

# The Modern-Day Child Slavery

Even after 73 years of 'independence' nothing better has occurred in the lives of the people of our country. On the contrary their lives are worsening day by day. The grand proclamations of our rulers and ruling classes that our economy is developing in leaps and bounds cannot hide this fact of ever growing distress of the people particularly the rural poor. The anti-people and pro-corporate agricultural policies being implemented by the successive governments have pushed our agricultural sector in to a deep crises leading to the untold rural poverty and distress. None of the governmental schemes for alleviation of poverty including the highly touted NMGREA could bring any relief to the impoverished rural households.

Besides migrating to far off places with families to eke out livelihood and living as destitute in those places, the rural poor are forced to mortgage their children for labour. Extreme poverty forced the parents to mortgage their children.

Such children mortgaged occurred in Banswara and Pratapgarh districts of Rajasthan have come in to light.

This practice of mortgaging children for labour existing in Rajasthan was raised in the Rajasthan Assembly by Gulab Chand Kataria, BJP M.L.A and former home minister of Rajasthan, the BJP's Kisorilal Meena did so in the Rajya Sabha recently.

The children are being mortgaged to shepherds or gaderias a nomadic community with large flocks of sheep. They belong to south-western Rajasthan and they take away children to central and western Madhya Pradesh and parts of northern Gujarat. The children are made to look after cattle and given bare minimum food. In some cases the shepherds sell the children further for running errands at road-side hotels.

The lives of the children who are taken away are tough. They are not given clothes to change even for many months. These children develop blisters on their soles, as they walk several miles on barefoot. They are allowed to sleep just only four to five hours at night. Very often the family members of the shepherds beat the children over trivial matters. There is no guarantee whether the children will ever return to their families.

The shepherds prefer to hire Bhil (tribal) children because they come cheap, eat little, work hard and are disciplined easily.

On the other hand extreme poverty compelled the parents to mortgage their children; since they find no work and left with no option to let their minor sons go for labour as mortgaged labourers.

But as usual when this modern day slavery is exposed the administration pretend innocence and state that it is the first time that heard about such a practice of mortgaging children for labour.

Though this very form of mortgaging children is not practiced, various other forms of bondage for labour is practiced by the rural poor in other states of our country. From the Orissa state rural poor households of entire family go in to bondage of labour in brick-kilns.

From north Andhra Pradesh districts young girls of 14 years to 16 years are sent to far off places as labourers of bondage in cotton ginning mills and textile mills.

Many children work as bonded labourers in the reputed bangle industry of Hyderabad city. Many children are working as bonded labourers in to the Zari and other such industries in our capital city New Delhi.

Many children are made to work as bonded labourers in mica mines and stone quarries.

It is an undeniable fact that extreme poverty compels households to mortgage the children for the survival of the family members.

Particularly this practice of bonded labour is an inherent feature of our semi-feudal system. Modernity of neo-global capitalist economic system co-habits with our semi-feudal system and depends on such despicable practices of child-slavery for its thriving on accumulating more and more profits.

This state of worst affairs warrants a powerful movement of people to end such human bondage of slavery demanding improvement of the living conditions of people from perpetual impoverishment!

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