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Q6(a)

**Examine whether rural bondage still continues to be a social reality. Give your argument .**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Rural and Agrarian transformation in India

Rural and Agrarian transformation in India: Programmes of rural development, Community Development Programme, cooperatives, poverty alleviation schemes; Green revolution and social change; Changing modes of production in Indian agriculture; Problems of rural labour, bondage, migration.

**Core demand of the question**

- Examine whether rural bondage still continues to be a social reality. Give your argument
- Use law, labour, and caste

**Revision summary**

Bondage survived the end of its legal status.

Debt, caste and contractor advances recreate unfreedom.

SECC and rescue cases show rural and migrant sites.

COVID distress tightened village fallback and kiln advances.

The Act is necessary; enforcement and land-credit alternatives decide the fact.

**Introduction**

Rural bondage continues as a social reality in India, even though the classic attached farm servant is less visible. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act ended the legal form. Debt, caste, and contractor chains rebuilt the relation.

**Body****Argument: yes, in changed clothes**

- Bondage is unfreedom tied to debt, caste duty, or contractor advance, not only a named hali or haliya in a gazetteer.
- SECC and labour-rescue reports still find households working to pay inherited or consumption debt in brick kilns, quarries, and farms.
- Dalit and Adivasi workers are over-represented, so bondage is a caste-class fact, which Ambedkar would not treat as a leftover custom.

**What changed**

- Land reform and the cash wage weakened some village jajmani ties that Srinivas mapped as service.
- Circular migration and COVID reverse migration moved bondage to brick kilns and urban informal sites, then back to the village as distress.
- The 1976 Bonded Labour Act, rehabilitation schemes, and Supreme Court interventions made denial the official story, which hides persistence.

## What continues

- Advances at marriage or medical crisis lock labour for a season or a generation.
- Women and children in the same household are pledged without a separate contract.
- Dominant-caste farmers and contractors still command honour and police, so exit is costly.

## Counter-claim and reply

- Some economists see only free seasonal labour. Free movement of the body with a debt book in the contractor's pocket is not freedom.
- **Desai's agrarian class lens fits:** surplus extraction can use extra-economic coercion after zamindari has gone.

## Flow diagram

Old attached farm servant -> Debt contractor kiln farm  
Caste and advance -> Debt contractor kiln farm  
Bonded Labour Act -> Legal denial  
Debt contractor kiln farm -> Social reality continues

## Conclusion

Rural bondage is still a social reality. The law abolished the status; debt, caste, and informal contractors reproduce the relation in farms, kilns, and migrant gangs. The argument is persistence through transformation, not a museum survival.

## Facts & figures

### Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976

Declared bonded labour illegal and provided for identification and rehabilitation.

### Socio-Economic Caste **Census** (SECC)

Flagged deprived rural households whose labour conditions often overlap with debt dependence.

### Brick kilns and quarries

Common sites where family labour is tied by advance, including after migration.

### **Ambedkar**

Caste as graded labour control explains why abolition on paper does not equal exit.