Kolar. These districts were selected because a substantial number of bonded labourers were identified by the active intervention of a NGO. JEEVIKA the NGO has been actively involved here in the identification, release, and rehabilitation of bonded labourers since 1993. In each of the two districts, one taluk from each district and two villages from each taluk were selected based on the intensity of bondage and the presence of organisational intervention against the bonded labour system.

Mysore district has a total population of 26.41 lakhs as per the 2001 Census. The Human Development Report on Mysore district reveals that the district has recorded an increase in per capita income from Rs. 1,459 in 1980-81 to Rs. 1,840 in 1990-91. The total number of taluks is seven, with 33 hoblies; there are 1,224 inhabited and 124 uninhabited villages. It has 236 gram panchayats and 10 towns/urban areas. The SCs constitute 18 per cent and the STs 1.30 per cent of the total population. The total literacy rate is 63.69 per cent, out of which male literacy is 71.30 per cent and female is 55.81 per cent. The net sown area is 56 per cent of the total geographical area.

4.4 Percentage of operational holding and operated area by land size

Marginal farmers constitute 52.14 per cent and small farmers 29.08 per cent of the total operational holdings. Marginal farmers control 46.14 per cent and small farmers 3.05 per cent of the total operated area. Large farmers constitute 0.42 per cent of the operational holdings and control 5.52 per cent of the total area.

4.5 Agriculture

Agriculture is the main occupation in the district as 80 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on it and hence the growth in agricultural production has a direct bearing on the overall prosperity of the district. Rice, *ragi*, *jowar*, cotton, and oil seeds are the major crops in the district.

4.6 Profiles of Two Selected Villages of H.D. Kote Taluk Of Mysore District

(a) HOSA HOLALU VILLAGE PROFILE

Hosa Holalu village is in H.D. Kote taluk of Mysore district and is situated 25 kilometres away from the taluk headquarters. It falls under Antara Santhe Gram Panchayat. The village has an Anganavadi Centre and ten SHGs (Self Help Groups) (6 male SHGs and 4 female SHGs); all the SHGs were formed with the help of JEEVIKA. Hosa Hblalu village has a government school up to the seventh standard. It provides free education to all children. The school provides hot mid-day meals to children, under the government programme.

Table 14: Profile of the Bonded Labourers of Hosa Holalu village of H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District As on 2000-01

S. No	Name of the BLs	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Caste	Educa-tion	Duration of Bondage (years)	Age at the time of joining	Source of income	No. of months work available	Who took advance	Amount of advance (in Rs)
1	Govinda	Male	25	Married	SC* (AK)	Illiterate	8	17	Coolie	6 months	Father	7,000
2	Basaviah	Male	24	Married	SC (AK)	Do	8	16	Coolie	6 months	Father	22,000
3	Basavaraj	Male	22	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	7	15	Coolie	6 months	Father	12,000
4	Kulliah	Male	25	Married	SC (AK)	Do	1	8	Coolie	6 months	Father	15,000
5	Nagaraju	Male	21	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	17	10	Coolie	6 months	Father	10,000
6	Ramesh	Male	20	Married	SC (AK)	Do	5	15	Coolie	6 months	Father	10,000
7	Venkatesh	Male	25	Married	SC (AK)	Do	13	12	Coolie	6 months	Father	10,000
8	Mahadev	Male	22	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	12	10	Coolie	6 months	Father	NA
9	Shivanna	Male	36	married	SC (AK)	Do	16	20	Coolie	6 months	Self	8,000
10	Ningaraj	Male	20	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	8	12	Coolie	6 months	Self	10,000
11	Ningaiah	Male	30	married	SC (AK)	Do	18	12	Coolie	6 months	Father	10,000
12	Ningaraju	Male	30	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	15	15	Coolie	6 months	Parents	15,000
13	Basavaraja	Male	20	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	10	10	Coolie	6 months	Father	8,000
14	Krishna	Male	25	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	10	15	Coolie	6 months	Father	15,500
15	Krishna.M	Male	20	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	5	NA	Coolie	6 months	Father	8,000
16	K.Nagaraj	Male	24	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	6	18	Coolie	6 months	Parents	NA
17	Tammanna	Male	25	Married	SC (AK)	Do	not aware	NA	Coolie	6 months	Self	10,000
18	Veerabhdra	Male	21	Un-married	SC (AK)	Do	11	10	Coolie	6 months	Father	15,000

(Source: Collected by the researcher from the study area)

During 2000-01, 18 bonded labourers were identified and released. Still, there were six bonded labourers in this village. All the 18 bonded labourers released belonged to Hosa Holalu village. They were all landless labourers and members of the SCs (Adi Karnataka). These families were below the poverty line (BPL). The village had 485 families belonging to the BPL category. (Source: Food Department of H D Kote taluk). All the 18 bonded labourers were illiterate. They had been in bondage for 10 to 15 years. They were bonded for loans taken by their fathers. Their age at the time of starting work as bonded labour ranged from eight to 18 years .i.e. two thirds of them were child labour. Ten of them were unmarried and eight of them were married. Their present age ranges from 20 to 30 years. The advance ranged from Rs. 7000 to Rs. 22000. All of them were scheduled castes (Adi Karnataka).

All of them were landless. They depended entirely on wage earnings and bondage. The daily wages helped them maintain the family's day-to-day expenditure. They depended for work on the big landowning farmers. They were given food only when there was work. Work was available for only six months in a year.

On an average, two to three persons in every family performed daily wage work. About 85 to 95 per cent were entirely dependent on daily wages for their livelihood. They had been performing the same type of jobs, which their ancestors had been doing. The traditional work of the families was being continued. During the last three or four years, they were working as bonded labourers in big landowner's houses. After they were released, they were working as daily wage earners. When they were bonded labourers, they had several restrictions, which ceased after their release.

All the 18 bonded labourers were daily wage earners. Their main source of income came from coolie work. Bonded labourers face several problems when there is no work opportunity. In such situations, borrowing is inevitable. Their sources for borrowing are: (a) through institutions (SHGs) (b) from friends and relatives (c) pledging of PDS cards (d) pledging the house/ property (sanctioned under Ashraya Programme) etc.

The bonded labourers are of the firm opinion that the poor cannot get any kind of relief from banks. The labourers feel that the banks in this region work for the benefit of the rich landlords. As they do not have property to deposit as surety or anybody to stand guarantee, banks do not come forward to help them.

(b) Belaganahally Village Profile

Belaganahally village comes under Savye Gram Panchayat. The village is three kilometres away from the taluk headquarters. The Vokkaliga caste, constituting about 150 households, is the dominant group in the village. The Lingayat community has about 80 households and the rest of the 25 households are of SCs (Holiyas). The village has a school, which holds classes up to the 7th standard, and an Anganawadi Centre. Three SHGs were formed with the help of JEEVIKA (2 groups formed by men and 1 group by women). All SC families are BPL. According to the Food Department, there are about 227 families who are BPL in the village. The main occupation of the villagers is agriculture. Nearly 85 to 90 per cent of the people are engaged in agriculture. The landlords in this village belong to the Vokkaliga caste.

Table 15: Socio-economic profile of the bonded labour released

S N o	Name Of the BLs	S E X	A G E	Mari tal Stat us	Ca- ste	Edu cat ion	Age of join ing	Sourc e of Incom e	No of Month s emplo yed	Dura tion of Bon dag e	Who Took Advan ce	Purpo se of Advan ce	Amou nt
1	Mallikarjuna	M	25	UM	SC	Illiterate	10	Coolie	5 to 6	15	Father	Illness	15.000
2	Nagendra	M	24	UM	SC	Illiterate	12	Coolie	5 to 6	12	Father	Illness	9.000
3	Shekar	M	23	UM	SC	Illiterate	15	Coolie	5 to 6	8	Parents	Marriage/illness	20.000
4	Ningappa	M	23	UM	SC	Illiterate	13	Coolie	5 to 6	10	Father	Illness	10.000
5	Shivanna	M	35	Marri	SC	Illiterate	10	Coolie	5 to 6	25	Self	Family	16.00

				ed		te						Proble m	0
6	Puttanna	M	25	UM	SC	Illitera te	19	Coolie	5 to 6	6	Fathe r	Illness/ Family	20.00 0
7	Harish	M	46	UM	SC	Illitera te	12	Coolie	5 to 6	4	Paren ts	Povert y	11.00 0
8	Ananda	M	20	UM	SC	Illitera te	13	Coolie	5 to 6	7	Paren ts	Marr/ill/ death expens es	17.00 0
9	Madhaiah	M	18	UM	Sc	Illitera te	13	Coolie	5 to 6	5	Fathe r	Marria ge	15.00 0
10	Nanjundi	M	22	UM	Sc	Illitera te	12	Coolie	5 to 6	10	Fathe r	Marria ge	15.00 0

(Source: Collected by the researcher from the study area)

In Belaganahally village, the district authorities identified 10 bonded labourers in the year 2001. They were rehabilitated during 2003-04. An additional 10 bonded labourers who were released subsequently were yet to be rehabilitated, while *another six bonded labourers, who are yet to be recognised by the government as bonded labourers, are still in bondage*. Out of 10 rehabilitated bonded labourers, five of them had been working for more than 10 to 15 years and five of them for less than 10 years. In this area, the average daily wage earned by a coolie (daily wage labour) is not more than Rs. 50 per day; women get Rs. 35 to Rs. 40 and men get Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 per day. They joined at the age of 10 to 15 years except one, who joined at 19 years. Nearly 90 per cent of them were child labourers at the time of joining. Their duration of bondage ranged from four to 15 years. In nine cases, parents had taken an advance and in one case the bonded labourer himself took the advance. The amount of advance ranged from Rs. 9,000 to Rs. 20,000. The advances were taken for marriage, illness, and consumption needs. All of them are illiterate. Only one of them is married. Their ages at the time of interview ranged from 18 to 46 years.

4.7 Kolar District Profile

Kolar district, popularly known as “The Gold Mine of India” and “The Land of Silk and Milk” is situated in the south eastern part of the state. Bounded by Ananthpur and Chittor districts of Andhra Pradesh to the north and east and by north Arcot and Dharmapuri districts of Tamil Nadu in the south, the district is adjacent to Bangalore district. The land of the district forms an undulating plain and the district is dotted with a number of hills of varying heights particularly in the north. Kolar district with an area of 8,240 sq kilometres has 11 taluks, 53 hoblies, 307 gram panchayats, 2,893 inhabited villages and 432 uninhabited villages. The density of population at 270 per sq kilometres is more than the state average of 235. The sex ratio is 970/1000 and the literacy rate is 63.14 per cent. Nearly 76 per cent of the total working population is dependent on agriculture.

The net sown area (NSA) is 3.63 lakh hectares, which forms about 49 per cent (state average 55%) of the geographical area. About nine per cent of the area is reserved under forests and 14 per cent is under permanent pasture. The gross cropped area (GCA) is about 4.16 lakh hectares. Thus, the cropping intensity is 108 per cent (state average 115%). About 21 per cent of the NSA is under irrigation. The major source of irrigation in the district is ground water and bore wells that account for 81 per cent in the NSA (0.79 lakh ha) under irrigation. Rainfall is scanty, erratic and distributed unevenly resulting in frequent drought. The exploitation of ground water is very high and further scope for ground water exploitation is limited. Agriculture is the main occupation in the district as 87 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on this sector and hence the growth in agricultural production has a direct bearing on the overall prosperity of the district. The cropping pattern in the

district reveals that about 38 per cent of the area (GCA) is under cereals, (Ragi 25%, Paddy 9%, others 4%), eight per cent under pulses, 23 per cent under oil seeds and one per cent under sugarcane. Mulberry cultivation is undertaken in 0.33 lakh hectares accounting for about eight per cent of the GCA and plantation and horticultural crops at 0.92 lakh hectares account for 22 per cent.

The land holding pattern in the district indicates that small and marginal farmers account for 79 per cent of total land holdings with 43 per cent of the land, medium farmers control 14 per cent of the operational holdings with 27 per cent of the land, while seven per cent of the holdings are above four hectares, accounting for 30 per cent of the land. Average size of holdings works out to 1.46 hectares as against the state average of 2.13 hectares. Traditionally the district is known for mulberry cultivation and accounts for 35 per cent of the total raw silk production in the state. Sericulture, which was a subsidiary occupation in the initial stages, has become a significant agro-based industry in the district. The soil and the climatic conditions are conducive for the development of this sector.

Amongst the allied activities, dairying is the major subsidiary occupation of the agriculturists and agricultural labourers in the district with an average milk production of about 3.65 lakh litres per day. Sheep and goat rearing is the traditional occupation of about 13,000 shepherd families and is a subsidiary activity of small and marginal farmers. Pig rearing is another subsidiary activity, and poultry farming is also slowly picking up in the district. About 79 per cent of the total cultivated area in the district is under dry land conditions. Farmers are gradually switching over from cereal and millet based farming to a perennial crop based system of dry land development with plantation and horticulture crops. Mango in Srinivaspur, vegetables in Malur and grapes in Chickballapur blocks are gaining importance.

The Kolar district is popularly known as land of silk, milk and gold, and the sericulture crops are referred to as golden crops. In all the villages of the district, sericulture has become the main subsidiary occupation of the farmers. The soil and climatic conditions are conducive for the development of sericulture. The total area under mulberry cultivation in the district is 33551 hectares. There are about 3.80 lakh persons engaged in sericulture in the district. During the year 1998-89, the production of cocoons was 22,479 metric tons. In this district, a healthy diversification trend is observed in respect of the adoption of advanced growing techniques, new varieties of mulberry, new strains of silk worms, silk worm rearing systems etc., by sericulturists. The adoption of these methods requires suitable infrastructure and substantial capital investment.

The workers constitute 49 per cent of the total population. Cultivators form 36 per cent and the agricultural labourers are 27 per cent of the total workers.

4.8 TWO SELECTED VILLAGES: PROFILES OF BANGARPET TALUK OF KOLAR DISTRICT

(c) Karada Guru Village Profile

The total area of the village is 21, 69 (hectares) and the total population is 870. The total number of households is 141. The nearest town is Kolar Gold Field, 16 kilometres away. The village gets power supply from Karadagere and belongs to Srinivasa Sandra Gram Panchayat of Kyasamballi Hobli. It has a school facility up to the 8th standard and an Anganawadi Centre. A Mid-day meal is served to those enrolled in the school. The caste composition of the village consists of Reddy, Vokkaliga, backward classes and minorities, SCs and Naidu communities. Agriculture is the main occupation in this village.

Table 16: Socio-economic profile of Bonded Labourers in Karadaguru Village of Bangarpet Taluk in Kolar District

Sl. No	Name of Bonded Labourers	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Education	Caste	Source of income	Wage rates		No. of months employed	How long BL	Who took advance?	Purpose of loan	Age of joining	Amount taken (Rs)
								M	F						
1	Gantlappa/Bhimappa	M	45	Married	Illiterate	SC (AK)	Wage work	30/20		6 months in a year	15	Parents	Marriage	30	15000
2	Ramappa/Chinnappa	M	35	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	10	-do-	-do-	25	25000
3	Govindappa/Bodappa	M	35	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	20	-do-	-do-	15	8000
4	Krishnappa	M	45	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	15	Himself	Acute poverty	30	15000
5	Ramappa/Gangappa	M	35	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	10	-do-	-do-	25	12000
6	Thimmarayappa	M	50	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	13	-do-	-do-	35	13000
7	Anjappa	M	60	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	13	-do-	-do-	45	15000
8	Savitramma	F	45	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	14	-do-	Acute Poverty	36	9000
9	Mankappa	M	70	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	50	-do-	Illness	20	10000
10	Koli Mariyappa	M	45	-do-	-do-	SC* (AD)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	25	Father	-do-	15	18000
11	Appaiahppa	M	50	-do-	-do-	SC (AD)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	30	Himself	-do- & marriage	20	25000
12	Venkatesh	M	30	-do-	-do-	SC	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	20	Father	Poverty	10	15000

(Source: Collected by the researcher from the study area) Scheduled Caste (Adi-Dravida)

Of the 12 bonded labourers, 11 were men and one was a woman. They had been bonded for 10 to 30 years and one had been bonded for 50 years. In five cases, the advance was taken by their parents and in seven cases they themselves had taken the advance. The advance was taken for marriage, illness, or expenditure. The amount of advance ranged from Rs 8000 to Rs 2500. The wage rates for the males and the females were Rs. 30 and Rs. 20, respectively. Their age at the time of joining ranged from 10 to 45 years and only three of them were child labour. All were married. All of them belonged to the SCs and were illiterate.

(d) Kadire Gowdana Kote Village Profile

The total area of the village is 509.56 hectares. Its total population is 663 and the number of households is 101. The nearest town is Kolar Gold Field, 18 kilometres away. Kadire Gowdana Kote belongs to Kamasandra Gram Panchayat of Bethamangala Hobli, Bangarpet taluk of Kolar District. The village has 20 Vokkaliga, 16 Kuruba, two Kumbara, and 10 SC families. Thus, SCs constitute 68 per cent of the total population the in the village. There is a

school facility within the village up to the fifth standard. The village has an Anganwadi Centre. The village has four SHGs (1 managed by men). Agriculture, sheep rearing and agricultural wage labour are the main occupations of the village. Men are paid Rs. 30 and women Rs. 25 per day as wages. There were 30 bonded labourers in 2001 and four of these have been rehabilitated. In 2004, as many as 22 bonded labourers were released from bondage. They are still to be rehabilitated; four others continue as bonded labourers.

Table 17: Socio-economic profile of Bonded Labourers in Kadire Gowdana Kote of Bangarpet Taluk in Kolar District

Sl. No	Name of Bonded Labourers	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Caste	Education	Age of joining	Source of income		Wage rates	No. Of months employed in 1 yr	Who took advance ?	Purpose of loan	Amount taken (Rs)	
								M	F						
1	Nagaraj	M	20	Unmarried	SC	3 rd Standard	10	Wage work	30	20	20	5	Parents	Marriage	20000
2	Suresh	M	20	-do-	SC	4 th standard	8	-do-	-	-	-do-	6	-do-	Hospital & Marriage	10000
3	Manja	M	18	-do-	Sc	2 nd standard	8	-do-	-	-	-do-	-do-	-do-	Illness	15000
4	Gantalappa	M	44	Married	SC	Illiterate	30	-do-	-	-	-do-	-do-	-do-	Hospital	10000

(Source: Collected by the researcher from the study area)

The present bonded labourers joined at the age of eight to 10 years except one who joined at the age of 30 years. Their parents had taken an advance for their marriage and medical treatment. The amount of advance ranged from Rs 10,000 to Rs. 20,000. Their duration of bondage was 10 to 14 years. One is illiterate and others have studied from 2nd to 4th standard. Except for one, the other three are unmarried. The males get Rs. 30 and the females Rs. 20 as daily wages.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF BONDED LABOUR SITUATION IN THE STUDY AREA

5.1 Who are the bonded labourers?

Generally, poor people with no source of livelihood borrow money from landlords to meet their needs. These needs may include the marriage of girls in the family, medical expenses or daily expenditure. In return, they work as bonded labourers to repay the interest on the loan. They get meagre wages and work for long hours. They initially started working on a yearly contractual basis, but changed into bonded labour. Poverty is the root cause for this evil practice, which compels them to borrow and to work in bondage. More than 90 per cent of bonded labourers belong to landless SCs. They have no other means of livelihood. Many are addicted to drinking arrack. To overcome major financial problems, they borrow money. Even a child becomes a bonded labour and ladies have to lose their modesty. The bondage system has been prevailing for many generations. Invariably they start working as a bonded labourer from childhood as the father takes an advance and pledges the children to work as bonded labour.

CASE 1: (still in bondage)

Suresh, a bonded labourer, is 32 years old and belongs to the backward Banajiga caste from village Hosa Holalu of H.D. Kote taluk in Mysore district. He is illiterate. In 1992-93, his father had to borrow Rs. 18,000 from Mr D. Sundar Das, a landlord, for arranging Suresh's sister's marriage. Now the loan is stated to be Rs. 45,000 (including interest). Suresh does not possess any land. *His house has been pledged to the master. The master (Sundar Das) owns about 150 acres of land* and, naturally, is very rich. He gives 25 kilograms of ragi per month instead of food to the bonded labourer (Suresh) and does not provide any other food or money. If Suresh is absent from work due to illness or otherwise, three kilograms is reduced from the monthly quota. In case he is absent for seven days in a month, he does not get a single kilo of ragi that month. His family is entirely dependent on his wage earning and there is no other means of earning. Unfortunately, his family has not been issued a PDS (Public Distribution System) card nor has this family received any assistance from the government.

The master has five such bonded labourers; three of them belonging to the Banajiga caste while the rest belong to the backward Naik caste. They have all been working for him for the past 10-12 years.

Conditions of work: They have to work from 6 am to 9 pm. No food is supplied to them. The landlord resides at the hobli headquarters. No leave is given to them under any circumstances. If Rs. 50 or Rs. 100 is taken for meeting health or other emergencies, it is added to the loan. They are not given money even for a hair cut. They are ill treated. Work never ends and no break is given between jobs.

During festivities, they are asked to clean the plates and tumblers of the master's family. They are ordered to clean the house. Abuses are freely hurled at them. They stomach all insults as they have borrowed money and are not in a position to repay it by any other means. They feel that there is no hope for their release from the master's clutches in this life.

When he asks about the accounts, the *master threatens to send him to Bellary or Bangalore jail and asks him to keep quite and continue to work. The master is a Congress Party leader at the district level* and has the people's backing and substantial clout with local officials. He is considered to be the biggest landlord in the taluk.

In the recently held survey, by JEEVIKA and the local administration Suresh's (bonded labourer) name was listed as a bonded labourer and his papers had gone to the tehsildar for his release. *However, due to the master's political influence, his name was removed from the list.* Instead of his release from the ordeal, the master threatened to cut his tongue off if he revealed to anybody that he is working as a bonded labourer. He feels that he will not be able to utter a word in his entire life. He is scared for his life, because of his attempt to get released from the clutches of his master. *Since he cannot repay the accumulated loan, he cannot think of his release from bondage.*

He says the bonded labourers are treated very badly and rudely, worse than SCs. He does not wish such an insult even on his enemies. Now he realises that working as a bonded labourer is a social cruelty. When he was 15 years old, he never knew about its ugly side. His realisation is of no consequence as he is helpless to repay the debt. He pins his hopes on getting some NGO's help so that he can escape from this heinous bondage. He says that he has been pleading with his master to help him get a ration card issued and get assistance for tasks such as the construction of a house, but the master does not do anything because he thinks that Suresh might leave his bondage once these facilities are provided to him. Suresh feels that the master fears that if the bonded labourers leave there will be nobody to work on his land. Hence, he does not take any interest in his rehabilitation.

The landlord has the support of the government officials. All officials and gram panchayat members respect him. Hence, no body is willing to help the five bonded labourers working in his house, fearing the wrath of the landlord-cum-politician. Suresh was told by JEEVIKA to inform media persons and E-TV personnel that he had been working as bonded labourer, but he was scared of doing so, anticipating a serious threat from the master to his life. Besides having knowledge about what JEEVIKA has been doing for the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers in the taluk, he also appreciated the good work they have been doing in spreading awareness about workers' rights, the need to form SHGs and to cultivate saving habits etc. *He is of the view that the government officials are not concerned about the welfare of bonded labourers.* Suresh was not aware of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. He says that he is not in a position to leave his master, as he cannot repay the loan of Rs. 45,000. He says that he has heard about Hangarahally's chained labourer's exploitation through JEEVIKA workers. *He feels that his position is wretched. He does not get food; no time is allowed for sleep or even to go to the toilet. He is getting crushed under the loan burden, the onslaught of the master and the heavy workload.*

Case study 2 (Still in bondage)

Venkataramanappa is aged 42 years and is illiterate. He belongs to the scheduled Holey caste. From Karaduguru village of Bangarpet taluk in Kolar district He became a bonded labourer when he was 14 years old. After repaying his father's loan, he had taken another loan of Rs. 25,000 from the landlord. The loan was necessary to arrange his brother's marriage and to meet other financial exigencies. The family is large, having 10 members. As it was difficult to maintain the family with his daily wage earnings, he had to accept bondage. In 2002 he was identified as a bonded labourer by JEEVIKA, but *has not so far been released and rehabilitated.*

He is not able to save anything and lives in a hut. His ancestors were drummers and this tradition is being continued by his son. He has to beat the drums for the Brahmins without any payment. He has to drum on several occasions for publicity (for instance, for the PULSE polio vaccine announcements, or about the distribution of ration, etc) and do many other things in the village. During the village festival (Mari Habba) he has to decorate the village main entrance and the area around the temples with garlands of leaves and flowers, etc. He has to beat the drum along the street when the deity is carried on a palanquin. During this occasion, people sacrifice several sheep; he has to carry the beheaded sheep through out the village. Whenever the village tank overflows, he has to erect a thatched roof over the

water-weir. On such occasions where people sacrifice a buffalo, he has to take its beheaded portion from the water and place it in a boat and float it along the tank. He has to perform duties of *neeruganty* (watering the fields from the tank). When dogs or cows die in the village, he has to bury them. When people in the village die, he has to beat the drum when the dead body is carried to the grave. Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 is paid on such occasions.

His son has failed the SSLC exam and has also learnt drumming. His younger son and brother have gone to Bangalore to do masonry work. They visit the house once a month. They are earning about Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,500 a month.

JEEVIKA has identified him as a bonded labourer. He says he has not received any assistance from the government towards his rehabilitation. In his opinion, extreme poverty, landlessness and unemployment are the main cause for becoming a bonded labourer. To pay back the loan, one is compelled to work as bonded labour until better options are available.

Case 3 (still in bondage): A Women Bonded Labourer

Narasamma is 38 years of age and is illiterate, a SC and has three children. She belongs to Bychapura village of Magadi taluk, Bangalore Urban district. Her eldest son has failed in the 9th standard. Of the two daughters, the eldest is in the 8th and the last daughter is in 4th standard. She has been identified as a bonded labourer, *but is yet to be formally released from her bondage*. She has neither a house nor land of her own.

She has been living in her parent's house since childhood. She was married to a person who was already married. His first wife was suffering from TB. After promising to look after Narasamma well, he got her to agree to the marriage even though it was his second marriage. A happy marital life has eluded her.

She has four younger sisters and a brother. She had to shoulder the responsibility of getting their marriages performed. Her father was also in bondage with a landlord (Mr. Subbegowda) and Narasamma too joined the same family as a bonded labourer. Now, her father is 70 years old. He cannot hear or see. To repay the debts taken by her father and loans she had taken, she is continuing as a bonded labourer till date.

Her routine includes, removing of weeds in the paddy field, cleaning the house, fetching fodder, cutting field crops at the time of harvesting, grazing etc. She gets two meals a day. As and when she asks she gets ragi and rice etc. She is given money to buy rations from the PDS. The master's family gives her two pairs of clothes every year. She reveals that her grandfather, father and mother were all working as bonded labourers. She too had to agree to work in bondage, as her parents were too old. This is a typical case of family bondage.

The condition of bondage, as revealed by her, is to work till the loan is repaid. She gratefully recalls that the landlord's family has been helping them for generations in many ways. She says that she would not like to desert them. She is not aware of JEEVIKA's activities. However, the landlord who was aware of these things suggested himself that she should apply for a release from bonded labour. *On his suggestion, she has applied for the release from bondage, but she has received no assistance so far.*

Her domestic situation is poor. She has old parents. Her husband is staying with the first wife. Due to her poverty, there is always paucity of money for food or clothing. She feels that *'I was born in bondage, am living in bondage and will end in bondage only'*. Being an illiterate, she says that she is not aware of any government programme. She said whether she would be rehabilitated or not was up to God.

Case-4 (Relapsed Bonded Labour)

Mariyanna and Hanumakka are married. Mariappa is 40 years from Kudur village of Magadi taluk in Bangalore Rural district, while his wife is 35. Both are illiterate and belong to Kudur Hobli. They do not own either a house or cultivable land. *They have been working as bonded labourers in a poultry farm for three years.* Each of them gets Rs. 3,000 per annum. They are on a yearly contract basis. They were earlier working as bonded labourers under Mr Shivalingaiah, a landlord. *They were released from bondage and obtained a release certificate from the government.* However, they are yet to receive any benefit for rehabilitation.

The local media has covered this case several times. The couple have approached officials and workers of JEEVIKA for relief. ETV channel has telecast their case. Despite these events, their status continues to be pretty bad. The researcher has obtained a copy of their release certificate, a copy of the FIR filed with the police, copies of complaints submitted to the officials (District Commissioner and Sub Inspector etc) with the help of JEEVIKA. In addition, the documentary evidence involved in this case and JEEVIKA's efforts to get this family rehabilitated have also been obtained.

At present, they are working as bonded labourers in a landlord's house (Mr. Keshava Murthy) in an effort to repay a loan of Rs.10,000 which they were forced to take. It is unfortunate that they have relapsed into the bonded labour system after their formal release. The landlord has provided a house to this family in his orchard. *The researcher has taken a photograph of this family and the house in which they are living.*

Case 5 (relapsed case)

Muniyappa belongs to Kudur, from Magadi taluk of Bangalore Rural district. He is 48 years old, is an SC and is illiterate. He has been working as a bonded labourer for the last 22 years with a landlord (Mr. Eshwarappa). He was allotted a house when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India He shares this house with his three brothers. Therefore, he does not have a decent house to live in. He has three children; the eldest, a daughter, has failed in the SSLC examination while the second, a daughter, is in 8th standard and the third, a son, is in the 7th standard.

He narrates the following as the cause for his bondage. His father had to borrow Rs. 2,500 from a landlord to arrange his elder brother's marriage. His father died before he could repay the debt. Muniyappa had to agree to work in bondage. After the settlement of the above loan, he needed Rs.10, 000 about ten years ago to repair the house as it was leaking badly. Hence, he had to borrow Rs.10, 000 from the landlord once again. To repay it, Muniyappa has been working as a bonded labourer till date. He informed the researchers that he needed another loan to marry off his daughter and the landlord had agreed to his request as well.

He says that JEEVIKA prevailed over him not to continue as a bonded labourer and they even spoke of getting the landlord punished for engaging him in bonded labour. However, Muniyappa says he had requested JEEVIKA not to do any thing to the landlord. He said that he had respect for the landlord as the landlord had helped him on several occasions. He said that he was in the landlord's debt. Muniyappa said that if the loan could be repaid entirely he could be freed from his bondage. His main worry was the marriage of his two daughters. He said that since he was 48 years old, he did not have the strength to earn money as a casual labourer and said that he was, somehow, managing because of the landlord who was sympathetic towards him. The landlord, says Muniyappa, had promised to help him financially when in need besides coming to Muniyappa's rescue in arranging the marriage of his two daughters and in the purchase of the *mangalasutra*.

Muniyappa said that he got two pairs of clothes per year, food three times a day and ragi and paddy whenever his family was short of food grains. He said that the government may

offer rehabilitation, but he did not have the capacity to sustain himself on it. He said that even if he secured free land, he might have to sell it off in order to arrange his daughter's marriage. *In that case, he would have to depend on the mercy of the landlord as a bonded labourer.*

Case Study 6 (Bondage Identified but not Released)

Apart from the above-cited cases, there were a few more peculiar case studies of bonded labourers who had been identified, but not yet released from their bondage belonging to Magadi taluk of Bangalore Rural district.

In 2000-01 there were 1,500 bonded labourers identified in the district. Of this, 65-70 bonded labourers belonged to Magadi taluk. During 2003-04, the state government released 29 bonded labourers. 75 per cent of the bonded labourers in the district belonged to Holeya and Madiga communities (scheduled castes). None of the 29 released bonded labourers of the taluk possessed any cultivable land.

The bonded labourers in the taluk were found to be engaged as workers in agricultural activities, horticulture and domestic work and in the weaving sector. *As per JEEVIKA's estimate, about 50 per cent of bonded labourers were found working in agriculture, 15 per cent in horticulture, 10 per cent in domestic works and 25 per cent in weaving activities.*

In the taluk, about 40 per cent of the population are Vokkaligas while 60 per cent are SCs and dalits. Plans are afoot to declare this taluk's assembly seat as a reserved constituency for SCs. *People in the area are of the opinion that landlessness, poverty and droughts have been responsible for the continuing bonded labour system in the region.*

The taluk has a good number of people owning large amounts of land. A few of them have 100-150 acres of land. These people are in the habit of engaging bonded labourers for carrying out various land-related and domestic tasks.

Few emigrate from the taluk. On the contrary, people seasonally migrate into the taluk from other parts of Kolar, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. *These people are generally found to work in the brick industry and in stone quarrying etc. About 50 per cent of these workers are child labourers.* Due to non-cooperation from among the landlords in the taluk, JEEVIKA could not undertake a detailed survey of child labourers.

Caste politics is predominant in the taluk. Most of the elected representatives and the officials belong to landowning upper castes. These people do not have any concern for the welfare of the disadvantaged or the oppressed. In the zilla panchayat, taluk panchayat and gram panchayats, a large number of elected members are illiterate. The land-owning upper caste people sponsor most of these members. Naturally, they represent the upper echelons of the society and work towards protecting their interests. These members govern as per the directives given by the landlords.

Kudur Hobli belongs to Magadi taluk. *It has 20-30 SC women bonded labourers in the village.* Most work on contract in the landlords' fields and houses while a few work in business families. They generally work from 6 am to 7 pm. *These people have been working like this for the past 25 years. With the help of JEEVIKA, all woman workers of this village were identified as bonded labourers. However, so far, these people have not received any release certificate or government support for their rehabilitation, despite JEEVIKA drawing the attention of the concerned officials many times in this regard.* The annual contract rate per person is fixed between Rs. 600 to 800 by the landlords. *All these workers are below the poverty line.*

Their work includes washing vessels, washing clothes, mopping the floor etc. The respondents posed a question "should we not be considered bonded labourers, as we are paid very low wages and asked to work for long hours?" Despite the fact that JEEVIKA has been striving to create awareness among the people in the area *people are still continuing as bonded labourers as there are no alternative jobs. There are no factories or garment industries in and around the place.*

The people have to resort to borrowing from landlords as and when they need to meet medical expenditures, to perform marriages in the family or to meet any other major domestic expenditure. In return, they are forced to work for the landlords as bonded labourers.

Of the eight case studies the pattern is as follows:

- Three cases continue in bondage
- Two cases relapsed in bondage
- One case identified but not released
- Two cases released but not rehabilitated

CASE 7 (released from bondage but not rehabilitated)

Shivanna, an SC, belongs to Belaganahally village of H.D.Kote taluk of Mysore district is 35 years old. He has studied up to the 3rd standard. He is presently in Yelamattur. He is working as a bonded labourer in Belagana Halli. He has applied for release from the bonded labour system. However, so far he has not been rehabilitated. He is also an active worker in JEEVIKA.

According to him, as per the A.K. Chakravarthy Central Committee's recommendation (1994), a worker whose labour is bound at the time of submitting the application is eligible for relief even if he is not a bonded labour at the time of investigation. He recalls having submitted an application once and the Revenue Inspector conducting an investigation as well. Shivanna says that the Inspector seemed to have recommended that though Shivanna had been a bonded labourer earlier, he was not one at the time of investigation and was, therefore, *denied rehabilitation and other facilities.*

Nothing has been done about his case after that. Every month, the Karnataka Development Programme meetings take place. Once in three months, gram sabhas are held. Discussions on the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers are held. Though this is one of the programmes under the 20-point economic programme, the officials do not bother about its implementation. He is, therefore, of the view that the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers is not being done effectively or regularly.

At every taluk level, a Vigilance Committee meets once in a month and discusses the following issues.

- Persisting bonded labour system
- Persisting child labour problem
- Identifying fresh cases of bonded labourers and their rehabilitation
- Reporting about the above aspects to the government

He is of the view that the Vigilance Committee is not doing what is expected of it. The non-release and rehabilitation of some bonded labourers itself is sufficient proof of their inaction.

Shivanna defines bonded labour as:

- Work under the mercy and hegemony of the master
- No freedom, work to be done as per instructions
- No leave, many conditions for work
- Always under the grip of the master

- Receipt of loan in advance
- No time limit for work
- No benefit from the fruits of labour
- No participation in any other work or social functions
- No access to good dresses or good food
- No concern for health
- No time for any kind of recreation
- Life is inhuman, disrespectful and very trying conditions and work
- Work for long hours, inability to satisfy the never-ending demands of the master.

One who works under the above situations can be called a true bonded labour. Thus, bonded labourers are second-rate citizens as they are denied their entire constitutional rights and privileges.

Shivanna comes from a large family of 12 members. His father has seven children. Due to poverty they had to struggle for food, clothing and shelter. *His labour was pledged when he was 12 years old.* Shivanna's father told him that there was a struggle in the family for food and if Shivanna were to go for work in the landlord's house he would get better clothing and food and be looked after much better. *Lured by his father's false promises, he consented to become a bonded labourer.*

Shivanna's younger brother was a mason who fell from the building, broke his back and later died. Shivanna's family had to borrow money for his treatment and to repay the loan Shivanna had to join the master as a bonded labourer. He was given Rs. 150 as advance before joining as a bonded labourer. The loan was reduced by Rs. 50 every year. Shivanna had been working for the past 12 years. At this rate, the loan burden would be on his head forever. Shivanna is married with three children. The eldest, a son, is in the 6th standard, the second child is a daughter in the 3^d standard and the youngest daughter is in the 2nd standard. Shivanna says he is now working as a daily wage earner. He is a member of SHGs and JEEVIKA. He has his own house, which does not have electricity or toilet facilities. Shivanna says that he has no bad habits. Whenever he is in difficult situation, he says that he borrows money at five per cent interest from local moneylenders or from villagers.

He says neither the central nor state government programmes have benefited him. *He feels his awareness level has increased after his release from the bonded labour system for which he acknowledges JEEVIKA's help and guidance.* He has submitted an application before the gram sabha for a house under the Ambedkar Housing Programme. In 2003-04, he was allotted a house though he has not been paid any money for the purpose so far.

All his parents and other members work as daily wage earners. Some of them know the problems that confront the bonded labourer. *Now, they are free of the bonded labour trap. However, some poor families are still struggling as bonded labourers.*

Ten years ago their condition was extremely pathetic. They were wearing dirty and torn clothes, bathing infrequently as they had no alternative clothes to wear. They were not able to eat good food; they often went hungry as they were not employed for many days in a year. In a year there was an opportunity for work for about four or five months. They would only get work during the sowing, weeding and harvest seasons.

Now he is a member of the SHG. He saves Rs. 5 per week. He has saved Rs. 2,350 since 1999. He had taken a loan of Rs. 3,000 once, for buying a cow.

Under whom were you working as a bonded labourer?

With Mahadevappa who belonged to the Lingayat caste, who owned about 25 acres of irrigated land. He ran a ration depot and owned a tobacco barrelhouse (for drying tobacco leaves) and coconut gardens. Shivanna said that his brothers worked as bonded labourers in a different village. Both of them are now released, but have not been rehabilitated as yet.

What are your experiences when working as a bonded labourer?

I was treated like an animal. The employer spoke very rudely and was abusive. Whenever I slept, the householders would wake me up. They did not touch me as they felt it would defile their purity. *They cleaned the floor where I was served food with cow-dung and my eating plate and tumbler were kept outside like that of an untouchable. This practice is followed in most of the families even today. On several days they served me stale food of the previous night.* Even today, I have to bow in front of the master. We are barred from entry into his house and not permitted to use the water tap outside their house.

As revealed in the survey, the aim of a bonded labourer is mainly to eat, clothe himself and survive. Sometimes they do not get enough food., Sometimes to feed their children they even have to resort to minor theft. He is aware of the Minimum Wages Act, which is not implemented strictly due to officials' negligence and carelessness. He says that the minimum wage fixed is Rs. 62.50 per day and that at least 200 days work should be provided in a year. If this rule is implemented properly, he feels that bonded labour could be ended in India.

Do you feel that the bonded labour is a social evil?

He feels it is so now. He did not feel it was so in the past as he was not exposed to its negative impact. Their circumstances compelled them to resort to this practice. He said that his family were SCs while the masters generally represent the high castes, such as Lingayats. The landlords say that we are here only to work on master's land and serve the upper caste groups.

Bondage and non-bondage is reflected as follows in the perception of this respondent's life.

Bonded labour	Non-bonded labour
Generally belong to joint family	Generally are small families
Have less income	Both husband and wife work
Have more expenditure	Have less family expenditure
Face difficulty in leading life	Will have some land and property
Often confronted by health problems	Do not have much health risks
Bondage exists	Bondage does not exist
Poverty is pervasive	Free from extreme poverty
Landlessness	

How can the bonded labour problem be ended?

In his view, the problem of bonded labour could be ended in the following ways.

- By implementing the Minimum Wages Act and actually pay Rs.62.50 per person per day to the workers
- By providing work for at least 200 days in a year
- By distributing land to the landless
- By providing the benefits of various government-sponsored programmes to the target groups. He felt that the benefits of most programmes were not reaching them.
- Bank assistance under several schemes is currently reaching the rich. This trend should be reversed and the poor should get the benefits from these programmes.
- Food-for-Work programme should be implemented effectively.

- Heavy machines are being used for road construction, or its repair and drainage works, in tank desiltation work etc.. This is depriving the poor of job opportunities. So, use of these machines should be barred.

In the respondent's opinion the bonded labour system could be ended if the aforementioned actions were seriously initiated.

Was there any organised movement or protest held to eradicate bonded labour menace in the region?

Yes, there were organised mass movements to protest against the bonded labour system. Roadblocks, black badge demonstrations, workshops etc. were organised for the following purposes: To demand complete abolition of the bonded labour system and benefit of government programmes must reach the poor. Periodical and continuous surveys to identify bonded labourers should be conducted.

However, the government officials are not doing what is expected from them. They send false reports to their higher-ups to show that such surveys are conducted regularly and even report that no bonded labourer exists. The government officials are not taking effective steps in rooting out the social evil of bonded labour in this region. In some places the government officials have initiated action only as they fear JEEVIKA. There is need to augment serious action in this direction.

In short, until poverty is eradicated, people's economic stability is improved and benefits from government programmes reach the target groups the problem cannot be easily ended.

CASE STUDY-8 (Released from Bondage but not yet Rehabilitated)

Mr Guru Prasad is 21 years of age, from Kadire Gowdana Kote village of Bangarpet taluk in Kolar district, has failed in the 8th standard and *has been released from bondage. He is yet to be rehabilitated.* He has an asthmatic mother, a malnourished brother and three children. His father has deserted the entire family and has gone away with another woman. The entire burden of the family has fallen on Mr Guru Prasad's shoulders. *Except for a house, he has no other property. He was being pressurised by the landlord to repay the loan advance or work for him as a bonded labourer.* He was not willing to work as a bonded labourer and there were no means for repaying the loan. Hence, he went to Bangalore where he is doing masonry work. He visits the village once or twice in a month.

He was in bondage for 12 years and grazed cows and sheep, fetched fodder, cleaned cattle sheds, etc. He felt bad when he saw the landlord's son (Mohan Reddy) going to school or engaged in play, as he had no such options. He used to console himself that he, being poor, should not dream of such facilities.

The family did not have enough for food and clothing, because of extreme poverty. Hence, he had to accept bondage. *The outstanding loan is now about Rs. 10,000.*

Household Condition

If the family gets daily wage work, they could get food and not otherwise. Guru Prasad's brother is living with his aunt, as the family could not feed him. He is 18 and does carpentry.

Out of three cases one is that of a woman bonded labourer. All these cases are characterised by extreme poverty and a situation of helplessness. These are cases of acute bondage due to economic confusion. The objective feelings of the bonded labourers are typically 'a culture of silence' as characterised by Paulo Frieril. In most of the cases they are bonded to men who are economically and politically powerful. The bonded labourers have resigned themselves to the situation and subjectively surrendered to the compulsions of the situation. They fear that the bondage may perpetuate into generational bondage. JEEVIKA's initiative to release them from bondage does not afford them the courage to face the

onslaught. Such bonded labourers can not help themselves. They need to be helped through strong outside intervention. The apathy of the Karnataka Government is clearly seen from these case studies.

5.2 Factors that perpetuate the bonded labourer system

There are many reasons that are perpetuating the system of bonded labour. These are:

- Poverty
- Ignorance and false notions
- Illiteracy and low awareness
- Ignorance of the law and lack of social consciousness
- Unemployment
- Negligence on the part of the officials and landlords
- Non-implementation of poverty alleviation and other welfare programmes by the government
- Traditional hereditary habits, inheritance of traditional occupation and inheritance of bondage
- Landlessness
- Weak governance from/after independence and the neglect of officials

One can safely say that bonded labour is primarily caste-based. *About 85 to 90 per cent of the bonded labourers come from the SC category.* This system is being sustained with a view towards keeping slavery alive and maintaining the distance between the haves and the have-nots.

5.3 Seasonal Migration

Seasonal migration is quite common in the study area. Interviews with officials and local NGOs have revealed that the area has been witnessing drought conditions for the past four to five years due to scanty and untimely monsoons. Therefore, the daily wage workers do not get adequate job opportunities. Even in better monsoon years, people get job opportunities only for six months in a year. In adverse conditions, it is much less. The poor unemployed start migrating to Bangalore, Kolar and even far off places in search of jobs. Some of them would also resort to distress selling of houses or little patches of land. Some would migrate seasonally while a few would permanently settle down elsewhere. Having lost almost everything these people experience economic vulnerability, social apathy and mental agony.

All the 44 bonded labourers are covered under the PDS. The PDS shop is two to three kilometres away from their villages. Supplies are regular and they get rice, wheat, sugar, kerosene and salt in the PDS shop. The survey found in Hosa Holalu village that *whenever the bonded labourers are in need of some money, they would pledge their ration cards with landowners.* For the loan obtained, the landowners collect 10 per cent interest per month. This also shows how precarious the financial condition is. There are three types of benefits accruing to the lenders on cards.

- a) The loan advanced fetches 10 per cent interest per month.
- b) Card acts as a surety for the loan advanced.
- c) Landlords buy subsidised grains from the PDS against these cards and sell them at market prices.

The differences in the rates of grains in PDS shops and in other commercial shops are given below:

PDS rates	Open market rates (gowda)
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Rice Rs. 3.25 per kg. Wheat Rs. 3.50 per kg. Sugar Rs. 14 per kg. Kerosene Rs. 10 per litre Salt Rs, 3 per kg	Rs. 10 per kg Rs. 6 per kg Rs. 18 per kg Rs. 20 per litre Rs 3 per kg
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The lenders earn more than two times by lending money against ration cards.

5.4 Bondage in the Capitalist Mode of Production

Capitalism generally results in oppression. We notice it in bricklaying and granite quarrying units where the exploitation of labour is quite obvious. They are paid very little, but made to work long hours. In Bangarpet taluk, a company called Archana Granite Pvt Ltd. employs girls below 14 years. Its proprietor is settled in Andhra Pradesh and the granite produced here is exported to many countries. This aspect needs to be studied more intensively.

5.5 The Land Ownership Pattern

The Reddies, Vokkaligas, Lingayats and Naidus own most of the land in the area. Reddies could be called landlords with a majority of them owning between 80 to 100 acres of land. Some of these big landlords have divided their land among their children or other family members to avoid the Land Ceiling Act. Though the landlords are not present in large numbers they own most of the lands around the village. These four land owning communities could be called the upper castes. In *northern Karnataka, Lingayats and in Mysore, Kolar and Mandya districts the Vokkaligas are the land owning communities.*

Some reasons for the prevalence of bonded labour system in this region.

- Backwardness
- Prevalence of landlords
- Large number of landless population
- Lack of employment
- Shortage of food
- Lack of awareness
- Non-implementation of legal provisions
- Neglect by the political leaders
- Officials negligence and non-seriousness in programme implementation

Differences between bonded and non-bonded labourers

Bonded workers	Non-bonded workers
In acute poverty	Poverty may not be acute
In debt	May not be entirely under debt burden
Landless	May have little land
No assured income sources	Some assured income source exists; possess livestock and wage earnings
Large family size	Small family size with 2-3 children
No education	Have some education
No awareness	Have some awareness
Alcoholic	Not addicted to alcohol

5.6 Impact of Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976

The intention of the Act is laudable, but its implementation is poor. Though the government has enacted the law, the government machinery is not well set to address the problem. The officials are not committed to the eradication of these social problems. Even when the

incidence of bonded labour is visible, the officials are not willing to acknowledge the fact. They do not want to inconvenience the landlords. The polity is nurtured by the rich and the landlord and hence is not pro-dalit. *Until the Hangarahally chained bonded labour incident came to light in 2000, the government was not willing to accept reality.* Thereafter, the government had to concede that bonded labourers existed in many places. The government has initiated certain actions to identify and rehabilitate bonded labour in the state. Yet, not more than 40 per cent of them have been rehabilitated in the last three to four years.

5.7 Role of major political parties

The government is not seriously concerned with the welfare of the bonded labour and the agricultural workers. Hence, no serious effort is made to totally eradicate the bonded labour system and to rehabilitate them. *Even the existence of bonded labour is denied by officials.* If they accept that there is bonded labour, it exerts pressure on the landlords and the officials. *The dalits are all in the grip of the landlords. The caste system is still very strong.* If the low caste people are economically stable, they can face these socio-economic infirmities boldly.

Both Bangarpet and H.D. Kote taluks are reserved for SCs and therefore the MLAs belong to lower castes (Bovi and SC). Yet, they are hand-in-glove with the local landlords and upper caste people. *They have no concern for the welfare of the people from their own community. They are like dummies who never speak against any social wrongs committed against their caste.* They favour upper caste people and the officials and are anti-dalit. *Every politician aims at creating vote banks while nobody bothers about pro-dalit policies.* These leaders are found to favour their loyal workers and coteries. When the Land Reforms Act was implemented, it did not have any impact here. *No surplus land was distributed among the dalits. This was because the political leaders were connected with landlords and most of the officials came from high castes.*

5.8 Role of micro-credit institutions

Agriculture is the mainstay of the region. Hence, agricultural labour is the main source of income for the landless workers. Over 85 per cent of the population depends on this occupation. This is one of the main contributory factors for the persistence of the bonded labour system.

In the area, the banks exist for helping the haves and not for the have-nots. Several welfare-lending programmes are all confined to paper and not present in reality. The banks are not assisting bonded labourers and agricultural labourers in improving their economic capacity. *Though the RBI has issued guidelines in 1976 directing the banks to assist bonded labourers, they have not been implemented in earnest.* As many bank officials belong to the upper castes, they do not bother to respect the RBI guidelines.

Even though Vigilance Committees exist, they do not do serious work. At the taluk level no such Committees are constituted even though it is required. This is due to the callous attitude of the officials. These committees should be set up at the district and sub-division levels. They, however, do not have any power. These committees have only the power to report the lapses, but do not have the power to initiate any penal action against the officials. Some respondents feel that Vigilance Committees do not work for the interest of the bonded labourers.

Only JEEVIKA's workers who are also on the Vigilance Committee are working actively in the process of identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. They also sensitise the officials to work for the welfare of these people. *Due to their efforts, there is some improvement in the lives of bonded labourers, which would otherwise have been very grim.* In the Kolar district, the Vigilance Committees at the local level have nominated the heads of NGOs such as Grama Vikas, Myrada and Sunanda Maitri. However, these members do not attend the Vigilance Committee meetings or take any interest in its affairs.

In JEEVIKA's opinion and also as seen from the present survey, the state's role in the process of identification is negligible. *In the absence of JEEVIKA's intervention, the state would not have bothered to do anything to identify, release or rehabilitate bonded labour. Therefore, JEEVIKA must be given full credit for the improvement in the position of bonded labour.* Because of JEEVIKA's continuous efforts in the past three years, the state government is taking certain measures in this regard.

During the survey it was noticed that the officials had fixed a date to visit the village to enquire about the released bonded labour and to initiate action for their rehabilitation. However, the officials never turned up on the date. Therefore, the released bonded labourers who were eagerly looking forward to their visit and welfare measures felt extremely let down by the officials' negligence.

5.9 Views of a Few Officials on the Problems of Bonded Labour

The following four have given their views:

- a) Shirastedar (Mr Soolappa)
- b) Panchayat Extension Secretary (Mr Amalnath)
- c) Social Welfare Officer (Mr Swamy)
- d) Deputy Tehsildar of Bangarpet taluk

The evil practice of bonded labour is continuing in Bangarpet taluk mainly due to persistent poverty. *About 60 per cent of the people are BPL as per the taluk's BPL Survey.* However, the higher officials do not agree with this fact as the Planning Commission has put the figure as 30 per cent. Therefore, there is a directive to undertake one more survey of the people below the poverty line.

The officials are of the view that whatever benefits are received, the fact would be brought to the attention of the gram panchayat /taluk panchayat /zilla panchayat committees. Whatever action is initiated to implement these programmes is done on behalf of these elected representatives. There is hardly any role for the officials. If there are any lacunae, the blame should go to the people's representatives.

Since the higher officials hesitated in discussing the problems of bonded labour, subordinate officials suggested that the affected should contact the higher officials and talk to them for any action.

What should be done to eradicate bonded labour?

People feel that JEEVIKA is doing good work in this direction. They suggest that the politicians and the officials should come forward to assist the bonded labourers in more than one way by providing alternative means of livelihood.

- Officials should discharge their role both efficiently and honestly.
- Every bonded labourer should be allotted a minimum of two acres of land.
- They should be equipped with the necessary training and awareness about their rights.
- There are lands under reserve forest areas of the central government. A part of this should be released and allotted to the landless poor who can lead their life in a better manner.
- There should be effective programmes towards the eradication of poverty.

5.10 Feedback from Landlords of Karaduguru Village of Bangarapet Taluk

Mr. Somram Reddy has more than 20 acres of land, which includes coconut and mango orchards. He grows paddy, *ragi* and commercial crops. He owns a bus and has constructed

a very big building. *An SC lady is bonded as a labourer to him. He has informed the government officials about this fact.*

He is aware of the 1976 Abolition of Bonded Labour Act's implications, but he says that this mere enactment alone would not be able to remove poverty and hunger in society. When people approach him for a loan, he cannot send them empty-handed. In return they prefer to work as bonded labourers. *He cites several reasons for the practice of bonded labour.*

Many people are very poor. Some do not have cultivable land. They have large families. There are no lucrative jobs. They face problems in feeding and clothing themselves. Even if they own some land, due to poor monsoons they cannot grow anything. They do not get easy loans from institutions. They only approach the landlords for their financial needs. They have no other way of repaying it. Naturally, they agree to become bonded labourers.

He says that the poor should not entirely depend on the government or for that matter on anybody. They should try to be self-sufficient. They should work and find some alternative avenues of livelihood.

(a) A Landlord's Views on the Measures to End the Bonded Labour System: Exception Rather than the Rule from General Landlords' Perspective

- The landlords should not treat the debtors as bonded labourers. They should be treated as one of their own family members. As they work hard for the landlords' sake, they should be looked after with affection and respect.
- The rich should help the poor when in difficulty.
- Over 75 per cent of the bonded labourers are alcoholic and waste most of their earnings on drinks. They do not have an attitude that encourages saving. This should be changed.
- The government should completely ban all the bars and wine and liquor shops.
- The government itself is responsible for making the poor poorer.
- All the bars and liquor shops are being run by the rich. The poor alcoholics make the rich richer. If the poor have to improve their position, they should stop drinking.
- All the poor and bonded labourers should be given proper education and awareness about the impact of alcohol on health and the wastage of money.
- While both the husband and wife work, the husband's earnings go only towards paying for alcohol. Some drink three times a day spending Rs. 10 each time. The family's needs are met by the wife's earnings. Not only does the family suffer, the nation as a whole is also handicapped because of this.

He concludes that the rich have sympathy for the poor and are helping them whenever they need help. NGOs are also doing good work for the upliftment of the poor. There are several programmes for their rehabilitation. These should be made use of by the needy properly.

Feedback from the Landlords of Kadiregowdana Kote village of Bangarper Taluk, Kolar district.

Why bondage?

Many people in the village are poor and do not have adequate means of livelihood. As they do not have savings to meet heavy financial expenditures in connection with celebrations of marriage or to meet medical expenses, they tend to borrow. Their first choice is to approach the landlords for a loan as the latter will help them. Support from banks and other institutions are almost always not available to them as they do not have security or land to pledge. Such people volunteer to work as bonded labourers with the landlords as there is no other way by which they can repay the loan. Thus, rich landlords, who lend them money, have to recover it by keeping them as bonded labour during which time their food, clothing and shelter is also taken care of.

In my house, I have one bonded labourer. I have openly accepted the fact. If government officials question me I would unhesitatingly say that the government should go to their help. Such vulnerable people should not be neglected by the government. If the government takes care of their legitimate demands, no one would have to go to the landlords for loans. The government institutions and banks should come to their rescue.

When the poor go to the landlords, the latter lend them money without asking for a guarantee or surety. Their food, clothing and other problems are taken care of as long as they are in bondage. Who else would be willing to lend them so much money when there is no prospect of its repayment?

The case studies of these two landlords apparently do not reflect the viewpoints of landlords in general. There are exceptions among the landlords who are influenced by liberal ideology; nonetheless the situations depicted by the two landlords are also a manifestation of the objective reality. The poor require money to meet their social needs and the only source of credit for them are the landlords. *This is the reality of the supply side. The demand side is of the landlord, who in any case needs the labourers and the economic compulsion of the bonded labourers, the hegemony of the landlords also acts as situation of convergence to perpetuate bondage.*

There are several welfare schemes intended to benefit the poor. However, in the name of the poor, the politicians and officials embezzle a major part of the funds. More than 75 per cent is eaten away by the officials and political leaders. Hardly 25 per cent trickles down to the target groups, which is grossly inadequate to rehabilitate them. 95 per cent of male members in a village are addicted to liquor. No sincere attempt is made to ban drinking. People waste the entire day's hard earned money on liquor. This is colossal wastage of both money and health. This should be stopped.

5.11 Action Proposed for Rehabilitation of Poor

Poverty eradication programmes should be strictly implemented. Drinking should completely be banned. The economic condition of the poor should be improved. The bonded labourers and agricultural labourers should get full and proper benefit of the government programmes. People's awareness campaigns should be organised periodically. They should organise themselves and fight for their rights. The landlords should not treat the workers as bonded labourers. They should be treated humanly and paid the minimum wages and provided all facilities. No landlord should make the workers work for repayment of interest on loans.

5.12 Working Condition of Bonded Labourers before Release

According to the labourers, their condition was worse when they were bound to their masters. Poverty was extreme, coupled with illiteracy. If labourers did not work, they did not get food. They had no clothes to wear. They were eating whatever was served to them in their masters' houses and were forced to wear old clothes. Their survival was threatened everyday.

In the opinion of the respondents, for bonded labour to be completely eradicated, all bonded labourers and agricultural workers should come together, work against this social evil and fight for their rights.

The following measures may help in eradicating this evil.

- 1) *The government should distribute land to landless bonded labourers.*
- 2) *The government should provide all assistance to institutions like JEEVIKA to spread awareness amongst the labouring community of their rights.*
- 3) *If the problem is left to the affected people (bonded labourers and agricultural*

workers) to fight for themselves the problems will not be solved. Therefore, there is need for organisations, such as JEEVIKA, to mobilise and help them in this respect.

As the working community is largely unlettered, they find it difficult to effectively bargain for their rightful dues with government officials. Hence, JEEVIKA's help is all the more important in this regard.

5.13 Resistance by the workers against bondage

Already, once or twice protests have been organised against the practice of bonded labour to pressurise the gram/taluk/zilla level to initiate action towards ending this social evil. Given below are the demands presented before the officials.

- Allot land to bonded labour
- Eliminate bonded labour practice completely
- Issue Green Cards in place of the common Yellow Cards
- Provide houses to the houseless
- Provide electricity
- Drinking water should be ensured
- Provide job opportunities through out the year under Employment Guarantee Scheme
- Rehabilitate bonded labourers completely.

Some of the demands have been met while some are still pending due to negligence on the part of the officers and political leaders.

INTERVENTIONS:

6. 0. JEEVIKA'S ROLE: AN ASSESSMENT

There are several NGOs, voluntary organisations and civil society organisations operating in different areas such as development, poverty alleviation, abolition of bonded labour, health and education, empowering the PRIs, elected representatives, and training programmes for the rural youth etc. Among these, JEEVIKA is totally committed to the issue of bonded labour. At present, JEEVIKA is working in seven districts and 23 taluks of Karnataka. Mr. Kiran Kamal Prasad is JEEVIKA's State Co-ordinator. As per the documents prepared by JEEVIKA and its Annual Reports its goals and objectives are as follows.

Goal/vision

JEEVIKA is working for the eradication of the Bonded Labour System (BLS) in Karnataka. It is also networking with NGOs in other states to empower dalits in their fight against the caste system.

Objectives

1. *Uniting the bonded labourers together with agricultural labourers and women in their families.*
2. *Lobbying, advocacy and pressurising the government to implement the provisions of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976.*
3. *Tapping various government schemes of poverty alleviation and social welfare.*
4. *Nurturing economic independence through community savings; skills for self-employment, co-operative economic ventures; and so on.*
5. *Cultural action and creating public awareness.*
6. *Documentation and research in support of action.*
7. *Back-to-School Programme for children below 14 years so as to prevent children from getting into bondage or other working situations detrimental to their growth.*
8. *Networking with other individuals, groups and movements in the state and within and outside the country.*
9. *Settle land disputes: through verifying land documents, getting legal advice and filing cases. Hold village meetings to settle land disputes.*
10. *Resort to public action: Approach the executive magistrates for proper action.*
11. *Approach the Social Welfare Department for proper compensations.*
12. *. Procure old age pensions. Promote SHGs exclusively for the elderly.*
13. *. Procure disability pensions: Approach appropriate agencies dealing with the issue for relevant help.*
14. *. Plant trees. Show skits on environment protection.*
15. *. Regular reflections on superstitions; practices and beliefs with activists and the unions and SHG members. Advocate practice of and give training on vipassana / Chennota.*
16. *. Conduct trainings on health issues for activists: Conduct trainings on health issues for union members. Gather villagers with knowledge of herbal medicines and pool together their knowledge. Promote awareness on HIV / AIDS through meetings, trainings, street theatre for youth, SHG members, union members, villagers and the public.*

6.1 ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT UNDER EACH OF THE OBJECTIVES

1. Sensitisation and organisation: These are the core and pivotal activities of JEEVIKA. All the other objectives are promoted only through the strengthening of this objective.

Bonded labourers are organised and unionised together with agricultural workers. The majority of the freed bonded labourers work as agricultural labourers. Therefore, to tackle bonded labour effectively, JEEVIKA realised that agricultural workers also need to be *sensitised* and organised together with bonded labourers.

The organisation is formalised into a Trade Union (TU). A TU called *Karnataka Jitadalu Mattu Krishikarmika Okkuta* was registered on May 20, 1997. Membership and monthly fees were collected in an effort to make the organisation and the union self-supporting and make the activists answerable to the people. The TU has committees in the villages and at the taluk level. Meetings of these *samitis* are held regularly. Village *samitis* meet once a week. One-day social analysis and trainings are conducted almost every month in each taluk for the union leaders and members in the areas for effective organisation. The issue of bonded labourers is kept alive in the agendas of government bodies and officials are made to respond to peoples' needs and to perform their duties without bribes. However, the union is in its infancy and hence is very weak. It has to take up different issues affecting the workers in a systematic and effective manner.

Various training and exposure programmes to different activists have increased their analytical skills and improved their level of performance. JEEVIKA's strength is that all its activists are dalits and all its personnel, even those helping out in office work, training, and coordination and monitoring are also involved in the field. The JEEVIKA activists at the state level now carry the training of leaders and activists. Even the taluk-level activists are trained to take up the one-day training in their own taluks.

The taluk and state-level co-ordinators meet at least once a month and activists in a taluk meet every week to review and plan. The core group consists of eleven state-level activists. They meet every Monday and otherwise whenever they are needed to take stock of things. Any changes in the policies and initiation of new activities are discussed in the coordinators' meeting at the taluk level and decisions are arrived at collectively.

2. Lobbying and Advocacy: JEEVIKA's activities began with making a detailed survey of bonded labourers and the identified bonded labourers were made to submit applications for their release and rehabilitation to the Deputy Commissioners concerned. The activists by themselves and through the union have been putting pressure on the officials through various activities and programmes, to take action according to the provisions of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. While they have met with some success, the pace of work is very slow. Due to these efforts, the top bureaucracy is at least acknowledging the presence of bonded labour as opposed to their earlier denial. Circulars are sent to take action according to the provisions in the Act. JEEVIKA has had a frustrating experience with the lower bureaucracy. JEEVIKA activists have found to their utter disbelief that the officials at the village and taluk levels resort to dubious ways to sabotage their superiors' orders. All efforts at lobbying so far were wasted when JEEVIKA recently came to know that the *Karnataka Government in its high-powered committee meeting on bonded labour on March 31, 1997, passed a resolution saying that there were no more bonded labourers in Karnataka*. It filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court to that effect. The workshop on bonded labour conducted by JEEVIKA in 2002, in collaboration with the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore, passed a declaration and through its report put pressure on the government to rethink its decision and take appropriate action. However, the bureaucracy has been pressurised to initiate action in Chikballapur sub-division in Kolar district, (comprising of five taluks), in Madhugiri sub-division of Tumkur district, (comprising of two taluks), in Maddur taluk of Mandya district and in Bangalore Rural district, (comprising of three taluks) towards taking appropriate steps to identify and rehabilitate bonded labourers.

A writ petition was filed on behalf of 192 bonded labourers of Anekal who had been rehabilitated earlier by the Deputy Commissioners of Bangalore Urban district in March

1992. This rehabilitation was later held back by him due to some political pressure. The case is still pending with the Karnataka High Court. As a result of the verifications ordered by the court, so far 15 bonded labourers have been granted some rehabilitation measures. The writ petition was due for a final hearing in May-June, 1998. Legal consultations were held to make an intervening application in the same writ petition on behalf of nearly all the 20,000 bonded labourers. They had been identified by JEEVIKA, which had submitted applications for their release and rehabilitation to the concerned Deputy Commissioners in 1994.

JEEVIKA has organised various programmes of mass action such as *the Bonded Labour Awareness Day on October 25* and the Bonded Labour Day on January 26 and has sensitised a wide circle of people on the issue of bonded labour.

(3) Procurement of Government Schemes of Welfare: The number of benefits procured is very meagre compared to the number of applications made by the union members and the time and energy spent by the activists in pursuing those applications. This method has been only partially successful.

(4) Promoting of Self-reliance: In the early days of unionisation, efforts were made to build up group savings of union members to avoid taking loans and getting into bondage. In the middle of 1996, the focus was changed to build up savings in women's groups in Anekal. Those women were family members of the bonded labourers who were by and large men. The experiment showed that it was easier to pool savings in women's groups than in men's groups. Also this effort paved the way to include women in the union. From the last quarter of 1997, the experiment has been extended to other taluks. By the end of March 1998, *efforts at forming women's savings group were made in twelve taluks*. From April 1998, savings through women's groups was made into a full-fledged programme, with a full-time women activist in each taluk and three state-level women coordinators to co-ordinate the programme. The programme has also helped remove the gender bias in JEEVIKA's organisational structure. Until the programme of women's savings groups was introduced, all the activists were men.

Two former bonded children, one child bonded labourer and three children of agricultural workers are undergoing training in carpentry and tailoring for three years in residential technical institutions in Whitefield. Three of them finished their training in April 1998; another two will complete it in the coming years, while one former bonded child labourer whose fingers were cut off by the master while in bondage, could not continue the treatment. One of them also joined the Bridge course conducted by JEEVIKA in Anekal.

JEEVIKA wants to propose that the government works out rehabilitation packages through cooperative ventures.

(5) Cultural Action: Cultural action is considered a very effective way of sensitising the workers, dalits and also the general public. Lots of youth are mobilised through cultural action. So far cultural troupes of fifteen members each are trained in eight taluks of which five troupes are very active. They go round to different villagers once every week giving street theatre performances and singing songs of awareness and conscientisation. All the activists in a taluk are the troupe members, together with some other volunteers who are paid a small honorarium. The travel and other expenses are met by funds raised from the public.

(6) Documentation and Research in Support of Action on Bonded Labour: JEEVIKA wants to strengthen its action and involvement through ongoing and rigorous research. Preliminary research is carried out by analysing the data gathered while identifying bonded labourers. So far, preliminary analysis of the data on bonded labourers of Anekal taluk has been done and the findings published in two booklets, one each in Kannada and English.

For the other 47 taluks, the analysis is yet to be completed. Kiran Kamal Prasad is doing a doctorate on bonded labour in NLSIU. Further research is planned on various issues relating to bonded labour, like the impact of globalisation, the relation of bonded labour to the caste system, historical forms of bonded labour and its changing nature and so on, to be taken up in the coming years.

A ten-minute video on bonded labour has been produced in English in April 1997. The video proceedings of the seminars and rallies of bonded labourers in 1995 have been edited in to a two and half an hour video film. Revolutionary songs and street theatre skits used by the JEEVIKA cultural troupe have also been recorded. These are meant for generating public awareness about the union members.

Different folders highlighting the salient points in the legislation on bonded labour and the recommendations on bonded labour have been printed in Kannada and circulated.

(7) Universalisation of Primary Education: During the Bonded Labour Day celebration in Anekal in 1997, a suggestion was *mooted to initiate action on behalf of children in bondage, to get them a good education, as a way of tackling bonded labour.* This suggestion was taken up seriously by the core group, which first went for an exposure visit to Hyderabad where a group, called M.V. Foundation (MVF) was carrying out innovative programmes to universalise primary education and eliminate child labour. After the exposure visit, plans were drawn up and funds were collected for bonded children. A cycle rally of 60 volunteers generated public awareness against child labour and the need for universalising primary education. Preparations were made to conduct a Bridge Course (BC) for 60 bonded and other working children with the purpose of training them within a year to be able to join higher primary or high school. Teachers for the BC were identified and given various trainings including the methodologies of Paulo Freire and were exposed to MVF's work in the Ranga Reddy district in Andhra Pradesh. The use of a vacant government building to run the BC was solicited. Permission was procured in mid October 1997. Funds from two agencies were secured by the end of the year and the BC in two batches of thirty children each was started in the third week of December 1997. Animators to 25 out of 33 gram panchayats were to be appointed. Their task was to identify child labour within their panchayats, build up a close relationship with them and their parents and motivate the children to join the BC conducted by JEEVIKA. Thirty supplementary teachers were also to be identified to teach in the understaffed government primary schools. Most of the children in the BC were admitted in higher primary classes in June 1998. Further plans were made for a period of three years beginning with April 1998. The aim is to see every child below 14 years in school.

(8) Networking: JEEVIKA initiated networking at the state level in 1993 through the cooperation of some NGOs. Many NGOs did not join the campaign. The co-operation of a few NGOs lasted till the collection of data regarding bonded labourers in 48 out of the 175 taluks in Karnataka was in progress. For the involvement with bonded labour in 15 taluks, JEEVIKA had to build up its own infrastructure. Despite this setback, JEEVIKA took a keen interest in networking on the issue of bonded labour and related issues with other groups in Karnataka as also other groups within the country and outside. The workshop conducted by JEEVIKA in collaboration with NLSIU was a fruitful exercise. It brought together activists and researchers concerned with the issue of bonded labour from the three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The features of bonded labour in South India as well as all over India were reflected upon and the ways and means to put an end to the evil were deliberated upon. The deliberations conducted in the workshop were used to pressurise the government. The workshop has also helped in taking the first step towards the building of an effective network with different groups and individuals, especially in South India on the issue of bonded labour.

Area of Work

Presently, JEEVIKA is working in seven districts and in 23 taluks of Karnataka. This was facilitated by the willingness and availability of dalit youth to take up work on the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. It has created social pressure on the issue of bondage in mainly two different ways: Primarily, through an extensive survey taken up in the initial stages covering nearly 48 taluks representing different geographical regions in the state – northern and southern Karnataka. Finally, the data was used to raise questions in the assembly, to write articles in newspapers and mainly to make the identified labourers file affidavits before the concerned Deputy Commissioners for their release and rehabilitation. *After identification, the bonded labourers themselves are being unionised and organised to fight for their rights.* Regular cultural activities are undertaken by way of street theatre to raise public awareness about bonded labourers in villages and amongst the general public.

In 1995, a massive rally of nearly 10,000 bonded labourers was organised in the state capital and seminars on bonded labour at the state level were held. Again, October 25, 1998, was celebrated as Bonded Labour System Awareness Day to coincide with the enactment of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act in 1975 and January 26 was celebrated by JEEVIKA as Bonded Labourers' Day. Every year different types of programmes such as processions, demonstrations, dharnas, seminars, public programmes to raise awareness on the issue of bonded labourers amongst the general public and government officials are organised. Whenever there are instances of atrocities on bonded labourers (murder, assault, harassment for the return of loans etc) the affected people take up massive demonstrations, dramas and protests, under JEEVIKA's guidance.

The initial survey of bonded labourers was begun in one taluk during 1988 and action on rehabilitation of the bonded labourers at that taluk level was initiated in 1990. The survey at the state level was taken up in 48 taluks in 1993 with active involvement of JEEVIKA and the state government from 1995.

The main inspiration was K.K. Prasad's personal desire. He gave up a Junior Research Fellowship in 1985 to actively involve himself in order to bring about a meaningful change in the life of dalits in Anekal taluk. He chose to live with the dalits in a particular village in Handenahally in 1986 and build up leadership to tackle their problems. *The process evoked a social boycott of dalits by high caste people demanding Kiran's ouster from the village. During the social boycott, Kiran was literally thrown out of the village by the Reddy caste people. The Superintendent of Police investigating the case found that there were 40 bonded labourers in the village and remarked to Kiran, "Now I know why Reddy caste people are against you."* This remark made Kiran reflect deeply and take up the fight against the bonded labour system in a systematic way. Thus, he was invited by the leaders of another village where he took their help in making a scientific and thorough survey of bonded labourers in all the villages of Anekal taluk. Various activities have been taken up first at Anekal and then at the state level.

JEEVIKA considers bonded labour not just as an economic issue, but also as an aspect of untouchability and the caste system. JEEVIKA believes that only when the caste system is wiped out will the bonded labour system be destroyed. The abolition of bonded labour will greatly promote an egalitarian society in India. Effective and lasting social change can be brought about only by and with the leadership of the affected people. Therefore, JEEVIKA believes in sensitisation, organisation and unionisation of bonded labourers together with landless agricultural workers to effectively eradicate the bonded labour system.

JEEVIKA strongly believes that bonded labour is an acute form of exploiting labour and not giving it its due. Only when bonded labour is eradicated will those who were slaves be fully respected and remunerated.

6.2 Field based/Research/Fact-finding/Documentation

A survey and research work was carried out at the taluk level from 1988 to 1990 and at the state level between 1993 and 1995, along with an investigation of the atrocities on bonded labourers, wherever they occurred.

Example: *Atrocities on bonded labourers and dalits: Interventions by JEEVIKA*

Case 1: Krishnappa was a bonded labourer for Dodda Venkata Reddy in Pillagundlahally in Chikkaballapur taluk for the past 10 years for a Rs. 1,000 loan. *He was tied to a post for 24 hours and the nails of his fingers were pierced with needles. He became unconscious and on a complaint the police got him admitted in a government hospital in Chikkaballapur town. Under pressure from JEEVIKA activists, the Additional Collector (AC), tehsildar and Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dy. SP) visited the master's village to collect information about the incident. On the same day, coordinators from all the 16 taluks mobilised people and took out a procession and demonstration in town and made the AC and the Dy. SP commit to taking stringent action against the master and provide rehabilitation to the bonded labourers. The Dy. SP booked cases against 8 persons under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, Bonded Labour System Abolition Act and SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act. Krishnappa, along with 22 other released bonded children from Chikkaballapur taluk were admitted to the bridge course programme in Anekal in July 2001.*

Case 2: Basavayya of Channapatna, belonging to a landlord community, was bonded to a person of the same caste. He had taken a loan of nearly Rs. 50,000 for the medical treatment of his family members. *In November 2000, he was insulted and beaten up by the master when he did not report for work due to ill health. The JEEVIKA activists took up the case with the concerned authorities. Basavayya was sent a legal notice for repaying the loan, failing which he was threatened with the forfeiture of his three acres of land. JEEVIKA sent a reply to the legal notice cautioning the master against taking any action against Basavayya lest the master attract the provisions of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act. The DC was also apprised of the matter.*

Case 3: In B.V. Hally of Veerupaksha Hobli in Channapatna taluk, Siddayya was a bonded labourer for Shivamallegowda. For some reason the master tied Siddayya to a pole and beat him. JEEVIKA activists filed a complaint with the police against Shivamallegowda. Though the police arrested Shivamallegowda, he managed to get bail. When Siddayya and the Taluk Coordinator were threatened with dire consequences, *Siddayya went into hiding with his family in Garuda Ukkada village in Srirangapatna. JEEVIKA called for a panchayat in the village after about two months and made Siddayya come back to the village. JEEVIKA is also taking up the issue of dalits who are undergoing various types of harassment at the hands of high-caste Hindus.*

6.3 National and International Network

JEEVIKA has been trying to enlist the active support of various factions of the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) in Karnataka since 1975. The idea was to take up systematic action against the practice of bonded labour in the entire state under DSS's banner. Although all the main leaders of the different factions of DSS had promised to take it up under their organisation, the collaboration did not materialise. The next attempt was to invite all the then members of FEVORD – K (Federation of Voluntary Organisations in Karnataka for Collective Action on Bonded Labour in the state). *Only a handful of organisations in Kolar and Bangalore and one in Mysore responded.* A sub-committee in Fevord-K on Bonded Labour was set up under the chairmanship of Kiran Kamal Prasad in 1993. It did not function for more than a year or so, as there was hardly any response from other voluntary organisations. Why? *The NGOs in Karnataka are not really concerned with issues of agricultural labour and dalits.* Taking action on behalf of bonded labour, which is a sensitive

issue in rural areas, requires very clear conviction, stands and strategies and would, in all probability, invite confrontation. All NGOs are not prepared to face such consequences.

JEEVIKA had, on its own, promoted a network of nearly 30 NGOs in Raichur and Koppal districts in 1999 and 2000. However, its inability to procure minimal finances to get the collective action augmented saw the untimely death of the network. In this context, JEEVIKA *now promotes action on bonded labour almost single handed*. However, the nature and structure of the organisation is collective in nature. Making the taluk-level units in more than 16 taluks independent, autonomous functioning units by the end of the next phase of involvement, but keeping common links in the fight against bonded labour would mean having a strong state-wide network on bonded labour.

An NGO in Punjab, Volunteers for Social Justice (VSJ), in 2002 initiated the promotion of networks on bonded labour at the national level and in different regions. JEEVIKA has promised its support to VSJ in that venture. JEEVIKA believes in collective action to tackle social evils. It is a collective entity of different groups from 16 taluks. In its various programmes, it seeks the collaboration of the many NGOs, dalits, farmers and other progressive movements in the area and extends critical collaboration to other groups in their fight for justice, equality, peace and development. It seeks benefits from other organisations for their programmes as in the case of the differently abled and the elderly.

Apart from forging 'sporadic' and 'ad hoc' yet ongoing and continuous linkages with other organisations and movements, JEEVIKA is an active member of quite a few state-wide, regional, national and international networks on issues that have a bearing on the life of bonded labourers. They are: National Alliance of People's Movements – Karnataka (NAPM-K), Campaign Against Child Labour – Karnataka (CACL-K), Micro credit Network – Karnataka (Micnet-K), Karnataka State School Development and Monitoring Committees Coordination Forum (KSSDMCCF), Souharda Okkuta for Harmony and Equality in Bangalore, Social Action Network – South India, Karnataka Social Forum/World Social Forum (KSF/ WSF) and International Playback Theatre Network (IPTN). In some of these, it has taken and is taking leadership roles at the district level, as in CACL-K and at the state level, as in Micnet-K, NAPM-K and KSF.

6.4 Method of intervention

JEEVIKA's overall goal is: "By eradicating the bonded labour system in Karnataka and networking for the same in other states of the country, empower dalits in their fight against the caste system and thus work towards bringing about an egalitarian society in India."

How far is the intervention successful?

Till 2000 there was hardly any impact in the sense of making the government implement the Bonded Labour Act, *but the bonded labourers on their own initiative came out of bondage through the various trainings, cultural action and union activities of JEEVIKA. The bonded labour children have been placed in bridge courses and later mainstreamed into schools.* None of JEEVIKA's lobbying, advocacy and networking strategies succeeded. *However, in 2000, the newspaper reports of a case of five bonded labourers who were chained for three years came as a rude shock to the government. Only then did the government make a commitment to identify and release bonded labourers all over Karnataka.* This commitment by the government did not show any positive result. *The field level understanding of bonded labour situation and effective strategies of intervention on behalf of the bonded labour enabled JEEVIKA to bring a positive change in the government's attitude. For instance, in 2000-01 JEEVIKA trained government officials at the district and taluk levels on the methodologies of identification of bonded labour. It carried out nearly 80 such trainings at taluk levels and 10 trainings at the district level.* There were between 100-300 officials of the Revenue and RD&PR Departments and nodal officials of various other departments. JEEVIKA activists were also part of the identification teams constituted by the government.

Through all these processes the government identified around 1,800 bonded labourers by the end of 2001 and rehabilitation grants of Rs. 20,000 per person were released by the end of 2003. Out of the 1,800 bonded labour nearly 1,700 bonded labourers came from areas where JEEVIKA is involved.

<p>SUCCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Main streaming the issue of BLs ➤ Awareness among BLs/AWs ➤ Identification of BLs ➤ Rehabilitation of BLs by government through various schemes and accessing different poverty alleviation schemes for the landless agricultural workers ➤ Forming of SHGs for savings and credit without interest ➤ Unionisation of released BLs & AWs ➤ Back to School Programme and Residential Bridge Course wherein working children are trained for the 5th Std in 4 months ➤ Cultural action 	<p>FAILURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of co-ordination from other stake holders in terms of identification, releasing and re-habilitation ➤ Land distribution to released BLs
<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Networking with local and national organisations ➤ Co-operation with media ➤ Development oriented approach ➤ Good relationship with community ➤ Collective land encroachment ➤ Political empowerment ➤ Documentation & research ➤ Cultural teams 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of resources ➤ Conducting deeper socio-economic research ➤ Judicial intervention

Prof. Abdul Aziz has done an 'Internal Evaluation' of JEEVIKA's work (2004) in which he has emphasised the positive role of this organisation "*It is in respect of social capital formation that the organisation has made significant contribution.* The various forms of interventions by the organisation have initiated some degree of change in the economy and social life of the weaker sections. The land owning class no longer take things for granted wherever the weaker sections have organised themselves into unions. There is a change in the manner the dalits are addressed, a change from the use of contemptuous words to polite and more acceptable words. The organisation has succeeded to some extent in politically empowering its members by motivating them to contest panchayat elections. The report however mentions that research does not seem to be on the organisation's priority list and hence the evaluator suggests that the organisation should initiate research work, in various fields and identify success stories as also stories of failure."

6.5 Intervention by the Government

The state government had issued directions to the Deputy Commissioners to conduct a survey for the identification of bonded labourers vide letter NO. RDP 15 RBL (P) dated 14/10/99. The survey was expected to be completed by the end of June 2000. *Many districts*

have completed the survey and have submitted reports to the government indicating the absence of bonded labour. The discovery of the practice of bonded labour in Mandya and some other districts subsequent to the completion of surveys leads to the conclusion that the methodology of the earlier surveys has not been effective and there is a need for a more systematic involvement of NGOs and senior officers at the field level in this task. The state government has, therefore, decided to order a fresh resurvey of bonded labour in all the districts. The following procedure is to be followed in the conduct of the new survey:

- The survey shall be conducted with the assistance of NGOs or reputed social research organisations like ISEC or Universities. NGOs with proven track records and credibility may be identified for this purpose.
- The Deputy Commissioners may issue a notice in the local newspapers inviting organisations or individuals with any information on the existence of bonded labour to report such cases to the officers(s) designated by the Deputy Commissioner. Any information or complaint regarding the existence of bonded labour in any specific village or workplace shall be verified by the Assistant Commissioner of the Sub division or, where the number of cases is very large, by the tehsildar of the taluk.
- The questionnaire prepared on the basis of the report of Sri S.R. Sankaran, former Chief Secretary, Tripura, can be used for the purpose of the survey. Deputy Commissioners can make required modifications to the questionnaire,
- Training workshops are to be conducted to ensure that the individuals involved in the survey work are conversant with the definition of bonded labour and the type of questions to be posed to verify the existence or otherwise of bonded labour.
- After the submission of the reports by the survey agencies, the Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners and the tehsildars shall personally cross check the results of the survey. The Deputy Commissioners shall visit at least four villages per taluk while the Assistant Commissioners shall visit at least ten villages in each taluk. The tehsildars shall visit at least 30 villages in their jurisdiction. The Deputy Commissioners may also utilise the services of other senior offices of the district for this purpose. A detailed report shall be drawn up summarising the results of such visits. These reports shall be a part of the final report submitted by the Deputy Commissioner to the state government.
- The Deputy Commissioner may prepare a list of units in each district where there is a likelihood of the incidence of bonded labour and child labour, with the assistance of Sericulture, Mines and Geology and Labour Departments. This list can be given to the agencies that are doing the survey.
- The reports of the NGOs and those of officers shall be placed before the Sub-Divisional Vigilance Committee and the District Vigilance Committee and after discussion in the Vigilance Committee; these reports shall be sent to the government with the comments of the committee on the findings of the survey.
- The details of the bonded labour identified during the survey shall also be computerised to facilitate systematic follow-up during rehabilitation.
- The survey shall be completed within a period of three months,
- The Deputy Commissioners shall ensure that the survey is conducted with all seriousness. The government will hold the Deputy Commissioners personally responsible if it is found that the survey has not been conducted thoroughly and cases of bonded labour have been overlooked during the survey.
- The state government will release Rs. 2.00 lakhs to each district to meet the expenditure on survey. (Director, Area Development Programmes and E/O Addl provided this information. Secretary to Government, Rural Development and PRI Department)

During 1992 to 2004, government intervention in the identification, release and rehabilitation process was not very satisfactory. JEEVIKA and the Government of Karnataka organised a joint survey for the identification of bonded labour in the state. The joint survey identified 18,000 cases of bonded labour while the government did not accept the figure. After the

Hangarahally episode the government agreed to the existence of only 1,800 cases. However, the state could actually rehabilitate a mere 300 cases. This would show that the state government was not very serious about the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers during the period 1992 to 2000.

The present survey team met the Labour Commissioner and the Labour Secretary on May 21, 2005, to discuss the extent of bonded labour prevailing in the state. In response, they both said that they had nothing to do with bonded labour. They further informed the team that the matter was to be dealt with by the Revenue and Rural Development and Panchayati Raj and hence directed us to them. Later, the team met the Director and the Assistant Director of RD&PR in this regard. They assured the team that they would provide information on the number of bonded labourers in the state, along with the number actually released and rehabilitated. However, the promised data was furnished later by the RDPR.

From the above it could be inferred that the government's response to the problem of bonded labour has been very poor during the period 1992 to 2000. It has also been noticed that no political party has intervened in the matter for securing the release and rehabilitation of the bonded labour.

6.6 Role of NHRC

Under the Abolition of Bonded Labour and Child Labour Act, 1976, the NHRC has been given various powers and functions in order to mitigate the problem of bonded labour in the country. As per the orders of the Supreme Court (dated: December 11, 1997, passed in the writ petition – civil No. 3922 of 1985), the NHRC should be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. The court has held that the concerned authorities should promptly comply with the directions given by the NHRC in this regard. Thus, the Commission has since then been involved in both the monitoring and implementation processes of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. It has conducted reviews periodically. *Through the efforts of the NHRC, Vigilance Committees have now been formed at district and sub-district levels, which was not the case prior to 2001. The NHRC also recommended the involvement of PRIs in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour by suitably amending the PRIs Act to achieve this end (NHRC Annual Report 2001-02; Pp 76-77).*

The survey reveals that the interviewed bonded labourers were not aware of the NHRC or its role in the eradication of the bonded labour system. However, the concerned government officials and the activists of JEEVIKA were aware of the role, importance and activities of NHRC. They are of the view that *there has been some degree of improvement in the implementation of the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976 after the NHRC took over the monitoring of the implementation of the Act. However, they feel that much more needs to be done to achieve the intended goal of the Act.*

6.7 Role of the Vigilance Committee

Under the Act, Vigilance Committees are to be formed at the District and Sub-division levels. These committees have been formed in the survey area. These Committees should (a) advise the District Magistrate (or any officer authorised by him) as to the efforts made and action taken to ensure that the provisions of this Act are properly implemented; (b) provide for the economic and social rehabilitation of the freed bonded labour; (c) coordinate the functions of rural banks and cooperative societies with a view to channelising adequate credit to the freed bonded labour; (d) keep an eye on the number of offences of which cognizance has been taken under this Act; (e) make a survey as to whether there is any offence of which cognizance has to be taken under this Act; (f) defend any suit instituted against a freed bonded labourer or a member of his family or any person dependent on him for the recovery of the whole or part of any bonded debt or any other debt which is claimed by such person to be bonded debt. During the present survey it was observed that these

Committees exist only on paper and are practically doing nothing. The Committees do not meet periodically, nor are they involved in either organising identification surveys or in the follow-up for release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. *Thus, Vigilance Committees have not contributed anything to the welfare of the bonded labour, thereby defeating their very purpose.*

Similar findings have been reported in the state-level reviews of the bonded labour and child labour situation carried out by the NHRC in the year 2001. The main findings are as follows:

- a. The top administration in almost every state is reluctant to admit that the problem of bonded labour still exists. Most of the states hold the view that with the coming into force of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, all the bonded labourers have been released and that the problem has been solved forever.
- b. Mandatory Vigilance Committees at the District and Sub-divisional HQs were not in position at many places. Even where such committees were constituted they have become defunct over the years. The committees have not made worthwhile contributions anywhere in terms of the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. Wherever bonded labour has been detected, the credit goes to NGOs and social activists who have been bringing these cases to the notice of an apathetic and unresponsive administration.
- c. The funds provided by the Government of India under the centrally sponsored schemes for the rehabilitation of the released bonded labour have been utilised to a very small extent because of a lack of interest and commitment on the part of the District Magistrates to the cause of bonded labour. Rehabilitation of migrant bonded labour seems to have been totally neglected everywhere. Most of them have invariably been dispatched to their native districts without receiving any rehabilitation grant.
- d. The efforts of the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, to provide financial grants for awareness generation, the survey of bonded labour and an impact-by-evaluation study have not evoked encouraging responses from many states. Very few states, have as yet, actually availed of the offer.
- e. The prosecution of offenders under the bonded labour system has, in fact, been neglected in every state reviewed. (NHRC Annual Report 2001-02; Pp 76-77)

6.8 Judicial Interventions

- a. Writ petition of 192 bonded labourers in Anekal taluk,
- b. Case of Venkatesh
 1. A writ petition was filed on behalf of the 192 bonded labourers of Anekal for whom rehabilitation was granted by the Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore Urban district in March 1992. However, the Deputy Commissioner later withdrew it due to some political pressure. The matter is still pending with the Karnataka High Court. As a result of the intermediate verification ordered by the Court, *so far only 15 bonded labourers have been granted some rehabilitation measures in 1996.* Legal consultations were held to make an intervening application in the same writ petition on behalf of all the nearly 20,000 bonded labourers identified by JEEVIKA and who have submitted applications for their release and rehabilitation to the concerned Deputy Commissioners in 1994. A case is also being made for the rehabilitation of these bonded labourers through the government co-operative schemes.
 2. Venkatesh was a bonded labourer at Handenahally village of Anekal taluk. Mr. Ramesh Reddy, his landlord had cut his fingers off. Later, Venkatesh went to contact Mr. Kiran Kamal Prasad and filed a case. The case is still going on. After pending for several years, the case came up for the first hearing in the Magistrate's Court in Anekal on April 11, 2000. A decision is still pending.

Experience of Venkatesh as a Bonded Labourer: A Heart Rending Case

My name is Venkatesh. My father's name is Katiappa. Pandeswaram is my village in Denkanikottai taluk of Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu. I was going to Denkanikottai for my 6th grade. It was in 1993. My father told me not to go to school. I told my father that I wanted to study well and pursue my studies. Then my father told me that I should obey him. Otherwise I should not come to the house at all, he threatened me. I agreed to do as he directed. He then asked me to work as a bonded labourer in the house of Subramanya Reddy in Koteganahally near Handenahally (of Anekal taluk in Bangalore Urban district of Karnataka). I asked my father what does it mean to be a bonded labourer? My father retorted, 'Don't you know what it is to be a bonded labourer?' Afterwards my father took me to the house of Subramanya Reddy; kept me there for bonded service and left for home. I pleaded with my father that I too would come with him. He advised me to work as the master directed and left. The master then started giving me various jobs. I had to get up early in the morning at 5 o' clock. First feed the cattle; then give fodder to the silk worms; then clean the cowshed; then go to the vineyard for watering it. I would get my breakfast at 10 or 11 o'clock. After breakfast, I would go to the farm for various jobs, mainly watering the crops. I would return to the house at about 7p.m and give fodder to the cattle and to the silk worms. After supper at about 9p.m., I would go again to the farm to run the motor to fill the water tank till about midnight and return to the master's house to sleep. This went on for about six months. One day, as I was cutting fodder (stalks of maize), I sustained a cut on my left hand. Because of the wound and the consequent pain in the hand, I was slow in clearing grass in the vineyard. At that time, Ramesh Reddy, the brother of Subramanya Reddy came to see my work and asked me why I was slow and inquired if I was disinterested in working. In all my innocence, I told him the situation. He remarked, "Having fingers in the hand would be troublesome. Isn't it?" As he said this, he held my left hand and, I was wondering he was just making fun of me. But to my surprise, he suddenly dragged me by my hand; kept it on a stone; took hold of a spade nearby; and in a swift move, *gave a severe blow on the fingers as if to chop them off*. There was another bonded labourer, Rajappa, working along with me. He immediately wrapped his towel round my hand and tried to console me. Then Ramesh Reddy took me to a clinic in Attibele about 10 kms away. There the doctors told Ramesh Reddy to take me to St. John's Medical College Hospital in Bangalore. There the doctors told me of the requirement to file a police complaint and also get my parents. Ramesh Reddy then told me that we better go to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital (where accident cases are treated). His sister's house was close to that hospital. There his brother-in-law told him that he knew the doctors in that hospital and took us to that hospital. They first left me outside and went in and spoke to the doctor and then came and took me in. It was about 10p.m. The doctor stitched the last two fingers of my left hand, which were severely damaged by the blow and put a bandage around them. The next day while taking me to my native village, Ramesh Reddy asked me not to tell the incident to anybody and promised me a gift of Rs.50, 000/-. After sometime, he again threatened me saying, "I tell you something more, Venkatesh. I have cut your fingers so far. If you dare to reveal the incident to anyone I shall chop your head off". *I got totally frightened with this threat*. I did not reveal whatever happened to me to anyone else, not even to my father. Then we approached my village. My father was ploughing in the fields. When he saw us, he inquired from the master when we arrived whether I worked well. Then he suddenly saw the bandage on my hand asked me in sorrow, what had happened. As I was about to say "Father", the master intervened and said, "See Katiappa, Don't you worry. Nothing has happened to your son. While cutting a tender coconut, he has sustained some injuries on his fingers. That is why I have brought him here. I shall go now. You and your son must come to Koteganahally in exactly another eight days." Saying this, he left. After eight days, my father and I went to Koteganahally.

The next day we went to the hospital in Bangalore. When the doctor opened the bandage, *he said that my little finger had to be fully amputated. The little finger was then removed.*

After this we went back to Koteganhally. I asked Ramesh Reddy, "Brother, you told me, nothing will happen to me. But see now. I have lost my little finger. What shall I do now?" He told me that he would give me Rs.1000/-. To this, I reminded him of his promise to me earlier on our way home from the hospital. Ramesh Reddy curtly replied, "I can give you only this much. If you want you take it. Otherwise, you do whatever you can." Then, my father and I left for our village. After three days, my father went to Handenahally, a village near Koteganhally, where my younger brother, Muthyala was also working as a bonded labourer. Through my brother, he came to know that it was Ramesh Reddy who had cut my fingers and it was not due to chopping a tender coconut. My father then came home with my younger brother. After some time, he came to meet Muniappa of Handenahally (who was a JEEVIKA activist at that time). *Muniappa advised him to file a police complaint. We did as he said. But nothing came out of the complaint. Then we came in contact with Kiran Kamal Prasad. He filed the present case. The case is still going on. After so many years, the case was to come up for the first hearing in the Magistrate's court in Anekal on April 11, 2000. Then, it was postponed to May 11. It has been postponed again to June 26 now!*

I went for bonded service due to poverty at home. We were five brothers. There was a lot of hardship to even get our meals. My father was getting old and was unable to do much work. My mother was not able to see. In this situation, my father placed two of us for bonded service. I was studying in the 6th grade at that time. My father came to my class in the school and asked me to go for bonded service. I felt very sad, when he asked me this. I wanted to study a lot and get a government job. I wanted to be a teacher in a senior grade. Even when I was working as a bonded labourer in my master's house and watching master's children go to school, I used to feel very sad. The children used to come back from school and play. I used to dream how nice it would have been if I were also to be like that! Even now I am interested in studies.

After this, through Kiran Kamal Prasad I joined Abhayadhama (a residential crafts' training institute). I was studying Kannada and English as also tailoring. But I did not continue the training after one year due to various reasons. I returned home before I could finish learning tailoring. After returning to my village, I started a business of selling roses with a loan of Rs.1000/- from Kiran. That business did not do well. I left it and was working as a daily wage labourer. I have married recently on 14 December 1999.

(Source: Case study presented by Kiran Kamal Prasad of JEEVIKA. Bangalore, during Annual UN Conference of the working group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery at Geneva, June, 2000)

6.9 Trade Unions

Trade Unions have hardly been involved in the eradication of bonded labour in the survey area. The trade unions need to come forward to help in the identification, release and rehabilitation processes of bonded labour in Karnataka.

Overall Perceptions about Interventions

Scholars at ISEC, the State Coordinators of JEEVIKA and other field activists have indicated that the trade unions are not active in Karnataka with regard to the bonded labour problem. *Only JEEVIKA has been actively involving in tackling the bonded labour problem in the state, while other NGOs are not playing an encouraging role in this regard. Civil society organisations also have not been very active in this field. Most of these bodies are not willing to take up dalit/land related issues. JEEVIKA has been networking with various other organisations on this issue.*

The government should be more proactive in all the stages – identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. *The survey analysis reveals that the role of Government is not in favour of bonded labour issues. As our field survey suggests that the bonded labour*

system continues to exist in Karnataka. JEEVIKA's survey also reveals that there are many bonded labourers in the districts where they are active. However, the government officials are not active in their identification, release or rehabilitation. In the absence of active NGOs and civil society organisations, it is difficult to identify bonded labourers. In agriculture, there are a large number of bonded labourers. Similarly, according to JEEVIKA, a large number of bonded labourers continue to slog in stone quarrying, domestic and agricultural sectors where no effort has been made to identify and release bonded labour. In the absence of strong intervention by the government it would be very difficult to further identify, release or rehabilitate the bonded labour. The future scenario seems to be very bleak.

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The survey was undertaken to document the perception of the released bonded labourers about the scourge of bondage in general and the relief experienced by them after their release in particular. It also attempts to know whether there is any difference in their socio-economic condition after their release. The survey also collected the respondent's views on the rehabilitation provided. The survey was able to capture the underpinnings of the bonded labour system by undertaking case studies from the villages covered. Landlords' and officials' views on the practice of bonded labour and their suggestions were obtained for eradicating the practice of bonded labour. Based on this information, the qualitative analysis from the two taluks (H.D. Kote and Bangapet) have been presented. The survey offers certain suggestions based on the respondents' views.

7.1 Objectives of the Study

- Highlight the role of NGOs in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labourers. Examine the interventions made by the government and other agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission, Vigilance Committees and the judiciary etc.
- Determine the status of rehabilitated bonded labourers in terms of improvements in their socio-economic conditions.
- Examine whether bonded labour practice still persists?

7.2 Methodology of the Field Research

Apart from primary data, secondary data were also collected. These included the following.

1. Published statistical census and other socio-economic data
2. Published studies on areas such as bonded labour, land reforms, agrarian relations, rural development.
3. Annual reports and other documented reports of JEEVIKA.
4. Government reports, circulars and statistics on bonded labour, land reforms and other socio-economic data.
5. Interviews with elected representatives, professionals and several officials, such as Social Welfare Officers, Assistant Directors of Agriculture, and Police Sub-Inspectors, from line departments.
6. For interviewing bonded labourers, an interview schedule was prepared, besides that case studies and qualitative data were used to get an in depth understanding of the reasons for persistence and the effort to eradicate the bonded labour system.
7. Selection of the study area. The selection of the district was guided by the following criteria:
 - Districts, blocks, and villages with the highest incidence of bonded labour
 - Districts where NGOs are active

The districts of Mysore and Kolar were selected for the study as they satisfied the above two criteria. The empirical study was conducted from October 2004 to January 2005.

7.3 Bonded Labour System in Karnataka

Bonded labourers in Karnataka are called *Jeethas* and are employed on an annual basis mainly for agricultural operations. Loans are advanced to the labourers, which they have to repay along with interest, and therefore, it becomes necessary for him or her to be attached to the lender. Under the terms of the agreement, he/she must work for the lender up to the end of the year or until the loan is repaid. No leave of any kind is admissible and in case of absence, either a substitute has to be arranged by the labourer or the labourer has to agree to do extra work to compensate for the absence. The system is called Jeetham, popularly

known as 'Jeetha', in Karnataka. The victims belonged to the scheduled castes. Often, it was hereditary because the wife and the father of the *Jeetha* also served the creditor to expedite repayment of loans. About four decades back, the *Jeetha* servant of the family was acknowledged as "hale-mamaga' (old son), mamaga (family son), alu (a)-maga (ruling son) etc. Such dignified concepts were attached to the *Jeetha* servant in order to extract greater allegiance to the patron family. This was due to the ignorance and economic inability on the part of the *Jeetha* servant. The *Jeetha* used to take pride in the wealth and power of his master and consciously or unconsciously accepted the system instead of challenging it.

7.4 Factors that Perpetuate the Bonded Labour System in Karnataka

The study suggests that there are many reasons that are perpetuating the system of bonded labour. These are:

- Poverty
- Caste discrimination
- Ignorance and false notions
- Illiteracy and low awareness
- Ignorance of the law and lack of social consciousness
- Unemployment
- Negligence on the part of the officials and landlords
- Non-implementation of poverty alleviation and other welfare programmes by the government.
- Traditional hereditary habits, inheritance of traditional occupation and inheritance of bondage
- Landlessness
- Strong resistance by the ruling elite to recognise the existence of bondage.

7.5 The Land Ownership Pattern

The Reddies, Vokkaligas, Lingayats and Naidus own most of the land in the area. Reddies could be called landlords with a majority of them owning between 80 to 100 acres of land. Some of these big landlords have divided their land among their children or other family members to avoid the Land Ceiling Act. Though the landlords are not present in large numbers they own most of the land around the village. These four land owning communities could be called the upper castes. The Lingayats in northern Karnataka and the Vokkaligas in Mysore, Kolar and Mandya districts are the land owning communities.

7.6 Role of Karnataka Government in Identification, Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour

- (i) Till February 28, 1995, 61532 bonded labourers were identified and released in Karnataka. Most of the work of identification and release of bonded labourers was carried out by the end of the 70s.
- (ii) The number of bonded labourers identified till March 2000 was 61709 i.e. a mere addition of 177 between February 1995 and March 2000 *indicating a severe apathetic and insensitive approach towards the issue of bonded labour.*
- (iii) Again between March 2000 and 2005 an additional 2068 bonded labourers were identified and released.
- (iv) This raises the following questions.
 - a. Why was the major work of identification and release done in the 70s?
 - b. Why was there slackness during the 80s and 90s?
 - c. Why was there a spurt again in identification and release in between 2000 and 2005?

- (v) The reasons for the major impetus in identification and release during the 70s.

Why Major work of Identification was done in the 70s

- (vi) The 1972 election altered the power structure somewhat reducing the landowning caste members and increasing the strength of the backward and minority communities in the legislature. They occupied important positions in the cabinet. The power structure qualitatively tilted in favour of the non landed interests. Therefore it became easier to initiate radical land reform measures including the other programmes for the weaker sections like the identification and release of bonded labourers. Thus the political configuration that emerged in Karnataka as a fall out of the major split in the Congress Party at the national level became most conducive to carrying out radical land reforms and bonded labourer liberation.

Why there was slackness during 80s and 90s

- (vii) However, this momentum generated by the new wave in the politics of the state could not be sustained for long. It was during the post Urs regime that a new configuration began to build up, which subsequently created problems at the implementation stage of land reforms, bonded labour and similar programmes for weaker sections. This explains why the 80s and 90s witnessed a complete lack of political and administrative will for the issue of both land reforms and the liberation of bonded labourers.
- (viii) This then takes us to the issues of the major lapses on the part of the Karnataka Government on bonded labour issue during 80s and 90s.

7.6.1 Karnataka Government's Lapses in the Identification, Release, and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers

1. In civil Writ Petition No. 3922/85 the Supreme Court of India issued direction to the to take steps for the abolition of the bonded labour system. The Deputy Commissioners completed the survey by the end of December 1996 and reported that there was no prevalence of bonded labourers in their districts except in Kolar district where 19 bonded labourers were identified, released, and rehabilitated
2. Between 5 July 1990 and 8 January 1995 JEEVIKA had identified a total of 656 bonded labourers in Anekal taluk and submitted the list to the District Magistrate. The verification was done by the District Magistrates and the result was as follows.
 - 301 were declared bonded labourers*
 - 125 were declared agricultural labourers*
 - 228 were not available*

Finally the District Magistrate declared 197 of them bonded labourers. A rehabilitation grant of Rs 12 lakhs was set aside for this purpose, *but the local MLA saw to it that not a single paise reached the hands of the people concerned.* The organisation filed a writ petition in the High Court. On the orders of the court the government identified only 15 cases of bonded labourers.

3. JEEVIKA a voluntary organisation had identified nearly 20000 bonded labourers in ten districts during the 90s. The complaints were enquired into by the Deputy Commissioners and they reported that there is no prevalence of bonded labourers in these districts.
4. A list provided by Rural Development and Panchayati Raj on the district wise information of bonded labourers in the state as on October 2002 specifies the number of bonded labourers in Devanagare district as follows.

2001-02----- 2785
Total 6712

This was identified under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner Sri K. Shriram. The then Secretary, Rural Development directed the Deputy Commissioner to redo the survey. *Subsequently the Deputy Commissioner reported that 6712 persons identified as bonded labour earlier were no longer bonded labour.*

5. All this smacks of injustice against the bonded labourers.
6. *The Hangarhally episode compelled the Karnataka state to conduct a fresh survey of chained bonded labourers.* The released families of child labourers consisted of 31 men, 26 women and 36 children below 14 years.
7. Further the Labour Commissioner in 1998 pointed to the existence of child bonded labour in silk reeling units in the Magadi and Ramanagram areas of Bangalore (Rural) district. In Bangalore Rural 3077 child bonded labourers were identified.
8. All this evidence points out that the Karnataka government has been very resistant to accept the existence of bondage from the 90s onward. They have used every means to scuttle the existence of bonded labourers. It is only after extreme pressure has been exerted that they are admitting to the existence of some bonded labourers. A thorough investigation of the existence of bonded labour needs to be undertaken in all the districts.

Even those who were identified before 1979 were from the southern developed districts. If the northern eight districts are very backward compared to the southern ones, one would presume the incidence of bonded labour to be quite high there. Yet, the number of bonded labourers identified by the government does not mirror this fact. This means the process of identification of bonded labourers in northern Karnataka was not adequate.

7.7 Intervention by JEEVIKA

Most of the cases identified, and released during the 70s and 80s were identified and released mainly due to sensitive and committed officials. Rehabilitation was also conducted seriously. *During the 90s, governments became insensitive to the bonded labour issue.* Now they do not want to recognise the existence of bonded labour. *The bonded labour issue has again become sensitive in a few districts and taluks of the state because of the active role played by the NGO JEEVIKA.* The NGO has faced strong resistance from the landlords and also bureaucracy. Despite the constraints it has single-handedly gone ahead with the release of bonded labourers. The main organiser *Mr. Kiran Kamal Prasad strongly believes that the cause of the bonded labourers has to be taken along with that of the agricultural labourers.*

He has not merely identified it as an economic issue, but also as an issue of untouchability and atrocities against dalits. He is also utilising the Trade Union strategy of sensitising and organising the bonded labourers. He also organises regular training programmes.

The Karnataka Government appointed a high power committee in 1997, which declared that there were no bonded labourers in the state. *JEEVIKA has been putting pressure on the government in various ways to recognise bonded labourers and rehabilitate them. To this direction it has undertaken the following steps:*

1. Identified bonded labourers in Anekal taluk, and constantly put pressure on the government to release and rehabilitate them.
2. Identified 10,000 bonded labourers and submitted the list to the government. The government has identified only very few as bonded labourers.
3. It has collected data on bonded labour in 47 taluks and given it to the government for action.
4. It utilises cultural forms to sensitise and mobilise the workers

5. It has also filed a writ petition on behalf of 192 bonded labourers of Anekal to whom rehabilitation was granted by the Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore Urban district, but it was deferred due to some political pressure.
6. It has also filed cases of 20,000 bonded labourers for release and rehabilitation
7. JEEVIKA's effort got further impetus due to the Hangrahally episode in which five-chained child bonded labourers were discovered. The government had to seriously take up the issue of bonded labour in 2001.
8. The government has now recognised JEEVIKA as the main NGO for the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. It is actively associating with them in this work.
9. JEEVIKA has also established networks with NGOs working with dalits and weaker sections in the state and is also actively networking with national NGOs involved with the bonded labour issue.
10. It has also received assistance from the NHRC on the bonded labour issue.
11. The National Law School, Bangalore, and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, have also recognised JEEVIKA's expertise and they are actively helping them in this cause.
12. According to JEEVIKA's estimation the number of bonded labourers in entire Karnataka would be more than one lakh. This needs to be probed through rigorous empirical investigation. One of the indicators as per JEEVIKA is that agricultural labourers do not get even 50 per cent of the minimum wages. The Hangrahally episode adduces evidence to JEEVIKA's claim.
13. JEEVIKA also hints at the changing nature of bondage today. "What we have today is a kind of voluntary bondage in the form of contractual agreements in place of customary practices. As a result the dalits no longer constitute the reservoir for drawing the labour force under the bonded labour system. People from the lower economic class also constitute bonded labourers. (One day workshop on Bonded Labour, 30-12-97).
14. According to JEEVIKA globalisation and the new economic policy is also accentuating the incidence of bondage due to reversal of land reforms, garlanding multinational, transnational and agribusiness. (Cf workshop on Bonded Labour, 30-12-97).
15. JEEVIKA holds that bonded labour is not a mere economic issue, but it also has a social dimension. There is an equal need to liberate the dalits and tribals for self-rule. It is thus an important strategy of JEEVIKA to network with dalit organisations to strengthen its campaign.
16. JEEVIKA has taken up a comprehensive approach to tackle the bonded labour issue. They have formed agriculture labour unions to take up the cause of both bonded labour and agricultural labour. They had a total of 7347 members in this union up to March 1999 among whom 2966 were bonded labourers, 4268 were agricultural labourers and 232 were women.
17. JEEVIKA feels that while some of the dalit organisations have positively supported them on the bonded labour issue, other NGOs are not lending active support on this issue. It is also not on the agenda of any political party. The trade unions also do not take up this issue seriously. *JEEVIKA is the only NGO that has kept this issue alive and is struggling on behalf of the bonded labourers.*
18. *JEEVIKA's experience is that the Karnataka government has been quite insensitive on the bonded labour issue during the 90s.* Their awareness and mobilisation campaign has pressurised the government in to at least identifying, releasing and rehabilitating over 2,000 bonded labourers in the area where JEEVIKA is active. Even in these areas it has taken action in respect of only 10 per cent of the total bonded labourers identified by them. JEEVIKA is of the view that only a strong intervention by the NHRC and the central government can put pressure on the Karnataka government to take up the bonded labour issue seriously.

19. In 1995, a massive rally of nearly 10,000 bonded labourers was organised in the state capital and seminars were held on bonded labour at the state level. Again, October 25, 1998, was celebrated as Bonded Labour System Awareness Day to coincide with the enactment of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act in 1975 and January 26th was celebrated by JEEVIKA as Bonded Labourers' Day. Every year different types of programmes such as processions, demonstrations, dharnas, seminars, public programmes to raise awareness on the issue of bonded labourers amongst the general public and government officials are organised. Whenever there are instances of atrocities on bonded labourers (murder, assault, harassment for the return of loans etc) the affected people take up massive demonstrations, dramas and protests, under the guidance of JEEVIKA.
20. The initial survey of bonded labourers was begun in one taluk during 1988 and action on rehabilitation of the bonded labourers at that taluk level was initiated in 1990. The survey at the state level was taken up in 48 taluks in 1993 with the active involvement of JEEVIKA and the state government from 1995.
21. JEEVIKA considers bonded labour not just as an economic issue, but also an aspect of untouchability and the caste system. JEEVIKA believes that only when the caste system is wiped out will the bonded labour system be destroyed. The abolition of bonded labour will greatly promote an egalitarian society in India. Effective and lasting social change can be brought about only by and with the leadership of the people affected. Therefore, JEEVIKA believes in the sensitisation, organisation and unionisation of bonded labourers together with landless agricultural workers to effectively eradicate the bonded labour system.

7.8 How far has the intervention been successful?

Till 2000 there was hardly any impact on the government's implementation of the Bonded Labour Act, *but the bonded labourers on their own initiative came out of bondage through JEEVIKA's various training, cultural actions and union activities. Bonded labour children have been placed in bridge courses and later mainstreamed into schools.* None of JEEVIKA's lobbying, advocacy and networking strategies succeeded. *However, in 2000, the incident of five bonded labourers who had been chained for three years came as a rude shock to the government. Only then did the government make a commitment to identify and release bonded labourers all over Karnataka.* This commitment by the government did not show any positive result.

SUCCESSSES	FAILURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mainstreaming the issue of bonded labour ➤ Awareness among bonded labour/agricultural workers ➤ Identification of bonded labour ➤ Rehabilitation of bonded labour through government from various schemes ➤ Forming of SHGs and credit with out interest ➤ Unionisation of released bonded labour/AWs ➤ Back-to-School Programme ➤ Cultural action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sensitising the employers/land lords ➤ Addressing basic issues of casteism and poverty ➤ Lack of co-ordination from other stakeholders in terms of identification, releasing and re-habilitation ➤ Land distribution to the released bonded labour ➤ Lack of co-operation from few line department officials ➤ Minimum Wages Act ➤ Employment Guarantee Act
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Networking with local and national organisations ➤ Co-operation with media ➤ Infrastructure ➤ Development-oriented approach ➤ Good relationship with community ➤ Collective land encroachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of resources ➤ Conducting socio-economic research ➤ Political empowerment ➤ Judicial intervention
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7.9 Role of Major Political Parties

The government is not seriously concerned with the welfare of the bonded labour and the agricultural workers. Hence, no serious effort has been made to totally eradicate the bonded labour system and to rehabilitate them. *Even the existence of bonded labour is denied by officials.* If they accept that there is bonded labour, it exerts pressure on the landlords and the officials. *The dalits are all under the grip of the landlords.*

Both Bangarpet and H.D. Kote taluks are reserved for SCs and therefore the MLAs belong to lower castes (Bovi and SC). Yet, they are hand-in-glove with the local landlords and upper caste people. They favour upper caste people and the officials and are anti-dalit. *Every politician aims at creating vote banks and nobody bothers about pro-dalit policies.* When the Land Reforms Act was implemented, it did not have any impact here. *No surplus land was distributed among the dalits. This was because the political leaders were connected with landlords while most of the officials came from high castes.*

7.10 Role of Micro-credit Institutions

In the area, the banks are not helping bonded labourers and agricultural labourers in improving their economic capacity. *Though the RBI had issued guidelines in 1976 directing the banks to assist bonded labourers, the guidelines have not been implemented in earnest.* As many bank officials belong to the upper castes, they do not bother to respect the RBI guidelines.

7.11 Role of the NHRC

Under the Abolition of Bonded Labour and Child Labour Act, 1976, the NHRC has been given various powers and functions in order to mitigate the problem of bonded labour in the country. As per the orders of the Supreme Court (dated: December 11, 1997, passed in the writ petition – civil No. 3922 of 1985), the NHRC should be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. The court has held that the concerned authorities should promptly comply with the directions given by the NHRC in this regard. Thus, the Commission has since then been involving in both the monitoring and implementation processes of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. *Through the NHRC's efforts Vigilance Committees have now been formed at district and sub-district levels, which was not the case prior to 2001. The NHRC also recommended the involvement of PRIs in the identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour by suitably amending the PRIs Act to achieve this end (NHRC Annual Report 2001-02; Pp 76-77).* It also persuaded the Karnataka government to take up the bonded labour issue seriously after the Hangarahally episode.

The survey reveals that the respondent bonded labourers were not aware of the NHRC or its role in the eradication of the bonded labour system. However, the concerned government officials and the activists of JEEVIKA were aware of the role, importance and activities of NHRC. They are of the view that *there has been some degree of improvement in the*

implementation of the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976 after the NHRC took over monitoring of the implementation of the Act. However, they feel that much more needs to be done to achieve the intended goal of the Act.

7.12 Role of the Vigilance Committee

Under the Act, Vigilance Committees are to be formed at the district and Sub-division levels. Yet, during the study, it was observed that these Committees exist only on paper. The Committees do not meet periodically nor are they involved in either identification or in the follow-up for release and rehabilitation of bonded labour. *Thus, Vigilance Committees have not contributed to the welfare of the bonded labour, thereby defeating their very purpose.*

7.13 Judicial Interventions

1. Writ petition of 192 bonded labourers in Anekal taluk,
2. Case of Venkatesh
 1. A writ petition was filed on behalf of the 192 bonded labourers of Anekal who were granted rehabilitation by the Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore Urban district in March 1992. However, the Deputy Commissioner later withdrew it due to some political pressure. The matter is still pending with the Karnataka High Court. As a result of the intermediate verification ordered by the Court, *so far only 15 bonded labourers have been granted some rehabilitation assistance in 1996.* Legal consultations were held to make an intervening application in the same writ petition on behalf of all the nearly 20,000 bonded labourers identified by JEEVIKA and who have submitted applications for their release and rehabilitation to the concerned Deputy Commissioners in 1994. A case is also being made for their rehabilitation of these bonded labourers through government co-operative schemes.

7.14 Trade Unions

Trade Unions have not been very active on the issue of bonded labour in the survey area. It is not clear why trade unions did not come forward to help in the identification, release and rehabilitation processes of bonded labour in Karnataka.

7.14. 1 In southern Karnataka even the backward districts have medium incidence of bondage, while the medium districts have high incidence of bondage. Northern Karnataka has both backward and medium developed districts. Hence, the possibility of medium intensity of bondage can be anticipated in northern Karnataka. Sharma Malas study also reinforces this.

7.15 Profile of Bonded Labourers Studied

1. The empirical study was undertaken in four villages; two villages in H.D. Kote taluk of Mysore district .i.e. Hosa Holahu and Balaganahally and two villages in Bangarpet taluk of Kolar district, namely, Karoda Guru and Kadire Gowdana Kote. The number of cases of bonded labourers studied in different villages is indicated below.

Table – 13

Sl.No	Name of the village	Name of the taluk	No. of Cases interviewed
1	Hosa Holalu	H.D. Kote (Mysore)	18
2	Belaganahally	H.D. Kote (Mysore)	10
3	Koradoguru	Bangarpete (Kolar)	12
4	Kadire Gowdana Kote	Bangarpete (Kolar)	4

2. Of the 44 cases interviewed, 43 were males. All the bonded labourers have been released but only 14 have been rehabilitated. There are still 16 persons continuing as bonded labourers in these villages. In three villages, most of them joined as bonded labourers between the ages of eight to 15 years except in village Karadoguru where they joined when they were between 20 to 30 years. The duration of bondage extended from six to 25 years. Invariably they were illiterate except three of them who had studied up to class II and III. Around 50 per cent of them were unmarried and the rest were married. The unmarried ones were still below 24 years. Most of them were employed for only six months in a year during the busy agricultural season and the employer did not give them any wages or food for the remaining year. However, during the agricultural season every year they were forced to work for the same employer, but now since they have been released, they are free to work for any employer.

3. In 36 cases they became bonded labourers because of the advance (loans) taken by their fathers and only in eight cases had they taken the loans themselves. They were all adults. The amount of advance ranged from Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 12,500 and they were taken for marriage, illness and consumption of their family members. Now all of them were working as agricultural labourers. Nearly 90 per cent of bonded labourers were from the scheduled castes. The landlords belonged to the dominant castes of Vokkaliga, Lingayat, Reddy, and Naidu.

7.16 Resistance to Bondage

4. Apart from the above 44 cases interviewed, case studies of seven bonded labourers belonging to Madagi taluk of Bangalore were conducted. The incidence of bondage is still continuing in this taluk. Vokkaligas are the dominant castes and SCs are the agricultural labourers.

5. Most of these bonded labourers belonged to the Holey and other communities who are scheduled castes. Four case studies relate to individuals who are still working as bonded labourers. One of them is a woman. They are all bonded due to poverty, landlessness, and absence of alternative employment and the lack of any avenue for taking loans to meet the needs of marriage, daily expenditures and illness and also for repairs. They are bonded for 15 to 25 years. One woman is bonded as she is the only earning member and has six dependents.

6. There are two cases of relapsed bondage. In both the cases after getting released they had to again take loans to meet urgent family needs of sums between Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 15,000. *They were not given any rehabilitation package.* There is another case of a released bonded labourer who has not yet been rehabilitated.

7.17 (i) *The survey finds that even after identification, some bonded labourers are still to be released or rehabilitated from bondage. Action is necessary to release them immediately.* The petition filed by JEEVIKA on behalf of 192 bonded labourers in Anekal taluk and the case of Mr Mariappa from Magadi taluk shows that they are yet to be rehabilitated.

(ii) From both the survey districts, Mysore and Kolar, it was revealed that those identified as bonded labourers were found to be very poor and they had orally agreed to the bondage.

(iii) *The survey points out that the bonded labour system is persisting because of extreme poverty, which is the main reason that the bonded labour borrows from the landlords. To combat this, there should be welfare programmes for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the poor. Banks should give them substantial aid. They should be provided with housing, livestock and cultivable land and financial help. Unless these are seriously translated into action, there is no possibility of ending the evil of bondage. Without*

these, the poor, when under financial stress, cannot depend on institutional support and lapse into the bonded labour system. The Rural Development Programmes are hardly accessible to bonded labourers.

- (iv) *Most of the bonded labourers entered into bondage at around 10 to 15 years of their age (which is school going age). This fact could be seen from the profiles of the selected bonded labour.*
- (v) *Most of the bonded labourers (95%) belonged to the SC community. Only a very few of them belonged to Balajiga and Kuruba castes (BCs).*
- (vi) *All rehabilitated bonded labourers said that they got benefits under various government schemes due to JEEVIKA's intervention through its taluk or hobli-level workers.*
- (vii) *It is noticed that there is perceptible improvement in their living conditions after their rehabilitation from bondage. Now that they are now in bondage; they are free to work wherever they feel; the over-exploitation of their labour is reduced in terms of working hours. These improvements may be attributed to their being released from bondage and also from their release from dependence on the landlords.*
- (viii) *Two relapsed cases were found in the study area. (See Muniyappa and Mariyappa and Hanumakka case studies) These would reveal that the rehabilitation was not adequate enough to stabilise their financial condition.*
- (ix) *All rehabilitated bonded labourers have low incomes and are below the poverty line. Even today, the major source of income is their wage income. A majority of them had taken a loan either from SHGs or from private money lenders for purposes such as marriage, family expenditure, medical treatment etc. This would imply that even after their rehabilitation, financial stability may not come about immediately.*
- (x) *The survey observes that out of the 44 rehabilitated bonded labourers; only three (belonging to Karadagur Village of Bangarpet taluk) had inherited cultivable land ranging from one to two acres while 10 of them have been cultivating the government Gomal land for the last 20 years. These 10 people have been issued with a government patta and the holding certificate. They are fighting, with the help of JEEVIKA, to obtain the regularisation of land titles. Nearly 116 acres of land fall under Survey No. 46 belonging to Majara Reddy Hally of Srinivasa Sandra Prama Panchayat. These were the government/grazing lands. These were encroached on 20 years ago by the SC households of the village, which includes 10 of the released bonded labourers during 2003-04. They are cultivating these lands without complete land ownership title deeds. These bonded labourers should be provided with complete ownership deeds as early as possible.*
- (xi) *The survey finds that the politicians and government officials are not discharging their duties properly. The very fact that the bonded labourers are still found across the districts would suggest that the intervention is inadequate. There is urgent need to tone-up both the political and government machinery for achieving better outcomes.*
- (xii) *The survey finds that the Panchayati Raj System was introduced in India with a social mandate. In an effort that the policy benefits reach the intended groups, political power was reserved among the SC/STs. More than 30 per cent of the political space is being shared by these groups (including women). Yet, the survey finds that these elected*

- representatives show utter disregard for the rehabilitation of bonded labour in their blocks, thereby defeating the very purpose of PRIs.*
- (xiii) All the rehabilitated bonded labourers have been issued with ration cards for drawing rations from the PDS.
- (xiv) *In all the surveyed villages SHGs have been formed where the rehabilitated bonded labourers are also members. They are required to contribute Rs. 10 per week to the SHG. As and when they have a financial requirement, they receive soft loans from the SHGs. People say that there is awareness among them about the need for SHGs. In all the villages there is more than one SHG being run both by males and females separately. The habit of saving is slowly being inculcated among them. These SHGs are formed with the help of JEEVIKA (see Annexure 2).*
- (xv) In all the surveyed areas there has not been any major crop change. Thus, the cropping pattern, which has been the trend for many years, is being continued. Only a very few rich farmers having irrigation facilities are growing cash crops like vegetables etc. besides growing paddy, sugarcane and cotton. The majority farm traditional crops like ragi, pulses, jowar etc.
- (xvi) The survey observes that the bonded labourers are released and rehabilitated by the Government of Karnataka through various programmes/schemes. *Thus, a significant number of bonded labourers have benefited from the government interventions though the task is not complete.*
- (xvii) *Of the 44 rehabilitated bonded labourers, 43 have been provided housing facility under Dr. Ambedkar Housing Scheme. Besides this, three of them have received assistance for setting-up petty shops. Six of them have been provided with bullocks and carts, 12 of them have obtained sheep/goat units and four of them have received cross-bred milk yielding cows.*
- (xviii) All through the survey, the respondents were *appreciative of the role being played by JEEVIKA. They all acknowledged that but for JEEVIKA's efforts in their identification, release and rehabilitation their socio-economic condition would not have undergone any change. Therefore, it was found that there is a need for NGOs in the local areas to take up the socio-economic problems of people and work towards their transformation by education, to make aware people about their rights, to mobilise them to fight for their rights, and to pressurise the officials and the politicians to work effectively in translating the constitutional guarantees into a reality.*
- (xix) *Education should be given top priority. People should be trained in various skills and vocations. Almost all of them (except 3) were found to be illiterate. Hence there is an essential need to make compulsory education a social reality. They should be made aware of the negative impact of the bonded labour system. Most of the bonded labourers at the time of entry are of school-going age. Hence, there is a need to enrol all school-age children and also make them attend school without lapsing. Mid-day meals and free uniforms should be made more effective in attracting children to schools.*
- (xx) The respondents say that they are aware about the government's programmes, about the need to abolish the bonded labour system and about the illegality of bondage etc. *They are getting organised under the banners of bonded labourer and agricultural workers unions, which are organising movements for getting their rights. They are also fighting for getting minimum wages in the villages. They are agitating to get government land for cultivation, housing and other facilities from the government programmes. They are also pressurising officials and*

politicians to implement the various programmes effectively. *All the respondents eulogised the role being played by JEEVIKA.*

- (xxi) Seasonal migration has been a common phenomenon observed in the survey areas. The people tend to migrate temporarily in search of jobs to neighbouring district and states. They do not get job opportunities round the year in the close vicinity of their village. Such work includes plantation work, quarrying and construction work. There is need to arrest this trend. It could be stopped only by providing the labourers with job opportunities for at least 200 days in a year in the neighbourhood of the village. The government should not promote the use of labour displacing technologies in fields, in road building, in tank desiltation etc. In the summer season many people do not get work opportunities. Hence, there should be a programme aimed at providing job avenues for the labour class during summer. The proper implementation of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme assumes utmost priority.
- (xxii) There is need to effectively implement the Minimum Wages Act in rural areas. If the labour is paid the minimum wages, they could have some savings after meeting their immediate domestic needs. As of now they are under-paid and therefore are malnourished too. Hence, there is need to augment the income earning capacity of the labour class.
- (xxiii) From the survey it was noticed that the government should be involved at all stages of interventions – identification, release and rehabilitation. However, this is seldom the case. NGOs and activists are found to play a major role in these processes. The government is initiating certain programmes mainly because of the pressures exerted upon it by the NGOs. *NGOs are not found in very large numbers in every region. Therefore, there is need to enlarge the Government-NGO partnership.* There is a great scope for NGOs and activists to be involved in these tasks at the village level. JEEVIKA is the only organisation involved in this task. Because of the vastness of the area and the seriousness of the problem it is necessary to promote more and more NGOs for shouldering the task of ending the practice of bonded labour and also in their rehabilitation. People are appreciative of the NGOs role while they are unhappy about the state's apathy towards their problems.
- (xxiv) *The outcomes of these interventions have not yielded the expected degree of result. Due to delays and poor rehabilitative programmes, two of the released bonded labourers relapsed into bondage.* Therefore, there is need to provide adequate attention for their welfare and an alternative way of life.

7.18 Rehabilitation

- i. The data indicates that at the All India level 2,24,074 bonded labours were rehabilitated up to March 31, 1993, of which 54,078 were in Karnataka, accounting for 24.13 per cent, that is, highest in the country.
- ii. The number rehabilitated up to 1995 was 55,406, that is, an addition of 1,328 in two years. Again, up to January 1, 2001, the total number rehabilitated was 55,430, that is, *an addition of only 24 cases during six years. Further, between 2000-01 and 2004-05, the total number of bonded labourers rehabilitated in the state was 2,063. This also happened because of the Hangarahally episode and JEEVIKA's intervention.*
- iii. *This clearly establishes the fact that in the past two decades, the state has not been sensitive to bonded labour.*
- iv. The Secondary Study suggests that the first phase of rehabilitation undertaken between 1976 to 1995 was meaningful and effective. *The rehabilitation amount was accessible to the bonded labourers and it also improved their economic condition. The field study suggests that the second phase of rehabilitation between 2003 and*

2005 has been less meaningful. It has only marginally improved the condition of the bonded labourers.

- v. It suggests that the Karnataka Government has to take up the task of rehabilitation of bonded labourers more seriously.
- vi. Another weakness in the rehabilitation scheme is that livestock and milch animals were the main source of rehabilitation, whereas land-based rehabilitation measures were not undertaken in the first or second phase.
- vii. A survey conducted by ISEC in 1997-98 revealed that 70 per cent of bonded labour in Karnataka did not retain the assets provided to them. The assets, such as sheep, goats, bullock-carts, buffaloes etc., were sold by the freed bonded labourers.
- viii. Now economic assets have been discontinued from the rehabilitation package. Now a total cash amount of Rs 10,000 is given to the freed bonded labourers. This is not a desirable policy.
- ix. During 1999-2000 to 2003-04 a total of 1,890 cases have been initiated for rehabilitation.

7.19 Region-wise Analysis of Bondage

As per the Karnataka Government statistics the highest incidence of bondage is in Southern Maidan Region (70.96%), followed by Malnad Region (26.87%) and very low in Northern Maidan Region (1.61%) and Coastal Region (0.63%). JEEVIKA has exposed the myth of low incidence of bondage in Northern Maidan Region. The Southern Maidan Region is relatively backward economically and yet has a high incidence of bondage. The Northern Maidan districts are placed in the medium level of development economically and have had a relatively successful implementation of the land ceiling programme. Yet the empirical studies adduce evidence to the prevalence of high incidence of absentee landlordism and concealed tenancy. Hence, there is the possibility of prevalence of bondage in the districts of Northern Maidan Region, which need to be probed through a fresh survey. Similarly Malnad Region is not only a highly economically developed district, but the implementation of land reforms programme is weak in this region with several exemptions on land ceiling to plantations and others. In view of large land concentration in the Malnad Region there is the possibility of the prevalence of bondage in this region, which also needs to be probed through empirical study. The two districts of the coastal region are relatively well developed and it has also witnessed successful tenancy reforms along with peasant movements. There are pockets with medium incidence of conceded tenancy and absentee landlordism, which can be probed for finding out the incidence of bondage.

Table 10: Classification on various indicators

SI.No	Region	Per capita income	Rank (High to low)	Poverty	Concealed Tenancy	Land ceiling	Incidence of Bondage %
1	Coastal Region	5129	3	Low	Medium	Not successful	0.63%
2	Malnad Region	8292	1	Low	Low	Not successful	26.87%
3	Northern Maidan	7663	2	Medium	High	Successful	1.6%
4	Southern Maidan	4418	4	High	Medium	Not successful	70.92%

7.20 District-wise Incidence of Bondage

Mysore has the highest incidence of bonded labour and it is one of the medium developed districts as discerned from several indicators. Shimoga has the second highest incidence of

bonded labour and is relatively a developed district. Bangalore (rural) has the third highest incidence of bonded labour and is a medium developed district. Mandya has the fourth highest incidence of bondage and is a medium developed district. Hassan has the fifth highest incidence of bondage and is a medium developed district. Kolar has the sixth highest incidence of bondage and is a backward district. Bangalore (urban) has the seventh highest incidence of bondage and is relatively a developed district. Chikamagalur has the eighth highest incidence of bondage and is relatively a developed district. Tumkur has the ninth highest incidence of bondage and is comparatively a backward district. Chitradurga ranks 10th in the incidence of bondage and is relatively a backward district.

The analysis reveals that out of ten bonded labour prone districts, three are developed, four are placed in the medium level of development and the remaining three are relatively backward districts. This leads us to infer that the incidence of bondage exists in the districts with different levels of development. Among the districts with lower incidence of bondage, three are developed districts, two are at the medium level of development and five are placed in the backward level of development. There is the possibility of having higher figures of bondage in the remaining ten districts as well, irrespective of the level of development. This is substantiated by the fact that JEEVIKA has identified a substantial number of bonded labourers in the districts of Raichur, Bidar and Gulbarga which as per government data have a low incidence of bondage with a relative ranking of 14, 18 and 16 respectively. JEEVIKA had submitted a list of bonded labourers in these districts to the Karnataka government, but as usual the Deputy Commissioners of the districts reported no case of bonded labour. The Hangarahally episode has exposed the untruth. *Hence, a fresh survey of bonded labour needs to be conducted in all the districts of the state with a team of academicians, NGOs and government experts.*

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

1. Even after the *enactment of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act in 1976, the practice is still in vogue in rural and semi-urban Karnataka as revealed by various surveys. There is need to improve its implementation for better outcomes.*
2. *The state government needs to conduct state-wide periodic surveys to identify the bonded labourers still at large in rural Karnataka. Such surveys should be conducted by actively involving the PRIs local NGOs, and academic experts.*
3. *Mere identification or release of bonded labourers cannot end the system. There is a need for serious efforts to rehabilitate them. They should be provided with land and other implements so as to sustain their livelihood. They should also be helped to acquire livestock necessary to supplement their household income. Besides, they should be trained in carpentry, dairying, masonry, pottery, tailoring etc. to augment their earning avenues. In the absence of such measures, it is likely that the labourers will lapse into bondage, defeating the very purpose of rehabilitation.*
4. *From the survey it was noticed that there has been an inordinate delay between the date of identification, release and rehabilitation. Therefore, the release and rehabilitation processes should be speeded up and carried on simultaneously.*
5. *The government has grazing land, forestland and Gomal lands in and around the villages. Freed bonded labourers should be provided with land and other facilities (such as ploughing unit, bullock cart, bullocks, ruminants, good seeds and fertiliser etc).*
6. *There is a need to educate people to minimise expenditure on marriages and on social needs. Institutional financial support with very nominal interest rates and provisions for easy and long repayment facilities would help people refrain from borrowing money from private sources. SHGs should play a pro-active role in the villages.*
7. *The traditional outlook of people should be changed through awareness campaigns to deter people from the practice of bonded labour.*
8. *Consumption of liquor is quite common in survey areas. As a result, most of their income is spent on liquor and tobacco, due to which their health deteriorates, besides destroying domestic peace. The government should ban liquor shops at the village level. The local NGOs, SHGs and mahila mandals should work with them to persuade people to refrain from liquor and tobacco consumption and explain the ill effects of these on their social life and health. This is the reason why most bonded labourers are not able to save money.*
9. *The study finds that there is no implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and the Employment Guarantee Scheme. As a result, the labour class is working for fewer wages and does not get employment around the year. Therefore, these Acts should be implemented seriously.*
10. *Under the rules, Vigilance Committees have to be constituted at every taluk for the purpose of identification, release and timely rehabilitation of bonded labour. However, most of these Committees exist only on paper. The members of these Committees do not bother about their tasks. There is an urgent need for toning up these committees for a better outcome. These Committees should also be bestowed with sufficient power so that they can deal with the problem of bonded labour effectively. This trend should be reversed and the Committees should do what is needed on their own.*
11. *The NHRC should be provided with sufficient penal powers (like the Lokpal) so that they can initiate effective measures in eradicating the bonded labour practice. They should also evolve effective coordination with state level Human Rights Commissions.*
12. *Schooling should be made compulsory for the children of freed bonded labourers.*

13. The District Magistrate should appropriately delegate power and authority to his subordinate officials to identify, release and rehabilitate bonded labour.

How can the bonded labour problem be ended?

- By implementing the Minimum Wages Act and actually paying Rs.62.50 per person per day to the workers
- By providing work for at least 200 days in a year
- By distributing land to the landless
- By providing the benefits of various government-sponsored programmes to the target groups. The benefits of most programmes were not reaching the target population.
- Bank assistance under several schemes is currently reaching the rich. This trend should be reversed and the poor should get the benefits from these programmes.
- Food-for-Work programme should be implemented effectively.
- Heavy machines are being used for road construction or its repair and drainage works and in tank desiltation work etc. This is depriving the poor of job opportunities. So, the use of these machines should be barred.

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Table : 6 Number and proportion of population below poverty line: modified estimates of the expert group

	Rural		Urban		Combined	
	No. of persons (lakhs)	Proportion (%)	No. of persons (lakhs)	Proportion (%)	No. of persons (lakhs)	Proportion (%)
1973-74						
Karnataka	128.40	55.14	42.27	52.53	170.67	54.47
India	2612.90	56.44	600.46	49.01	3213.36	54.88
1977-78						
Karnataka	120.39	48.18	47.78	50.36	168.17	48.78
India	2642.47	53.07	646.48	45.24	3288.95	51.32
1983						
Karnataka	100.50	36.33	49.31	42.82	149.81	38.24
India	2519.57	45.65	709.40	40.79	3228.97	44.48
1987-88						
Karnataka	96.81	32.82	61.80	48.42	158.61	37.53
India	2318.79	39.09	751.69	38.20	3070.48	38.86
1993-94						
Karnataka	95.99	29.88	60.46	40.14	156.45	33.16
India	2440.31	37.27	763.37	32.36	3203.68	35.97

Source: Government of India (Press Information Bureau): Estimate of Poverty (March 1997)

Table 7: Comparative Ranking of Districts in Per Capita Income, Poverty Line and HDI/GDI Rank and Literacy

SI	District	Per Capita Income 1990-91	Rank	% below Poverty line(1993-94)*	Rank	HDI Rank*	GDI Rank*	Literacy %**
	Coastal Region	5130	6					
1	Uttara Kannada	4909	8	24.97	5	4	4	66.7
2	Dakshina Kannada	5350	5	8.91	1	3	3	75.9
	Malnad Region	6469	4					
3	Shimoga	4682	9	25.56	7	6	6	61.5
4	Chikamagalur	6768	3	15.61	3	5	5	61.0
5	Hassan	3842	17	14.44	2	7	7	56.8
6	Kodagu	10583	1	20.73	4	1	1	68.3
	Northern Maidan	3944	15					
7	Belgaum	4585	11	29.86	10	9	9	53.0
8	Bijapur	3784	18	28.98	9	14	14	55.1

9	Dharwad	3695	19	49.75	19	11	11	58.7
10	Bidar	3220	23	56.06	20	18	18	45.1
11	Gulbarga	4223	12	45.54	17	19	19	38.5
12	Raichur	3483	21	25.11	6	20	20	36.0
	Southern Maidan	5023	7					
13	Bellary	4618	10	44.50	16	17	17	36.0
14	Chitradurga	4035	14	39.00	14	10	10	55.5
15	Tumkur	3648	20	40.64	15	12	12	54.5
16	Mandya	3865	16	30.16	11	13	13	48.1
17	Mysore	4240	13	28.94	8	16	16	47.3
18	Kolar	3276	22	48.45	18	15	15	50.4
19	Bangalore (U)	6832	2	31.42	12	2	2	76.3
20	Bangalore ®	6832	2	38.17	13	8	8	50.2
	State			33.16		0.470	0.451	56.0

Source: Abdul Aziz M.D. Publication, New Delhi 1997

*Human Development in Karnataka 1999

** Census 1991

Table 8: Tenanted Holdings in 1970-71 Compared with Successful Tenancy Applications

SI	District	Percentage of			
		Tenanted holdings to total	Applications granted occupancy rights	Applications decided in favour of ex-tenants	Area decided in favour of ex-tenants
	Coastal Region				
1	Uttara Kannada	68.2	81.8	81.8	84.6
2	Dakshina Kannada	54.4	77.7	77.7	77.9
	Malnad Region				
3	Shimoga	21.5	55.6	51.4	44.9
4	Chikamagalur	8.2	57.1	57.0	44.9
5	Hassan	3.5	47.4	47.2	35.3
6	Kodagu	1.4	2.9	25.2	13.3
	Northern Maidan				
7	Belgaum	15.9	72.6	72.6	61.5
8	Bijapur	9.8	58.4	62.0	40.7
9	Dharwad	18.2	61.6	61.6	59.3
10	Bidar	2.8	27	27.0	29.0
11	Gulbarga	10.6	18	17.7	13.7
12	Raichur	3.7	22	22.0	17.9
	Southern Maidan				
13	Bellary	5.9	36.9	37.0	3.7
14	Chitradurga	1.5	34.4	38.2	22.8
15	Tumkur	1.7	40.3	41.0	30.0
16	Mandya	2	55.7	55.8	41.0
17	Mysore	3.6	56	57.0	42.1

18	Kolar	6.2	51.5	51.8	37.6
19	Bangalore (U)	5.1	44.9	36.0	9.6
20	Bangalore ®	5.1	44.9	45.8	42.8
	Karnataka	11.2	59.7	59.0	45.0

Source: Land Reforms in India, Volume 4, Aziz, Abdul and Krishna Sudhir (eds), Sage, 1997.

Table 9: District wise Statement Showing the Bonded Labourers Identification as on 31.12.1996

Sl.No	Name of District	Identified & released Bonded Labourers	Percentage	Ranking	Classification of intensity on Bondage *
Coastal Region					
1	Uttara Kannada	8	0.01	19	HI
2	Dakshina Kannada	385	0.62	13	LI
Malnad Region					
3	Shimoga	8851	14.35	2	VHI
4	Chikamagalur	2756	4.47	8	VL
5	Hassan	4910	7.96	5	MI
6	Kodagu	57	0.09	15	LI
Northern Maidan					
7	Belgaum	19	0.03	17	LI
8	Bijapur + Bugalkot	788	1.28	11	HI
9	Dharwad	-	-	20	HI
10	Bidar	12	0.02	18	LI
11	Gulbarga	49	0.08	16	HI
12	Raichur	123	0.2	14	LI
Southern Maidan					
13	Bellary	602	0.98	12	LI
14	Chitradurga	1252	2.03	10	HI
15	Tumkur	2046	3.32	9	LI
16	Mandya	5315	8.61	4	HI
17	Mysore	22644	36.71	1	HI
18	Kolar	2938	4.76	6	HI
19	Bangalore (U)	2802	4.54	7	VHI
20	Bangalore ®	6132	9.97	3	VHI
	Total	61689	100		

Source: Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka
Based in the study of Sarma Marla
VHI – very Highly Intensive; HI- Highly Intensive MI- Medium Intensive
LI- Low Intensive

Table 10: Comparative Ranking of Districts in Several Indicators

Sl.No	Districts	Per capita	BPL 1993-	HDI/GDI*	Literacy Rates**	Ranking on	Development Indicator****
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		Income (1991)	94*			incidence of Bonded Labour***	
1	Kodagu	1	4	1	3	15	Developed
	Bangalore (U)	2	12	2	1	7	Developed
	Bangalore ®	3	13	8	14	3	Medium
	Chikamagalur	4	3	5	6	8	Developed
	Dakshina Kannada	5	1	3	2	13	Developed
	Uttar Kannada	6	5	4	4	18	Developed
	Shimoga	7	7	6	5	2	Developed
	Bellary	8	16	17	20	12	Backward
	Belgaum	9	10	9	12	19	Medium
	Gulbarga	10	17	19	18	16	Backward
	Mysore	11	8	16	16	1	Medium
	Chitradurga	12	14	10	9	10	Backward
	Mandya	13	11	13	15	4	Medium
	Hassan	14	2	7	8	5	Medium
	Bijapur	15	9	14	10	11	Medium
	Dharwad	15	19	11	7	20	Backward
	Tumkur	16	15	12	11	9	Backward
	Raichur	17	6	20	19	14	Backward
	Kolar	18	18	15	13	6	Backward
	Bidar	19	20	18	17	18	Backward

*Human Development in Karnataka, 1999

** Census 1991

*** Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

**** Based on various Indicators

Table 12: Average Land Owned Per Ceiling Surplus Owner in Different Districts
(area in acres)

Sub region	District	Average area owned	Rank
Sub region -1			
Northern Dry Region	Belgaum	1055.98	1
	Bellary	56.96	10
	Bijapur	91.05	3
	Dharwad	194.94	4
	Gulbarga	66.89	9
	Total	237.03	
Sub region -2			
Central Region	Bangalore(Rural)	49.50	11
	Kolar	80.50	7
	Tumkur	201.94	3
	Total	106.34	
Sub region -3			
Southern Region	Hassan	70.70	8
	Mandya	31.57	6
	Mysore	91.10	
	Total	253.41	
Sub region -4			
Hills and	Dakshina Kannada	396.85	2

Coastal Region	Uttara Kannada Total	71.62 152.92	7A
State		215.28	

Table 13: Bonded Labour: Central Assistance

Name of the State	Number of Bonded Labourers		
	Identified and Released	Rehabilitated	Central assistance provided (Rs. In lakhs)
Andhra Pradesh	36289	29552	680.10
Bihar (including Jharkhand)	13112	12396	317.28
Karnataka	63583	56106	1470.28
Madhya Pradesh (including Chattisgarh)	12928	12021	158.75
Orissa	49971	46843	898.13
Rajasthan	7478	6321	71.42
Maharashtra	1401	1319	9.55
Uttar Pradesh (including Uttaranchal)	27797	27797	533.22
Kerala	823	710	15.56
Haryana	544	28	0.82
Gujarat	64	64	1.01
Arunachal Pradesh	3526	2992	568.94
Tamil Nadu	65573	65573	1661.94
Punjab	69	69	6.90
Total	283158	261791	6393.44

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 2002-03; Page 76.

Note: In addition a sum of Rs 291 lakhs has been released to various state Governments for conducting survey of Bonded Labourers.

Table 14

The Number of Identified Bonded Labourer by JEEVIKA Submitted to the Karnataka Government

District	No. of applications submitted	Taluk	No. filled applications
Bidar	718	Basvara Kalyan Taluk	210
		Bidar Taluk	245
		Bhalki	172
		Aurad	91
Gulbarga Dist	501	Yadgir Taluk	501
Raichur Dist	3075	Devadurga	285
		Manvi	780
		Lingasagur	527
		Sindhanur	734
		Gangavathi	205

		Koppal	51
		Kushtagi	184
		Yelburga	309
Kolar Dist	1461	Chickballapur	242
		Chintamani	193
		Gowribidanur	533
		Bagepalli	316
		Gudibande	198
Bangalore	1267	Chennapatna	308
		Ramnagar	277
		Magadi	348
		Hosakote	290
		Devanahalli	36
		Bangalore North	8
Mandya	427	Maddur	427
Mysore	2050	H.D. Kote	2050
	9499		

ANNEXURES

Annexure - 1

Table-1: Area and Population

Sl. No.	District	Area (Sq.Km)	Population (Census 2001)		
			Total	Male	Female
1	Bangalore	2,190	6,537,124	3,426,599	3,110,525
2	Bangalore (R)	5,815	1,881,514	962,183	919,331
3	Chitradurga	8,388	1,517,896	776,221	741,675
4	Davanagere	6,018	1,790,952	917,705	873,247
5	Kolar	8,223	2,536,069	1,286,193	1,249,876
6	Shimoga	8,465	1,642,545	830,559	811,986
7	Tumkur	10,598	2,584,711	1,313,801	1,270,910
I	Bangalore Division	49,697	18,490,811	9,513,261	8,977,550
8	Belgaum	13,415	4,214,505	2,150,090	2,064,415
9	Bijapur	10,475	1,806,918	926,424	880,494
10	Bagalkot	6,594	1,651,892	834,247	817,645
11	Dharwad	4,230	1,604,253	823,204	781,049
12	Gadag	4,657	971,835	493,533	478,302
13	Haveri	4,851	1,439,116	740,469	698,647
14	Uttara Kannada	10,291	1,353,644	686,876	666,768
II	Belgaum Division	54,513	13,042,163	6,654,843	6,387,320
15	Bellary	8,419	2,027,140	1,029,714	997,426
16	Bidar	5,448	1,502,373	771,022	731,351
17	Gulbarga	16,224	3,130,922	1,592,789	1,538,133
18	Raichur	5,559	1,669,762	841,840	827,922
19	Koppal	8,458	1,196,089	603,312	592,777
III	Gulbarga Division	44,108	9,526,286	4,838,677	4,687,609
20	Chikamagalur	7,201	1,140,905	574,911	565,994
21	Dakshina Kannada	4,843	1,897,730	938,434	959,296
22	Udupi	3,598	1,112,243	522,231	590,012
23	Hassan	6,814	1,721,669	859,086	862,583
24	Kodagu	4,102	548,561	274,831	273,730
25	Mandya	4,961	1,763,705	888,034	875,671
26	Mysore	6,269	2,641,027	1,344,670	1,296,357
27	Chamarajanagar	5,685	965,462	489,940	475,522
IV	Mysore Division	43,473	11,791,302	5,892,137	5,899,165
	STATE	191,791	52,850,562	26,898,918	25,951,644

(Source: Director of Census Operations)

Table-2: Density and Sex Ratio (2001)

Sl. No.	District	Density	Sex Ratio	Growth Rate % (1991-2001)
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1	Bangalore	2979	906	35
2	Bangalore (R)	323	953	12
3	Chitradurga	179	955	15
4	Davanagere	302	951	15
5	Kolar	307	970	14
6	Shimoga	193	977	13
7	Tumkur	243	966	12
8	Belgaum	314	959	17
9	Bijapur	172	948	18
10	Bagalkot	251	977	19
11	Dharwad	376	948	17
12	Gadag	209	968	13
13	Haveri	298	942	13
14	Uttara Kannada	132	970	11
15	Bellary	240	969	22
16	Bidar	276	948	20
17	Gulbarga	193	964	21
18	Raichur	241	980	22
19	Koppal	166	982	25
20	Chikamagalur	158	984	12
21	Dakshina Kannada	416	1023	14
22	Udupi	286	1127	7
23	Hassan	253	1005	10
24	Kodagu	133	996	12
25	Mandya	355	985	7
26	Mysore	383	965	15
27	Chamarajanagar	189	968	9
	STATE	275	964	17

Overall average – 964 females per 1,000 males

Urban – 940/1000

Rural – 976/1000

(Source: Karnataka at a Glance, 2002-03)

Table-3 Literacy

Sl. No.	Name of the District	Literacy Rate (%) 2001 Census		
		Total	Male	Female
1	Bangalore	83.91	88.36	78.98
2	Bangalore (R)	65.00	74.43	55.12
3	Chitradurga	64.88	74.69	54.62
4	Davanagere	67.67	76.44	58.45
5	Kolar	63.14	73.14	52.81
6	Shimoga	74.86	82.32	67.24
7	Tumkur	67.19	76.88	57.18
8	Belgaum	64.42	75.89	52.53
9	Bijapur	57.46	68.10	46.19
10	Bagalkot	57.81	71.31	44.10
11	Dharwad	71.87	81.04	62.20
12	Gadag	66.27	79.55	52.58
13	Haveri	68.09	77.94	57.60
14	Uttara Kannada	76.59	84.48	68.48
15	Bellary	58.04	69.59	46.16
16	Bidar	91.98	73.29	50.01
17	Gulbarga	50.65	62.52	38.40

18	Raichur	49.54	62.02	36.84
19	Koppal	55.02	69.15	40.76
20	Chikamagalur	72.63	80.68	64.47
21	Dakshina Kannada	83.47	89.74	77.39
22	Udupi	79.87	86.59	74.02
23	Hassan	68.75	78.29	59.32
24	Kodagu	78.17	83.80	72.53
25	Mandya	61.21	70.71	51.62
26	Mysore	63.69	71.30	55.81
27	Chamarajanagar	51.26	59.25	43.02
	STATE	67.04	76.29	57.45

(Source: Karnataka at a Glance, 2001-2003, Directorate of Economics and Statistics)

Literacy: Up from 56.04 % in 1991 to 67.04% in 2001

Urban 74.20% to 81.05%

Rural 47.69% to 59.68%

Table-4: Women SHGs (2003-04)

TABLE-3 : WOMEN SELF HELP GROUPS-2003-04

Taluks	No. of Villages	No. of groups	No. of members	Savings Total	Loans Given	Loans Recovered	Loans Outstanding
Anekal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hosakote	13	17	209	70,599	115587	58924	56,663
Magadi	16	20	232	140,660	64,750	17,250	47,500
Chennapatana	10	19	217	237,204	246,250	95,833	150,417
Madhur	8	15	210	34,485	11950	1170	10,780
Bangarpete	11	17	217	49,845	297,200	260,864	36,336
Chikkballapura	12	13	178	25,652	23,411	3,350	20,061
Gudibande	15	15	163	49,051	275,930	185,560	90,370
Gowribidanuru	6	8	79	3,700	19,228	550	18,678
Bagepalli	14	27	393	95719	109990	48070	61920
Chinthamani	9	11	156	197,753	86100	40620	45,480
Shidlaghatta	8	8	89	17,363	3,985	1,760	2,225
H.D.Kote	25	32	409	263,009	452,900	313,250	139,650
Madhugiri	13	14	189	110,120	373,320	331,260	42,060
Pavagada	7	8	93	78,180	50940	8,468	42,472
Yadagiri	12	18	222	246,395	1783170	1382555	400615
Total	179	242	3056	1,619,735	3914711	2,749,484	1,165,227

(source;JEEVIKA

Table-5: Women SHGs (2004-05)

WOMEN SELF HELP GROUPS - 2004-05

Taluks	No. Of Villages	No. Of Groups	No. Of Members	Total Savings	Loans Given	Loans Recovered	Loans Outstanding
Anekal	6	7	89	26,380	26,380	16,280	10,000
Hosakote	11	16	187	1,26,350	2,72,399	50,378	2,22,021
Magadi	15	18	214	2,11,550	61,625	28,900	32,725

Chennapatana	9	19	234	3,06,136	2,77,400	1,59,275	1,18,125
Madhur	6	13	183	97,570	21,800	11,240	10,560
Bangarpete	14	19	246	1,10,380	9,66,751	4,58,590	5,08,161
Chikkballapura	13	16	174	36,659	72,530	64,000	8,530
Gudibande	8	11	122	55,115	1,09,750	1,05,150	4,600
Gowribidanuru	6	7	77	20,683	11,825	11,522	303
Bagepalli	18	25	371	2,26,812	1,00,143	92,526	7,617
Chinthamani	12	19	298	2,99,290	53,784	30,390	23,394
Shidlaghatta	10	13	148	34,469	4,700	4,300	400
H.D.Kote	33	49	619	4,47,734	5,30,250	4,28,295	1,01,955
Madhugiri	14	19	262	1,87,900	1,69,660	1,02,250	67,410
Pavagada	10	15	154	78,180	13,950	7,358	6,592
Yadagiri	18	21	262	1,55,445	9,20,234	6,98,500	2,21,734
Total	203	287	3640	24,20,653	36,13,181	22,68,954	13,44,127

(Source; JEEVIKA)

ANNEXURE II

List of People Interviewed in Karnataka Study (Apart from 44 bonded labourers)

Sl. No	Name and Designation (interviewed)	Name of the Taluk & District
1	Assistant Director of Horticulture	H.D. Kote Taluk , Mysore Dist
2	Assistant Director of Agriculture	H.D. Kote Taluk , Mysore Dist
3	Social Welfare officer	H.D. Kote Taluk , Mysore Dist
4	Deputy Tehsildar	Bangalore Pet Taluk, Kolar Dist
5	Amal Nath, Panchayat Extension Secretary	Bangalore Pet Taluk, Kolar Dist
6	Shirasthdhar, Tehsildar Office	Bangalore Pet Taluk, Kolar Dist
7	Sub Inspector, Police Department	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
Members Vigilance Committee		
8	Mr. Basavaraj, Taluk Co-coordinator of JEEVIKA	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
9	Rama Chandrappa, Taluk Co-coordinator of JEEVIKA	Bangarpet, Kolar District
10	Sangeevaiah, Social Worker	Bangarpet, Kolar District
Others: Social Workers, Farmers, Panchayat Members, NGO Activists, Scholars etc.		
11	Nanjundaiah, Social worker	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
12	Siddamma, Taluk Panchayat Member and Ex.Vice President	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
13	Karigowda, Doctor (Private)	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
14	Patel, Officials, Labour Commissioner	Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore
15	Srivatsava, Official, Labour Secretary	Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore
16	Mr. Channa Basavaiah, President Naorala Kuppe Gram Panchayat	H.D. Kote Taluk, Mysore District
17	Mr. Puleyendran, President of Trade Union	Bangarpet, Kolar Dist
18	Mr. Nanjundaiah, Advocate and President for Rajya Raitha Sangha	Bangarpet, Kolar Dist

19	Soma Shankara Reddy, Big Farmer and Bus owner	Bangarpet, Kolar Dist
20	Nagaraj, Farmer (Land Lord)	Kadivegowdana Kote, Bangarpet, Kolar Dist
21	Celastine & Judo (NGO), Secretary	Sunanda Maitri, Bethamangala village, Bangarpet, Kolar Dist
22	Field Officer	Myrada
23	Dr. Abdul Aziz, (Retd. Professor, Economist)	Institute for Social and Economic Change, Nagarabhavi, Bangalore
Other JEEVIKA Activists		
24	Lakshamma, Taluk Co-ordinator	Bangarpet, Kolar Dist)
25	Umesh, District Co-ordinator	H.D. Kote Mysore
26	Govinda, Taluk Co-ordinator	Chennapatna, Bangalore Rural
27	Venkatesh, District Co-ordinator	Hoskote, Bangalore Urban
28	Gangadhar, Taluk Co-ordinator	Magadi, Bangalore Rural
29	Shivanna, State President	H.D. Kote, Mysore Dist
30	Nagamma, Taluk Women Co-ordinator	H.D. Kote, Mysore Dist
31	Shivamma, State women Co-ordinator	Hoskote, Bangalore Urban
32	Nagarai, Hosli Co-ordinator	Magadi, Bangalore Rural