



Slavery still exists

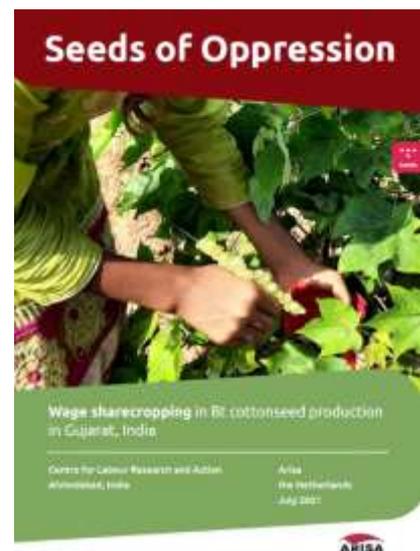
Press release Arisa

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Brahmaji is a '*Bhagiya*' worker in the Indian state of Gujarat. India produces 41% of the world's cotton. Gujarat is the largest cotton producing state in India. *Bhagiya* refers to a form of sharecropping commonly practiced in Gujarat, India. Many of these *Bhagiyas* are migrants from other areas who have little choice of livelihood. The practice resembles slavery because workers often have huge debts with the landowner that they have to pay off by working for the respective landowner.

Brahmaji cultivates 0.8 hectares to produce cotton seed. He has a debt of EUR 781 which he must repay. He has so little left each month that he cannot send his children to school.

Brahmaji's experience is featured in the report *Seeds of Oppression*. A report Arisa and her Indian partner *Centre for Labour Research and Action (CLRA)* are releasing this week. The report highlights a slavery-like reality for many workers working in the seed industry sector. The abuses described in this report, such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, structural underpayment, and appalling working conditions, are still a daily reality in 2021. When these workers question their employers about facts, the narrative is quickly circulated that they are disobedient and this reduces their chances of future employment.



If and when you buy cotton clothing 'made in India', these practices might be the hidden reality behind it.

Recently, the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, Minister Kaag spoke out against labour abuses taking place in Indian cotton mills. With this she took a promising first step. Arisa hopes that this first move will be followed by legislation in the field of sustainable business with urgency. It cannot be the case that in a peaceful and prosperous country such as the Netherlands, companies produce clothing and textiles that hide these slavery-like conditions.

The full version of the report can be downloaded here: <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/SeedsOfOppression.pdf>.

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