

From Rejimon in India

Their woes are mine, and their triumphs are my own...

I am not a conventional researcher. I don't hold a PhD, but I carry something more powerful: the language of workers, the weight of their struggles, and the fire of my own experience as a Dalit. I see myself in them—the exploited, the silenced, the unseen.

For two years, I investigated forced labor in a product's supply chain in India, driven by an unshakable resolve to expose the truth. I was alone on the ground, but my efforts bore fruit in 2024: a government added that product to its forced labor goods list.

The backlash was immediate. Critics warned I was harming India's internal market, that jobs would vanish because of my actions. Fear crept in—had I gone too far?

But then, something remarkable happened. Instead of collapse, the industry transformed. Companies, unwilling to lose their business, began dismantling the chains of forced labor.

They started paying workers minimum wages, and thousands began to see benefits for the first time. 1000s got benefited. This was my victory, achieved not through academic credentials but through empathy and understanding of the workers' plight.

The 2024 International Labour Organization (ILO) report paints a stark picture: forced labor generates \$236 billion (₹19.81 lakh crore) in illegal profits annually, a 37% surge since 2014, built on wages stolen from victims.

My work targeted a piece of this global injustice, proving that one voice—rooted in the lived experience of a Dalit—can spark change. I know why workers suffer, why they are exploited. Their woes are mine, and their triumphs are my own.

(PIC: Me with North Indian workers in a South Indian coastal village at the end of 2024. Don't I look like a worker too? Yes, I am. I know. I was exhausted—without food, proper accommodation, enduring long travels, endless waits, and so much more...