



Childhood gasps in slavery... India tops the list

By [Titas Biswas](#)

How undeniable is the role of a geopolitical territory in terms of imperialistic annexation? Well, if you dig deep enough into history, you need not indulge for too long to realise that the policy of annexation is spontaneous, if not subtle. Now by ‘subtle’, you do not certainly want to talk about the romantic depiction of things that you come across when you discuss imperialism, such as, just as an example – slavery.

A number of academicians would argue, and have always argued in favour of spontaneous evolution of diplomacy and domination. You cannot say that is a lie, not from a post-modern approach, at the least. Spiritual allegation against the dark side of humanity, one could reasonably revert back to an approach as vague as that. So, the most basic of questions is, what is the certain chronology of circumstances – both metaphysical and dialectical that compel you to be a part of the “sacred tales” of a not-so-homogenous-entity-called-civilization? Why are you enslaved? Why are you not enslaved?

The first answer to the question asked previously is a rather simple one. That question could be put in some sort of an artistic envelope, made to look like one of those Frida Kahlo versions of Picasso’s *Guernica*... “Why are you trapped?”, you could say, for instance. Or, “Why are you claustrophobic?” The delusion doesn’t necessarily need to be very pragmatic, just as the long, pathetic introduction and sweet sarcasm used until now, to take you through the terrorising journey of what entrapment

might necessarily feel like. Here, we will talk about bonded-servitude and invisible chains (and definitely the invisible hand on that note).

According to a Walk Free Foundation report of 2016, some 18.3 million people out of the 46 million modern enslaved people reside in India. This includes child labour, forced marriage, human trafficking, forced begging, forced prostitution among others. That leaves this piece of geopolitical territory, satirical as it might sound, with

39% of the world's "modern" slaves. A professor of Contemporary Slavery at University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom, Kevin Bates specifically talked about the situation in 2017. Just like the sugary, little tale you're told about a globalised, modern economy, the posh industries and the random flavours of the cities reeking luxury and trouble like brief and smart American sitcoms, modern slavery is the revenue generation part of this conglomerate of industries that produces a profit of almost \$150 billion per annum!

In India millions of children work for the factories, brothels or families. The govt. census of 2011 found the total number of child labourers, aged 5 to 14, to be 10.1 million (working either as 'main worker's or 'marginal worker's). Out of the number of domestic workers, 90% are girls in this age category. In addition more than 44.7 million children here are out of school. The real figures, are of course, far more inflated since the census hardly gets to register these cases at birth.

According to a certain estimate by a state investigative agency, 3 million prostitutes work in Indian brothels -- and some 40 percent of them are minors. Girls are sold to men who pose as marriage matchmakers or promise jobs in the city as soon as they reach the age of 10.

By 2016, the official public figures available showed that there are at least 14 million children living under slavery. An honest estimation could lead to this number doubling up in no time at all! India tops the list when it comes to the number of children still living and working in bonded labour and slave conditions in the context of ILO Convention No. 182.

The Bonded Labour System Abolition Act 1976 remains one of the strongest laws against this contemporary system of slavery in India. As an analogy to the Mid-day Meal System or the subsidies paid to the unemployed in exchange for work under schemes such as the MGNREGA (2005), this act paid subsidies to those who freed themselves from bonded labour. But the kind of extremely corrupt administrative system that has sustained itself as a culmination of multiple networks is a toxic one. Such an obstruction also causes a cognitive sense of fear, alarming agony and tragedy among those who have been exploited over generations. The ones who had been levied the duty of getting them freed are often found to only expand the periphery of the cycle of feudalism in the country, not unlike most of the countries in Southeast Asia.

Whereas acts in the 1940s and 1950s prohibited child labour in certain dangerous conditions like mines, the Child Labour Act in 1986 created the first large-scale prohibition against child labour, and a 2009 law called the Right of Children to Free

and Compulsory Education Act tightened the child labour laws by guaranteeing a free education for children under the age of 14.

Apart from the large corporate setups that engulf all the elements that had ever constituted your life since you were detached from the umbilical cord, almost half of India is still susceptible to contemporary slavery. According to 2005 Government of India, NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization), child labour incidence rates in India in highest among Muslim Indians, about 40% higher than Hindu Indians.

The Chandigarh edition of Indian Labour Journal of 2013 investigates how, despite the improvement of Consumer Price Index (CPI) over the course of the decades after India adopted the neoliberal policies, the extent and impact of malnutrition in enslaved children (and even adults) have only worsened over time; all credits to the lack of co-ordination in the distribution of wealth coupled with unmanaged inflationary measures.

Hard as it might get to believe, in some cases, these measures have not been taken at all in the first place.

It reminds you of the thousands and thousands of farmers who had no option but to take their own lives after the little tweak in the economic policy back in the 1990s. Some estimates the number up to 200,000. If this slavery is not economic, is not detrimental – both physically and psychologically for this entire generation of apparent flock of sheep - then what is? If this is not slavery in political terms, if this is not bonded labour, if subsistence farming and unemployment still afflicts this entire country, if the growth of informal economy and corruption in government is not responsible for the flare up of such incidents chronologically, then what is?

In many cases the parents themselves persuade their own children to work as slaves just for earnings. A report by the special Rapporteur to India's National Human Rights Commission, reported the discovery of 53 child labourers in 1996 in the state of Tamil Nadu during a surprise inspection. Each parent had taken an advance of Rs.10,0000 to 25,0000. The children were made to work for twelve to fourteen hours a day. This malpractice deprives children of their childhood and hinders their physical and mental growth.

In the present situation it's important not to open schools for the children only, but for their parents as well. If the parents are unable to understand the hollowness of this satanic practice, how would they rescue their children from the quagmire of this meaninglessness? Today, it's necessary to educate the parents mostly to acquaint them with the doleful History which repeats itself wantonly, and to project before them, what role a creator plays to shape and secure his creativity as, 'every child secures a father in their heart'.

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