

**CHILD LABOUR IN COLONIAL INDIA : A STUDY
OF BENGAL JUTE INDUSTRY (1880-1930)**

A thesis submitted towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

M.Phil in Women's Studies

Course affiliated to Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies,
Law and Management
Jadavpur University

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2019

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Affiliated to the
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This research owes to many people and I would try to do justice to their undaunting support by conceding their contributions here. I think although my name appears on the top of the cover page of this thesis, the whole credit goes to those precious people without whose assistance this research would not have got its present material existence.

First of all, the every bit of this study owes to Professor Samita Sen whose contributions to my intellectual enrichment and shaping up my research orientation cannot be expressed in words literally. Her writing has been my academic inspiration since the undergraduate days when I took up women's studies as one of my elective subjects. But when I met her after getting into the MPhil course, she proved to be transformed from 'inspiration' to 'idol' near me. Her unflinching support has been throughout this research: from broadening my research interest in the labour studies field to narrowing down my research area suitable for an mphil research, directing me in the most appropriate manner one young fellow can ever have, providing me with the amazing foreign primary sources and her own valuable collection of archival materials on the jute industry to tirelessly checking my drafts and tolerating my stupid questions despite her busiest schedule at Cambridge. I feel that probably I was destined to get her mentorship which entirely re-directed my research orientation and had I not met her, I wouldn't have taken up this subject.

This thesis would never have been possible without Kunal da, who is the best supervisor one can ever have. Perhaps, even the word 'excellent' would not fully do justice to his excellence. I'm the most fortunate scholar to get his guidance and support in the every step of my research. His valuable inputs changed the thrust of this study in multidimensional ways without which it would have been a deprived research. And the ways he tolerated me and my delays in submitting the drafts have made me grateful to him forever.

The week-long discussions at V.V.Giri National Institute of Labour, Noida helped me to learn the labour history methodology and directed me when I was absolutely clueless about how to conduct a labour history research. I thank Professor Prabhu Mohapatra and Rana Behal sir for providing me with incredible suggestions on this topic which definitely boosted the credibility of this research.

My thanks goes to the staffs at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, West Bengal State Archives, National Archives, New Delhi for helping me in finding proper sources. Debamitra di of our school's library, Banani di of the library of the history department and the staffs at the Central Library of Jadavpur University deserve worthy mention in this credence. My heartiest thanks goes to Hardik da who never failed to meet our expectations in solving the official problems. I thank the School of Women's' Studies, Jadavpur University for giving me this wonderful opportunity to pursue research.

The continuous support of my fellowmate Puja di while pursuing this writing is worthy to be mentioned here. The setting of the deadlines for completing the chapters together has a huge contribution in finishing the drafts at time and her accompaniment has made my mphil journey a groovy one. I thank Sampriti di from the history department, Jadavpur University for guiding me beyond expectations whenever I was in need. My masters degree friends Nandita, Shalini, Somen, and Umi are the "3 AM friends" who have continued their unflinching support and love and I'm grateful to them for our togetherness.

The contributions of my childhood friend Puja in my life is unforgettable and to formally thank her would do injustice to the love, affection and loyalty she has showered upon me over the years. She has been with me in the every highs and lows of my life and our friendship is the most cherishable thing in my life.

I'm grateful to my paternal aunt and uncle for standing beside us in the most critical phase of my family whose unconditional support helped me to stay away from the familial problems and continue my research.

Finally, I would like to mention the most precious gems of my life- baba and maa without whom my life is incomplete. They have continued their undaunting support in every bit of my life while gladly tolerating all of my tantrums. Maa always has taken care of me despite her persistent chronic illness and tried her best to help me to continue my study. I have no words to describe the role of baba in my life. He is the asset in my life forever. This research is more of him than mine. This thesis is dedicated to them.

PREFACE

While thinking of doing research on the child labour and the gendered division of labour in the factories of the jute manufacturing industries of Bengal one persistent research problematic haunted me i.e. the dubious nature of the colonial official sources. The aim of this research is not to portray the children labourers only as the ‘pauperised proletariat’, rather an attempt has been made throughout this study to analyse the strategies and conditions imposed by the colonial state out of their capitalistic rationale which only caused those colonized children’s pauperization and made them subservient to the state, family and capitalism. How the colonial protectionist policies were actually the exploitative tools making their oppression all-pervading, how the working class family life got transfigured by the colonial state and the children’s subjectivities got entrenched into the multilayered subjugation of the colonial state, the categorization of the classes of ‘young persons’ and ‘immature adults’ in the labouring population as a part of the colonial process of knowledge production and the problematic relationship between the three C’s- children, capitalism and colonialism, the working conditions of the children inside the factories are some of the problematic areas on which this study has focused. . By bringing the analytical category of marginalized and peripheral labour within the ambit of childhood, I have attempted here to draw the material lives of the industrial children who happened to be also colonial. The assymetrical power-relations prevailing in the every strata of the colonial industrial sector and its mechanism has formed the hypothetical ground of this research.

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INTRODUCTION

“We have seen that the development of the capitalist mode of production and of the productive power of labour- at once the cause and effect of accumulation- enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in action more labour by greater exploitation (extensive or intensive) of each individual labour-power. We have further seen that the capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour-power as he progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.”

- Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol.1, Moscow,1978, p. 595.

This research attempts to explore the systematic and diabolical exploitation of children in the jute manufacturing factories of colonial Bengal. The labour of children in an industrially advanced economy has always been viewed theoretically from the problematic of market demand side i.e. the massive cry for child labour on the part of a capitalist economy due to its ‘cheapness’ and the ‘suitability’ for certain kinds of works . So, some definitive legislative measures and policies had been taken by the colonial government of India to ‘protect’ this ‘special category of labour’. But the supply side of the labour market equation must not be ignored in an archetypal colonial setting of Bengal jute industry, which has occupied a major focal point in this thesis. While analyzing the colonial essentialism of

social reproduction as a politico-economic determinant of reproducing the ‘class’ of the labouring poor it explores the intersectionality of the politics between three C’s: Children, Capitalism and Colonialism. While unfolding this intersectionality and various other intricacies of the colonial state, this research ventures to inquire into the mechanism of the colonial capitalism. As capitalism always sought for productivity and wages are determined only by work rate and output, children’s labour was looked down upon as underproductive, unskilled because of the allotment of fixed set of works to them so that they remain underpaid. While unfolding laws for the labour process itself and defining various stages of the modes of the production Marx examined the upshot of accumulation upon the working class. The need for capital accumulation led capitalists to engage cheap labour in a economic system based on extremely exploitative labour relations. Child labour had a distinctive role to play in a colonial capitalist production system. The colonial capitalism employed labour so that new labour could be extracted of its full labour-power for the utilization of maximum profit. The physical production of children and their using up in the process of labour were to keep the cost of production low and to increase the intensity of the work. The continuation of such exploitative practices can be explained by how the capitalists and workers perceive the process of labour use and capital accumulation. In his *Capital*, Marx asserted that the capitalist “takes his stand on the law of the exchange of commodities. He, like all other buyers, seeks to get the greatest possible benefit out of the use-value of his commodity.”¹ Capitalist always pushes the burden of the reproduction

¹ Shakti Kak and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), (2012), *Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia*, Delhi, Primus Books, pp. 22-36.

of labour power on the worker with only the promise of subsistence or less in return.² One definite motive behind engaging child labour in the factories was the inability of the child workers to get unionized. They could be coerced far more easily than the adult workers and the extraction of their labour power could be continued in a far more unhindered process. Children's labour in the colonial setting was assumed to be a sort of investment in which the surplus labour of the children was utilized to reinvest profits to make still more profit.

In the case of nineteenth century child labour in England during the industrial revolution, Factory Inspectors' reports tell us that the over-utilization of children's labour continued even when the industry was in recession. The advent of machinery and other technological developments led to the replacement of adult and specialized labourer by women, children and the unskilled. In the context of 1851 unrest, Nasmyth, the inventor of the steam hammer put his statement,

“The characteristic feature of our modern mechanical improvements, is the introduction of self-acting tool machinery. What every mechanical workmen has now to do, and what every boy can do, is not to work himself but to superintend the beautiful labour of the machine....Formerly, I employed four boys to every mechanic. Thanks to these new mechanical combinations, I have reduced the number of grown-up men from 1500 to 750. The result was a considerable increase in my profits.”³

The introduction to machine induced production didn't lighten the physical burden of the worker, to increase its production the colonial employers not only maintained the pre-

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

technological modes of exploitation but also invented novel ways of this exploitative process to keep the cycle of capitalist production going. The very practice of child labour is uneconomic in any economic system because it stunts the development of the future stakeholders of that economy. But capitalism tends to see nothing except undercutting competition and instant profit. How the dehumanization of the child workers was carried out is clear from Marx's words,

“ In the hardware manufactures of Birmingham and its neighbourhood, there are employed, mostly in heavy work, 30,000 children and young persons, besides 10,000 women. There they are to be seen in the un-wholesome brass-foundries, button factories, enamelling, galvanizing, and lackering works. Owing to the excessive labour of their workpeople, both adult and non-adult, certain London houses where newspapers and books are printed, have got the ill-omened name of ‘slaughter-houses’. Similar excesses are practiced in bookbinding, where the victims are chiefly women, girls, and children; young persons have to do heavy work in rope-walks and night-work in salt mines, candle manufactories, and chemical works; young people are worked to death at turning the looms in silk weaving, when it is not carried on by machinery.”⁴

Coming into the question of time and industrial discipline I'll discuss the theorizations of the capitalist temporalities by Moishe Postone, E.P. Thompson and Theodore Adorno respectively. Taking a slightly different line from Marx's critical theory, Moishe Postone⁵ shows that in order to understand the nature of this industrial time-discipline, there is a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

need to study how Marx reveals the basic contradictory nature of capitalism, which lies in the sphere of production itself. When capital is acting as a specific historical form of wealth and mediating in these two types of labour time, value is measured by the “non-manifest temporal expenditure” of “abstract human labour” and the significance of use-value lies in the material wealth and is measured as “a function of the quantity and quality of what is objectified by concrete labour”⁶. The use-value dimension of the social forms includes concrete time as moments of such various specific instances of concrete labour.⁷ Though the bourgeoisie emerged as powerful, the new temporal social forms came to be imposed on all members of the capitalist society and gave rise to a new form of domination. Postone’s assessment of Marx’s critique of capitalism highlights how socially necessary labour time can be linked to structures of alienated social relations in capitalism, whereby individual interests of workers are engulfed by abstract spatio-temporal conditions.

E.P.Thompson⁸ has defined the clock-time as ‘a new Puritan discipline’ and ‘bourgeois exactitude’ and held the ‘inward notations of time’ responsible for a severe restructuring of working habits in a mature industrial society like new disciplines, new incentives, and a new human nature. He argues that, “...But the question of task-orientation becomes greatly more complex at the point where labour is employed. The entire family economy of the small farmer may be task-oriented; but within it there may be a division of labour, and allocation of roles, and the discipline of an employer-employed relationship between the farmer and his children. Even here time is beginning to become money, the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ E.P.Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline, And Industrial Capitalism, Past and Present*, Volume 38, Issue 1, December 1967, pp. 56-97.

employers' money. As soon as actual hands are employed the shift from task-orientation to timed-labour is marked. It is true that the timing of work can be done independently of any time-piece.....And the employer must use the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted; not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency; it is not passed, but spent.”⁹ According to him the introduction of the watches and clocks in the public life mitigated the demand of the industrial capitalism and also regulated the new rhythms of industrial life and the “attention to time in labour depends in large degree upon the need for the synchronization of labour”.¹⁰ He continues that, “Although the custom of annual hiring prevailed, the actual weekly earnings were at piece-rates, the skilled male potters employing the children, and working, with little supervision, at their own pace. The children and women came to work on Monday and Tuesday, but a ‘holiday feeling’ prevailed and the day’s work was shorter than usual, since the potters were away a good part of the time, drinking their earnings of the previous week. The children, however, had to prepare work for the potter, and all suffered from the exceptionally long hours which were worked from Wednesday to Saturday”¹¹. In the Western notion, the industrial capitalism considered the machinery as a means of disciplining the industrial operations.

To follow the analysis of Theodore Adorno¹² on the ‘Free Time’, it may be discerned that the ‘free-time’ of the working class population was only the ‘spare-time’, not the ‘leisure-time’ which was entitled only to the elite class. So, in the bourgeoisie

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Theodore W. Adorno, Chapter ‘Free Time’ in *The Culture Industry*, Routledge Classics, 2001, pp. 187-197.

society the free-time of the labourers was relegated to a commodity along with their labour-power. Their free-time was not entirely “free” in the ‘profit-oriented social life’ because “what becomes of free time, where productivity of labour continues to rise, under persisting conditions of unfreedom, that is, under relations of production into which people are born and which prescribe the rules of human existence...”.

RESEARCH RATIONALE :The primary rationale behind this historical research is to document the history of children in colonial India centering around the labouring childhood. But this “documentation” is not merely the portrayal of factual realities espoused by the colonial official sources, rather the objective of this project from the very beginning has been to “honour” the lives of the children workers. The initial idea to ‘take up’ children as the “subject” of my research owes to the dearth of historical works in India on the colonial childhood in the discipline of history. While the Indian historiography has come across many junctures which propounded the *voice of the voiceless* and substantiated the *history from below*, why the colonial children didn’t fall under those categories of ‘voiceless’ and ‘below’ despite having their unique multilayered subjectivities and probably being most vulnerable ones within the class of the ‘subalterns’ quite astounded me and insisted me pursue this field for my m.phil research. The in-built inclination within me towards the field of labour history further guided me in the right direction to look into the area of child labour in colonial Bengal. When I first thought about writing on the history of child labour, the major problem which popped up in my mind was the “historian’s hunch” in accounting the historical experiences of the most marginalized section in the most complex historical juncture based on solely the official sources. To counter this problem, my first task was to understand the nitty gritty of the colonial operationalization to realize how

the official documents and archival sources can be manufactured and structurally adjusted to lessen the locational relativity of the colonized. By focusing on the historical transition of the colonial society from a pre-industrial to a industrial one, the field of labour history has always brought into account the spatio-temporal axis of the colonial industrialization and a sort of 'revisionist attitude' has been in the works of labour historians through inventing new spheres of writing like 'labouring poor' instead of the 'working class', cultural aspects of the workers' lives rather than solely their material lives and so on. Following their lines, I have ventured to write an account of that section of the labouring community who got affected most from blurring of the demarcation between the public and private sphere in the transfigured colonial industrial society i.e. the child labour. Though the children workers were not a politically active community and organized and hence cannot be correctly termed as 'the working class' in its true Marxist sense, the nature of the "organized violence" against them by the exploiting colonial state has provoked me to treat the colonial children as a collective entity instead of their individual entities. It should be said here that it is the multidimensionality of their exploitation and their increasing informalization by the colonial state in the formal industrial sector have enhanced the chances of applicability of the term "working class" against this historically minor community. To avoid fixation and unilinearity in producing the history of child labour an attempt has been made here by recognizing the essential identity of the children workers and giving acknowledgement to their active agency. The primary reason behind choosing the sphere of jute industry as my research area is the research-convenience associated with this industry in terms of its available primary and secondary sources and also the situatedness of plenty of jute mills around my locality in the North 24 Parganas which

helped me to grow a familiarity and psychological attachment with the existential experiences of the jute-mill workers, their working conditions inside the mills, the operation of the jute mills. Although mine is a historical research and solely based on the archival sources and not associated with the field-work in jute-mills, as the knowledge of the past is not always in contrasts with the understanding of the present and historical problems are not completely disassociated with those of the present, the visualization of the present jute-mills helped me to endure Collingwoodian “historical imagination”. Moreover, the historical importance of the jute industry in colonial economy made its appearance more relevant to me than the other contemporary organized industries like cotton or sugar. Bengal jute was such a product which was enable to easily suppress the Scottish one and was the only indigenous industry which got backing from the British Parliament who crushed their native jute industry of Dundee and made Bengal the ‘juteopolis’. The international demand for jute for the packaging materials and the collective British monopoly over this industry had made it more significant than the other contemporary industries. As Dipesh Chakraborty has argued that probably the ‘mercantilist’ attitude of the British Government was mostly reflected in the case of jute industry. The technological and managerial supervision also reached its peak in the jute mills. The abundance of migratory up-country labourers, labour-surplus situation, distinctive circulatory pattern of migration, particular vibrant composition of the jute-mill workforce, discriminatory gendered division of labour and the ‘slumification’ of the working-class families in and around the radius of the coolie-lines put this industry most distinctive and socio-economically significant amongst the other organized industrial sectors. . In the mid 19th century Bengal mills were run by the native labourers, but in the later part of the century due to up-country men’s migration

it had turned into a labour-receiving and not a labour-supplying province. During famines or flood there was a temporary over-supply of labour in Bengal. The flow of labour varied according to the type of harvest in labour-supplying areas. The Census Report of Bengal for 1921 (part 1), paragraph 99, distinguished five types of migration: a) casual migration due to short moves continually taking place between adjacent areas; b) temporary migration due to business journeys, pilgrimages and the like; c) periodic migration, arising from seasonal causes, such as harvests; d) semi-permanent migration, when persons reside and earn their living in one place but retain their home and family connections in another; and e) permanent migration, when, for various causes, families were settled in permanent areas other than their home districts. The migration of industrial labour fell within the last three classes, and migration was caused by seasonal demands for labour of which most was agricultural in character. The chief industry utilizing labour of this class was jute-baling. The children along with their families joined the floating labour of jute industry and constituted the most vulnerable class in the flexible labour market. As Ranajit Dasgupta has argued that the historical context of the emergence and growth of an industrial class in India as well as the creation of the labour market structure was characterized by the appearance and growth of the capitalist industrial organization and methods without 'dynamic industrialization'. Three major migration streams of labour migration happened in the western districts of Bihar, the adjoining eastern districts of the then United Provinces and two Orissa districts to Calcutta and the surrounding areas for employment in jute mills and other factories.

IMMIGRATION AREAS	HOOGHLY	HOWRAH	24 PARGANAS	CALCUTTA	TOTAL
BIHAR DIST.-					
PATNA	5013	6160	12333	19989	43497
GAYA	4802	5612	13986	38083	62483
SHAHABAD	3407	7324	20672	16068	47471
MONGHYR	3506	3802	15458	15947	38713
SARAN	10477	6562	24768	10331	52138
MUZAFFARPUR	4677	4018	11682	14656	35033
DARBHANGA	1908	2572	5436	7793	17709
U.P.-					
BALIA	3204	9082	9712	3491	25489
GHAZIPUR	2779	4586	16631	7065	31061
BENARAS	1912	3179	8515	10948	24554
AZAMGARH	2115	3598	12458	5753	23924
ORISSA DIST.-					
CUTTACK	8995	16571	37472	31720	94758
BALASORE	3864	6134	13785	12131	35914

Source: Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931.

The reason behind choosing this specific period is that during this time children were rapidly employed in the jute manufacturing factories. 1880s was the period when this industry was developing rapidly and the migrated rural children joined the ‘floating labour’ of the flexible labour market of jute industry. 1930 was the time when jute industry faced a slump and following 1922 regulation child labour became prohibited in India. But in Bengal it was in the 1930s that, owing to the advent of high-speed spinning machine, the requirement of children became obsolete in the jute mills.

I’ve tried to answer the following questions through this study:

1) How the recruitment of the children by the jobbers was carried out, the causality behind a direct pool of child labour from the working class families themselves, how the migrated rural children were transformed into factory workers thus entering into the class of ‘urban poor’, the strategic role of family as a site of social reproduction would be some of my prior research questions.

2) The research-purpose is to analyse the above-mentioned problematics through tracing the specific conditions created by the colonial govt. to exploit the labour-power for profit maximization. The introduction to machineries didn’t lighten the physical burden of the worker, to increase its production the colonial employers not only maintained the pre-technological modes of exploitation but also invented novel ways of this exploitative process to keep the cycle of capitalist production going. The very practice of child labour is uneconomic in any economic system because it stunts the development of the future stakeholders of that economy.

3) The study will also focus on the ‘age of employment debate’ in factory labour commissions on the issues like what should be the ideal age for the children to work in the factories, and the ‘ideal’ working hours for them etc.

4) Why did the question of the provision of the elementary education to the child workers became a grave concern in the executive or legislative commissions of labour would be analysed by me.

5) Another problematic which would be addressed by me in this regard is the differentiation between the categories of children and the young persons in the official documentation. Although the quantitative difference was meagre in the terms of age or work-experiences, there was definitely shown a significant amount of qualitative change in the strategic position of a child when elevated to the position of a young person. Sometimes they were also called paradoxically in the factory reports as ‘immature adults’ thus falling in a grey area in between the working children and the working adults.

6) I’ve planned to focus in my study to show how children’s sexual body became mechanized and a site of contestation in terms of their efficiency of production and how their bodies became the sole criterion of their recruitment in the factories with the certification of ‘physical fitness’.

7) How colonial ‘protective’ legislations through their ‘disciplinary mechanism’ attempted to produce ‘docile bodies’ within the factory space is a major area of my research. I would like to analyse whether the ‘colonial gaze’ was muddled by the ‘adult gaze’ which continuously found in the children’s bodies the quintessential appropriateness of performing certain kinds of jobs like doffing or spinning.

8) Child labourers' societal background, wage-rate pattern, health, mortality rate , working conditions inside the factory and living pattern would be some of my major focus areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

To counteract the above-stated problems, I've adopted here a feminist qualitative research method which seems to take a socio-historical stance. This study requires a critical engagement with archives which has been perceived by Foucault as "documents of exclusion" and "monuments to particular configurations of power" (Burton, Antoinette, 2003). Although the quantitative informations and statistical inferences from the Factory Commission reports, Foreign reports of the Royal Commission on Labour, official documents of Judicial, Police, Legislative and Commerce Branches and Miscellaneous Reports of Home Department, District Gazetteers, Imperial Gazetteer, Census Reports, sociological industrial survey reports and others would establish the theoretical presuppositions on a empirical ground, the dependence on the quantitative method would have caused its ahistoricism as it would reduce the agency of the child labour to a 'quantifiable variable.' Rather, the historical contextualization of children in the colonial factories must be done within a feminist paradigm of research to theorize their existential experiences and socio-economic locations in a colonial setting. Situating the researcher on a strong anti imperialist-anti capitalist-feminist standpoint, the methodology of this study would take a relativist position in exploring the heterogenous character of colonial exploitation and regulatory mechanisms. As the main motto of this study is to do away with the historical invisibleness of the child

labour, adopting the feminist qualitative research ethics would validate the objectives of this research. According to Peter Kirby, any study of child labour in history must begin with an assessment of the limitations of the primary evidence upon which our knowledge is based. The colonial official archives were manufactured in such way that all the social surveys especially the censuses used to take into account the occupations of the adult males proficiently, the working women and children remained unnoticed, invisible and unacknowledged. Thus, a large section of the native population got unnoticed in these partial and biased accounts. The informalization of the children workforce and the casual nature of their work and wage-rate consciously done by the colonial Government led to disregard their work as being any 'occupation' in its Home or Judicial Branches' files. In the colonial process of knowledge production there is no paucity of quantitative evidence on the Indian children in the factories, but these quantitative materials were manoeuvred in such a way that only the certain things in a certain way which were intended to be shown by the colonial government would appear to the readers. The colonial enumeration on the certain indigenous communities produced certain facts against them that perhaps led to the most distortion of the factual realities against certain communities. These factors are seriously a great hindrance in front of the researcher to produce a historical account based on 'truth' and 'objectivity'. Though this project follows a feminist paradigm and feminist epistemological orientation vouches against these much nuanced terms 'truth' and 'objectivity' (it believes in the 'death of truth' and Haraway's 'partial objectivity'), being solely a historical study it had to bear the structuralist framework of 'historical truth' and 'factual objectivity'. Perhaps feminist methodology doesn't contrast with 'historical objectivity', rather with the 'scientific objectivity'. To quote Peter Novick who said "At

the very center of the professional historical venture is the idea and ideal of ‘objectivity’”, it can be followed from him that:

“The principal elements of the idea (of objectivity) are well known and can be briefly recapitulated. The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and, above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are ‘found’, not ‘made’.....The objective historian’s role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge; it must never degenerate into that of an advocate or, even worse, propagandist. The historian’s conclusions are expected to display the standard judicial qualities of balance and evenhandedness.”¹³

This quotation containing all the flaws of structuralist method doesn’t support my thesis in every aspect. Like the phrases that truth is not perspectival and historian’s disinterestedness would justify its objectivity stand in sharp contrast with my political standpoint of being a anti-imperialist and feminist. But this standpoint didn’t lead to the distortion of the facts, rather helped the researcher to produce a colonial history more critically and analytically through a judgemental lens which haven’t hampered the embodiment of the past happenings. One distinctive feature of the colonial official archives is that the facts in those archives don’t “speak for themselves”, rather speak for their

¹³ See Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, *Historiography in the Modern World*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016.

manufactures. These documents being so “epistemologically prejudiced” and metaphysically partial that the particular feminist and anti-capitalist optical system of the reader can only justify to the historical truth of colonized people’s history. This specific political standpoint hasn’t created any stumbling block in front of the construction of a ‘truly historical’ account, rather particular moral and ethical undertone of this method has legitimized the problematizations of this historical context. The feminist undertone of this research obviates the very word ‘method’, rather in favour of using the word ‘perspective’. The using of the archival sources didn’t led the researcher towards a ‘positivist empiricism’, rather this research is solely based on the ‘feminist empiricism’ which is more likely to favour qualitative data and doesn’t deny the epistemic authority of the subordinate groups. It doesn’t supports the fixed, basic, theory-neutral justification like the positivist empiricism and has followed a feminist inquisitive ‘sight’ throughout this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Indian labour history suffers from the dearth of literature on the child labour, I’d like to analyse the significant books of labour history which have influenced my writing to some extent. In this context I’d also discuss the labour historiography in India because I have learned writing labour history after reviewing and critically analyzing those books and the pattern of labour history in India till now.

The growing interest in the field of labour history is not an emerging field, rather a much older historiographical trend in India. Dwarakanath Ganguly’s ‘Slavery in British Dominion’, ‘Plantation Labour in India’ by Rajanikanta Das or the books by Sukomal Sen on the working class movement in India had already set the trend. But the first breakthrough in

the labour history research were the books - Rajani Palme Dutt's 'India Today', Radhakamal Mukherjee's 'The Indian Working Class' and Maurice D. Maurice's 'The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills'. But these all were empirical research. To describe the labourers' socio-economic conditions they were based on statistical evidences and social surveys and primarily isolated from the larger framework of the colonial capitalism. The other writings on the Indian labourers generally reflected two broader issues: (a) to describe the formation and evolution of the trade-unions and (b) to describe the details of labour movements and strikes. Although in the writings of both liberal and Marxist scholars, the socio-economic condition of the labourers had occupied a major space, their trend was trade-union centric. V.B.Karnik's 'Strikes in India' and 'Indian Trade Unions: A Survey' follow this trend.

Between 1920s and 1940s two main trends in the labour history were followed: the first was the colonial discourse on labour formulated and developed in various official reports and the writings of colonial official-scholars. The second was the discourse on labour evolved by Indian intellectuals and social reformers opposed to the colonial rule. But these discourses were mainly the accounts of the adult male labourers of the formal large scale industries. A kind of exclusionist research trend had hampered the very motto of accounting the labourers' existence. The elimination of the gendered division of labour in the Indian industries had caused a subsistent cognition gap in the labour history literature.

Along with the pathbreaking researches of E.P.Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm the pattern of labour history in India got new dimension and with conceptual clarifications it inclined more towards the Marxist tradition of labour history in the 1960s. The notions of historical

materialism, dialectical materialism, production system, production relations, means of production and its relations with class and class struggle formed a critical juncture at which the labour history in India got a new dimension and meaning. From this time the larger framework of industrial economy and colonial capitalism were brought into the fore of the labour research. Colonialism, western modernity, political development, economic determinism were some of the key words in the labour history field during this time. The multiple identities of class, gender, politics of identity, constant proletarianization of the workers emerged as significant explanatory tools during this period. The detailed archival exploratory research revealed a new horizon in the research methodology of the labour history research. There also emerged at times the complex and conflictual contradictions in the definition of the term 'proletariat'. The formulation of the class of 'pure proletariat' was analysed through the dialectics between the means of production and the means of subsistence. There are various stratified fields in the process of being and becoming the urban proletariat class in which the labour circulation system played a crucial role in the transitional phase of a pre-capitalist and capitalist mode of production. The works of Nirmala Banerjee, Radha Kumar, Mukul Mukherjee analyzes significant milestones in this field. Marxist trend of labour historiography must be seen within the problematic paradigm of the dialectic relationship between the subjectivity and the workers' class-struggle. As Marx has claimed, "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past".

In the 1980s, with the formation of the 'new labour history' bearing the subaltern and gender twists it founded new theoretical paradigms of labour history in India. This

paradigmatic shift formed a critical juncture in which turned upside down the research orientation of the labour history. The pathbreaking book of Dipesh Chakrabarty 'Rethinking Working Class History' in 1989 focused on the cultural aspect of the jute-mill workers' lives instead of the material one. He has raised the question of the very utility of the orthodox Marxist approach in analyzing the conditions of the factory workers. He has proposed rethinking in this sphere. The interconnectedness among the notion of 'non-class', collective identity and social identity of the workers, emergent class-consciousness of the workers in a colonial capitalistic background, the deviance of the attention from imperialism, colonialism and capitalism to culture and consciousness have been some distinctive theoretical propositions espoused by him in this book. It facilitates a transitional paradigm while ignoring the role of the state and emphasizing the role of culture in the lives of the industrial labourers in the jute industry.

The classic work of Samita Sen brought a significant breakthrough in the labour history research through the long-needed and much desired analysis of the problematic relationship between gender and class. The women workers in jute industry in the late colonial India has formed the pivotal character in her research. The social stratification through the hierarchies of class and gender had relegated the female labourers in the industry 'underpaid', 'unpaid', 'unskilled' and 'underproductive'. The ideological construction of women in the colonial India had reduced the position of the women both inside the factory and family by portraying them only 'mothers' and 'wives'. The feminization of the labour force got transformed into the female-exclusionary workforce in the later period thus reducing their importance in the industry. According to her, "from the 1950s, the unions played an active role in eliminating existing women and hindering women's recruitment".

Leela Fernandes in her work has conducted an ethnographic study based on one jute mill in Calcutta and has focused on the problematic of gendered identity of the workers rather than on their class identity. She has shown how the participation of the women workers got reduced to only two percent in the post-independence India from the thirty percent in colonial India. She emphasizes on the role of the trade unions, mill authorities and male workers in excluding women from the wage-work and relegating them to the subjugating sphere of the household labour.

One striking work on the jute-mill labourers is the research of Parimal Ghosh. His main proposition is that the history of the jute mill workers is the imagery of a evolutionary history devoid of any fixed or unilinear theoretical framework. The social background of the rural labourers who got migrated from the from the agricultural society to the urban industrial society and joined the flexible market of the floating and unskilled labourers form the crux of his study. He argues that the interconnectedness between the rural and urban labourers gave birth to both the class consciousness and community consciousness among the workers. Unlike Europe, they didn't emerge as a distinctive homogenized class. The unique connectedness between the agricultural and urban labourers was atypical of the colonial Indian working class. In this sphere, the joint role of the colonial state and the mill managers worked in mutual collaboration in the Bengal jute industry.

Ranajit Dasgupta has attempted to figure out the labour market structure and the supply of labour in the plantation, mines and factory industry. He has analysed the socio-economic background of the jute mill labourers from different caste, class and religious sections on the basis of his research on the census reports and factory inspector's report.

Last but not the least, I'd review the work of Subho Basu on the Bengal jute industry. He argues in his research that the unique feature of the Indian working class was its attachment with the rural society which caused the nature of the labour movements in India as 'aporadic and temporary'. The chronological framework of his research is from 1890 to 1937. He has tried to show the labour politics, nationalist politics and the colonial politics amongst the Bengal jute mill workers. He emphasizes on the 'action from below' on the part of the militant and organized labourers against the imperialism. He took on the municipal records and argues how the organized labourers reacted against the colonial state in the specific historical moments. Based on western model he analysed the inherent communitarian characteristics in constructing the broader framework of the class-politics.

CHAPTERIZATION:

The first chapter focuses on the conditions of children inside the jute manufacturing factories and the colonial dubiousness in propagating 'welfarist measures' in the form of protectionist legislations. I have argued here the specific colonialist policies and the perceptions of the mill managers clearly expresses the falsified justification of the imperial government in pursuing paternalistic attitude. Through factual witnesses from the mill managers, factory owners, mill supervisors, mill surgeons and civil surgeons this chapter explores how the maneouvered legislative intervention of the state led to the diabolical exploitation of the factory children. Using the politics of ageism and propagating the children's 'nimbleness' as the most productive element in maximizing capitalist profit, the crux of this chapter is based on the internal arrangement of the factories and colonial attitude towards the children. The dilemma of the colonial state regarding the children's

recruitment pattern, working hours, working-age, wage-rates, holidays and various processes of certifying their age have been accounted in this chapter.

The second chapter highlights the problematic of working-class homes and families and their impact on the children. Research into the historic social structure and the household economy has shown how the very coherence of family life often depended upon the children. From this perspective this chapter attempts to explore the politics of colonial discourse on the materiality of working-class homes and the children. It analyzes the 'special treatment' of the labourers' households by the colonial state and the transformed gendered division of labour with the advent of an industrial society. How the family members of the working class homes entered the labour-force of the factories and in the form of wage-labour brought market to the home have formed major issues in my analysis. The construction of the coolie-lines, the mechanism of management of the working-class homes by the government through the intermediaries, sanitary system and the dilapidated condition of those bustees which led to the slumfication, the specific diseases suffered from by the child labourer, infantile mortality due to the unhygienic conditions inside the homes and factories are some areas of importance in this chapter.

The third chapter ventures to explore the problematic relationship between the three C's: Children, Capitalism and Colonialism. Starting with some theoretical propositions on the labour, capitalism and colonialism this chapter moves through the intricacies of the social reproduction theory, Industrial time and discipline, composition of the jute mill labour-force, the imperial attitude towards the factory child's education, the nuanced relationship between the British Parliament and British Indian Government regarding the 'protectionist'

policy formulations against the special classes of labour and last but not the least, the pivotal role played by the sirdars in mediating between the children labourers and the factory managers and their indomitable negotiation with capitalism through maintaining distinctive alliance with colonialism.

Chapter One

CHILD LABOUR AND THE COLONIAL POLITICS OF PROTECTIONISM

As Lieutenant-Colonel C.R.M. Green, the Civil Surgeon of 24 Parganas stated that “there always is a large number of children in the jute mills”¹ substantiate the fact that there was a constant supply of children in the jute-mill workforce. Apart from the recruitment of the children by the jobbers by various means there was a direct pool of child labour from the working class families themselves living within the radius around the jute mills. Colonialism’s essentialist and exclusionist policies bracketed women and children as the ‘special classes of labour’ and through the continuous process of colonial knowledge production and their certain categorization led to the compartmentalization of women and children workers in the factory labour-force thus making them ‘eligible’ for protectionist measures of the government. How these protectionist measures constructed a colonial mechanism to subjugate the “special classes of labourers” more by making them vulnerable and susceptible to the mill managers and factory supervisors can be discerned from the

¹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908)*, London, Retrieved from House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2006, p.236.

empirical establishment of this chapter. The manager of the Hastings Jute Mill, Rishra² opined that, “a child in India is well able to look after him or herself, and is far better employed in a well-lighted and ventilated jute mill than in running about outside doing mischief. Children at this age in India, are far more advanced than in the United Kingdom, and are not to be compared with the latter at all. If the age limit is raised, it will entail a heavy loss to the parents, with no ultimate good whatever to the children. I should say that certificates of both age and physical fitness should not be required before children are allowed to work in a jute mill. The overseer in charge can pretty well judge for himself as to their physical condition...It is not necessary to have a law that children should only be employed in sets, as they are at present employed in jute mills in sets or squads, and there is no need of any change. Millowners should not be burdened by providing education for children in their works. If such a law was brought into force, it would mean that mills were educating children and throwing them into all our large towns as babus or clerks with a small smattering of education, large enough to give them the idea that manual labour was not good enough for them. We have any number like this at present, who would sooner starve than take any other but babu’s work. It is this class who would strengthen the ranks of our Swadeshi Bengalis”.

The Factories Act of 1881 in India prohibited the employment of children less than seven years of age.³ In 1891, this age was raised to 9 years and in 1948, to 15

² Ibid, pp. 277-78.

³ Parimal, Ghosh, *Colonialism, Class and a History of the Calcutta Jute Millhands 1880-1930*, Sangam Books Ltd, 2000, p. 146.

years. Similarly, the Act of 1881 prohibited successive employment in two factories on the same day. It provided for a nine-hour day at most, with four holidays a month for children working in factories.⁴ In 1891, working hours, working hours were reduced to seven and night employment between 8 P.M. and 5 A.M. was forbidden for children. In 1911, the prohibition of work at night was increased from 7 p.m. to 5.30 a.m. and the working day for children was reduced from seven to six hours with a half-hour rest after five and a half hours.⁵ But these “sufficient” legislations could be proved sufficient only if they were properly implemented. It often appeared like flouting the laws by the mill managers in employing children and the indirect support of the govt. in it only ensured the protection of production in the advanced capitalist country from a larger supply of cheap labour.

In the report of Indian Factory Labour commission of 1908 there an attempt had been made to define the terms ‘excessive hours’ and ‘working hours’ to indicate the occurrences where the labourers actually worked in a day for a period exceeding 12 hours⁶. The period of the working hours generally appeared to be counted excluding the interval period which was supposed to be of a definitely fixed nature. But the ‘excessive hours’ included that ascertained interval period also. In all the jute mills, as observed by the commission, the spinning and weaving community which constituted the bulk of children and women labour worked for that excessive hours. The jute mills generally worked from 5 A.M. to 8 P.M. without any interlude.⁷

⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Evidence* (1908), London, Retrieved from House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2006, pp. 9, 11-13.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 67.

⁶ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 235.

⁷ *East India (Factories) Report* (1891), London, Retrieved from House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2005, pp. 9-13.

YEAR

HOURS PER DAY

1898	13.91
1809	14.03
1900	13.87
1901	13.50
1902	14.25
1903	14.10
1905	14.52
1906	13.35
1907	14.44
1908	15.34

Table 1. showing the average working hours per day of the children in the jute manufacturing factories. Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Evidence* (1908), London, Retrieved from House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2006, p. 244.

Some times the spinners were called for Sunday work for the purpose of machinery-cleaning because it required many hands to clean-up⁸. On those Sundays the children along

⁸ *Indian Factories Act*, Act XV of 1881 and Act XI of 1891, Sections 5,6,7, Legislative Department, Government of India; *Indian Factories Act* 1891, Sections 5,7,9.

with the adult male labours worked half-day but got a full day's wage. So the working class parents forced to send them to the factories even on Sunday despite the presence of the legal rule of giving compulsory holiday on that day especially to the women and child labour⁹. But how the operatives were actually carried out and the shifts were arranged within the mills were found to be somewhat more complex than the situation in the other mills.

“...but it is admitted that in certain mills constant endeavours are made, when the conditions of the labour market permit of this, to “crib time”, and in such cases the factory may run from 4.30 A.M. TO 8.30 P.M. . The workers, except in the weaving and sewing departments , are divided into a number of shifts, the hours of work of each shift being arranged so that each worker has an interval of at least two hours- or else is entirely free-at the the time when he takes his principal meal.... The weavers must, however, all be present at the opening and closing of the mill; and they are therefore on duty ordinarily for 15 hours a day , or where “time-cribbing” is resorted to , their actual employment may extend to 16 hours a day. No regular midday interval is given in any of the jute mills, and the machinery is never stopped between the starting and closing times.”¹⁰

⁹ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, pp. 221-25.

¹⁰ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), London, Retrieved from House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2006, p. 9.

MILL NAME	MEN	WOMEN	CHILDREN
UNION MILL	2482	385	376
STANDARD MILL	3160	672	564
CLIVE MILL	4467	961	935
DALHOUSIE MILL	2035	558	415
LAWRENCE MILL	2374	107	608

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 281.

The commission found that in Calcutta 15 percent of the working children were employed as 'half-timers'. And in the jute mills specifically the proportion of under-age children i.e. children under nine years of age comprised of 30 to 40 percent of the total half-timer workforce¹¹. It was admitted by the mill manager as evident from the report that the proportion of children under nine years of age was probably about 25 percent of the total workforce.¹² In the Bengal cotton mills among 1057 of the children employed on full-time

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 4-17.

¹² Ibid.

work as being over 14 years of age there were 404 of them being under that age¹³. In the case of the jute mills the children were sent for certification of physical fitness before being employed. In many times their actual age got adulterated and there was much difference between their actual age and the number written in their official certificates, also sometimes there happened to be underestimation of their age when they actually began work as half-timers. The children who were supposed to be full-timers were generally engaged without medical examination and as there was a huge demand for children and young adults to work on the spinning frames, the tendency was to employ all comers who can possibly be regarded as over 14 years¹⁴. Children working in the mills were also placed on full-time as soon as they were in the opinion of the mill manager, able to work for the whole day. How the children were maltreated at the time of recruitment flouting the existing laws on the factory labours was unveiled by the confessions made by the mill managers during factory inspection. One manager stated that he did not send children to the doctor to be certified prior to employment as he had an acute suspicion that most of them would probably be rejected due to unfitness¹⁵. Another manager admitted the mills had made no change and alterations in their system consequent on the amendment of the Factory Law in 1891¹⁶. No attention had been paid to the provisions raising the age limits of children from seven to nine and from twelve to fourteen. The employment of children on full-time, and the working of under-age children were the most serious abuses regarding

¹³ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 64.

¹⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), pp. 43-44.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

child labour in the jute mills. The children where they were employed for half-time only were frequently required to work for seven hours continuously without any interval or rest and one manager who adopted this system claimed that it was a sufficient compliance with the law if half an hour's interval were given to the half-timers before they began work, or after they finished it¹⁷. Mr. Andrew Small¹⁸, manager of the Lower Hooghly Jute Mills at Buddertollah asserted that, “ as half-timers only work for 6 hours a day, I do not consider a medical certificate as to fitness at all necessary...Non working children should be prohibited from accompanying workers, unless the mill has a nursery with capable women at large”. Here, the mention of non-working children meant too little children who used to come with their mother and laid on the shopfloor under the supervision of their working mother albeit in a very unhygienic condition. It was not a rare picture in the mills of jute industry that the mothers operating heavy machines carrying babies with them (Sen, 1999). The mill authority considered this type of occurrence hampering the productivity output of the mothers having diverted their attention to their children. So the government soon prohibited the working women to carry with them children unless they were of the ‘working-class age’.

The physique of the children examined in the jute manufacturing factories were in general of poor condition, thin and the living pattern was unhygienic. Child labour as distinct from the physical condition in which the adult labours worked, not only made the children suffer from jute dermatitis but also working in a static posture for a long time caused hindrance to their normal growth, rendered the child stunted and reduced the life-

¹⁷ East India (Factories) Report (1891), London, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 312.

span of them considerably¹⁹. In the Ganges Valley Bone Mill of Uttarpara, there were employed 200 men, 45 women, 12 boys and 2 girls²⁰. The children were employed in cleaning bone sinews assisted their parents in other works also. They were recruited mostly from the *chamar* class and their wages ranged from rs. 8 to rs. 15 a month²¹. Each crushing machine had a fan which carried the dust into the dust chamber, where it settled and the air escaped²². Even the children used to suffer frequently from anthrax, blood poisoning and poisoned fingers²³. The children working in the cotton mills lived in a far more precarious condition. Owing to the prevalence of abuses like the working of half-time children for full time, the employment of children under age, the neglect to give regular intervals and the regular flouting of the norm of legal working hours deeply affected the general health and physique of the children. As Lieutenant-colonel Mactaggart²⁴ had noted, “young persons are just those who are likely to suffer permanently from the effects of overwork, even for a limited period. They are also the persons most likely to be driven to working for long hours than they wish to work, and in any case they are, owing to want of experience, incapable of judging what is good for them.” As the act of doffing required constant labour and the children were employed as “suitable doffers”²⁵, was indeed a hard work for a child of 9 years of age and their miserable health condition owed much to this doffing. The factory labour inspectors repeatedly alluded to the perfect appropriation of the children in this act. Men were not capable of doing doffing work so quickly and expertly as

¹⁹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), pp. 23-30.

²⁰ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), 252.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 60.

²⁵ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), pp. 231-53.

children. Also, male labours didn't agree to take up a job that was considered typically for the children worker and thus considering it inferior, unskilled and not worthy to do it. In the jute mills the doffing work was very hard, all the apparatus dealt with were heavier than in cotton spinning, and the children were ordered to do with the utmost speed, as the spindles filled very quickly²⁶ the doffing was done much more continuously and laboriously in the jute factories than in the cotton mills. The doffers worked in rooms full of loud noisy machineries, scarcely ventilated, and frequently excessive hot²⁷. In Bengal 10-12 percent of the total children workforce were employed as doffers in the jute spinning mills, in the Bombay cotton mills this number rose to 23 percent and in Madras it was about 20 percent in average²⁸. They were attached to a squad numbering 14 children, under a sirdar and this set had to doff bobbins from the spinning frame, a certain number of frames being allotted to each set, according to the size spun²⁹. The doffing process generally lasted 25 minutes, after which the children 'rested' about for 10 to 12 minutes, so that out of a total of 7 hours' attendance they used to take rest for about two hours according to the official estimation³⁰. The factory inspector visited the mill every quarter and examined the children appointed since his previous visit and any precautionary measures suggested by the inspectors for fencing the machineries were rarely carried out by the mill managers³¹.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 249.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), pp. 6-11.

³¹ General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, Proceedings-A, No. 1-44, May 1894, (West Bengal State Archives).

ARRANGEMENT OF WORKING IN THE FACTORY

ADULTS

MALE OR FEMALE	COMMENCING HOUR	CLOSING HOUR	PERIOD OF SHIFT	TOTAL HOURS	WORKING
A. Squad	5 AM	8 AM	3 HOURS	9 HOURS	
	9 AM	3 PM	6 HOURS		
B. Squad	5 AM	9 AM	4 HOURS	11 HOURS	
	12 AM	3 PM	3 HOURS		
C. Squad	4 PM.	8 PM	4 HOURS	10 HOURS	
	9 AM	2 PM	5 HOURS		
D. Squad	3 PM	8 PM	5 HOURS	11 HOURS	
	5 PM	9 AM	4 HOURS		
	5 AM	12 AM	2 HOURS		
	10 AM	8 PM	5 HOURS		
	3 PM				

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Source: Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908), p. 241.

CHILDREN

BOYS OR GIRLS	COMMENCING HOUR	CLOSING HOUR	PERIOD OF SHIFT	TOTAL WORKING HOURS
<u>A.</u> Squad	5 AM	9 AM	4 HOURS	7 HOURS
	12 AM	3 PM	3 HOURS	
<u>B.</u> Squad(1)	9 AM	12 AM	3 HOURS	7 HOURS
	3 PM	5 PM	2 HOURS	
<u>C.</u> Squad(2)	6 PM	8 PM	2 HOURS	7 HOURS
	9 AM	12 AM	3 HOURS	
	3 PM	6 PM	3 HOURS	
	7 PM	8 PM	1 HOUR	

Source: Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908), p. 241.

While making provisions of the protectionist measures against the “class of young persons”, women and children the colonial government always took the pursuit of ‘economic’ and ‘humanitarian’³² grounds. Economic in the sense that they continuously kept on surveying and experimenting the effect of varying working hours of different classes of factory labours on the productivity of the mills. They went on to survey whether the decrease in the working time of the special classes of labour i.e. women children and young class would led to a decrease in the production output of the factories. The ‘humanitarian’ grounds formulated proposals like to distinguish a class of ‘young persons’, to comprise all young adults between the ages of 14 and 17, with working hours limited to 12 in a day, the reduction of the working hours of children from the official ‘7 hours’ to 6 hours , the prohibition of the employment of “young persons”, women and children before 5.30 A.M. or after 7 P.M., the substitution of a compulsory interval after six hours’ continuous work³³. Official records unfailingly shows that the state’s ‘protectionist benevolent’ attitude went on to reflect in their labour policies and legal interventions where they states that it was the foremost duty of the state to protect the the class of “immature adults”³⁴ who was unable to protect itself effectively and incapable of judging what was good for them. The question of the formation of a class of ‘young persons’ had been raised by the Textile Factory Labour Committee of 1906, and by the Indian Factory Commission of 1890³⁵. The factory commission of 1890 which was presided over Surgeon-Major Lethbridge³⁶, was

³² East India (Factories) Report (1891), London, p. 10.

³³ Ibid, pp. 7-16.

³⁴ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 78.

³⁵ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidences* (1908), p. 242.

³⁶ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 47.

opposed to the creation of a class intermediate between children and full-time workers, on the ground that the members of such a class would be squeezed out of industrial employment if their hours “were restricted by law to any period between full-time and half-time work”. In the new provision of 1908 it was made that children who have worked as half-timers should be permitted to enter the young persons class without further medical examination, when the medical certificates obtained by them prior to their admission as half-timers show that they had attained the age of 14 years³⁷. The Factory Commission of 1890 considered it unnecessary to impose any restrictions as to hours of labour on persons over 14 years, as in India children of that age were frequently beginning to assume the responsibilities of family life³⁸. One strong vindication upon which the colonial factory inspectors proposed to keep the age limits of children to remain unaltered was that as Indian working class parents desired their children to become wage-earners at the earliest possible moment, if the minimum age limit for the employment of children in factories were increased then the children would be forced to perform other more laborious jobs than in the factory settings and work until they had attained the age qualifying them for factory employment³⁹.

In the Calcutta jute mills the children were required to be at the mill by 5 A.M., and they had frequently to walk two or three miles before arriving there⁴⁰. In 1908, the President of ‘Indian Labour Union’, Mr. Aswinikumar Bandyopadhyay presented a few labourers from the Budgebudge Jute Mill to the members of ‘Indian Factory Labour

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 41-47.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Evidence* (1908), London.

⁴⁰ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 6.

Commission'⁴¹. From the statement of Kirtibas Mondal, Gopalsang Barui, Bipinchandra Bairagi, Loku Ramjan and others it was known that the main factor behind the poor health of the labourers was the excessive working hours in the suffocating and polluted environment of the factories from which even the children were not being spared. Coming from the pure natural environment of the villages, their health couldn't adjust to the industrial urban space⁴². This was also the reason of their absenteeism of which the European staffs used to do mockery and argued against increasing the wages of these 'lazy' people. Those workers also stated that:

“The operatives are mostly Bengalis living in surrounding villages up to 3 or 4 miles off. The first warning whistle is blown at 3 A.M. Enquiry showed that a half-timer, a child of not more than 7 years, selected by the commission at random, had to leave his home every morning at 4 A.M. and walk 2 miles to the mill.”⁴³

The children were employed in a “split set” system i.e. they worked for about half the total time in the morning, and then, after an interval of three hours, completed their remaining portion of their seven hours in the afternoon⁴⁴. This second part of the system led to the evasion of the law. The original legal working hours for women, children, and the 'young persons' was fixed at 5.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. But the opinions given by various mill managers expose the fact that this legal rule was being flouted to such an extent i.e. women and children worked so long in the second set in the night, that frequently they

⁴¹ See *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Evidence* (1908), London, p. 278; *Evidence of Witnesses* No. 192 and 193.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), pp. 56-57.

used to stay in the mill to get accompanied to their homes by their male relatives since Indian traditional culture always vouches for the “bodily safety” of the vulnerable sections like women and children through securing themselves with the ‘masculine’ protection of the familial boundary. The mill managers were of the view that, “where a woman’s husband and children are employed with her, we must let her leave the mill at convenient hours to enable her to prepare meals for the family. *If we do not show this leniency we run the risk of losing the whole family.*”⁴⁵ (italics mine). Most of the managers were against of raising the minimum age at which children were allowed to work in factories beyond nine, because many of girl labourers were married at the age of ten. According to the official estimation , the total period of absence of the children from their homes exceeded 14.5 hours and for women it was even longer. In the descriptive words of Gopal Ghosh:

“Inhuman labour-condition, excessive toil, unusually long hours of work and incredibly meagre wages were the lot of workers at that time in the mills and factories...But the very long hours of work were heavy on the workers. Generally ‘sun rise to sun set’ was the working period. The poor workers could never see the sunrise as they would have been in the factories before the sun was up. There was no limit to working hours and it could very well have been 14, 16, 18, or in some case 23 hours. There was no Sunday, no holiday, no starting or closing time.”⁴⁶

Mr. H.C.Streatfeild⁴⁷, the Representative of the government of Bengal stated that at the conclusion of one set’s shift the children were offered ‘bakhshish’ to stop on for another hour or so. This split-set system was strongly prevalent in the Calcutta jute mills and to

⁴⁵ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 264.

⁴⁶ Gopal Ghosh, *Indian Trade Union Movement*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, T.V.Publications, 1961, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁷ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908),pp. 56-57.

some extent in the cotton mills. In the oral statement of Mr. D.W.Melville⁴⁸, manager of the Upper Anglo-Indian Jute Mill in Kankinara it was expressed that the mill employed 2000 men, 500 women and 500 children: “The amended Act of 1891, a regards the ages for the employment of children, had never been enforced in Calcutta, and the children were as young and immature now as they were before the act was revised. An attempt was made by the factory inspector to enforce the Act, but this came to nothing; *for if the industry had had to wait until children of proper ages were obtainable, they would have had to close the mills. In order to keep the mills running, under-age children had to be employed. Twenty percent of the children in the mills were under nine years of age, but the percentage of full-timers under 14 years was not so large.*”⁴⁹ (italics mine)

MILL	MEN	WOMEN	CHILDREN
KAMARHATTY	4481	1042	992
KANKNARRAH	8968	1126	1547
TITTAGHUR	8560	2195	1644

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908).

⁴⁸ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 277.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

There was a separate register in Form E under rule 24 of the rules under section 18 of the Factories Act⁵⁰ which was supposed to record all the names and other particulars of children admitted to employment in the Bengal factories. But in reality, that register skipped the names and details of many employed children who used to be under the official legal age. This act served two kind of purposes, one, the mill managers could easily dupe the factory inspectors who used to rely more on the written evidences than their own eyes witnessing the under-aged children working in the factories and secondly, the more under-aged hands could be employed ‘illegally’, the more would be the profit of that specific mill and also less official and moral obligations towards those “unrecognized” children. The undocumented children couldn’t even avail the minimum protectionist measures provided by the government to protect the ‘special class’ and thus were prone to be more vulnerable to the adults’ exploitation irrespective of the managers or adult workers especially the male ones.

In Khardah Jute Mill, Titagurh, in 1908 there were employed 7090 workers comprising 4781 adult males, 1207 females and 1102 children and according to the oral evidence put forward by the mill manager Mr. Thomas Burns for 1898-1907 the mill at Titagurh had worked 15 hours a day and during that period the working days had ranged from 303 in 1899 to 308.50 in 1902⁵¹. The manager admitted that his mill was not at par with the “economical working” of the jute mill i.e. was not in accordance with the governmental regulations regarding the length of the working day or provisioning welfare measures to the workers. His claims that the children workers in his mill were ‘healthy’ and stout and

⁵⁰ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, p. 83.

⁵¹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), pp. 253-72.

were properly looked after by the mill authority stand in contradiction with the increasing number of child-death in that area as found in the surveys of factory commission. One recurrent statement of the mill managers of Khardah, Kankinara or Fort Gloster Jute Mills was regarding their “disapproval” of constructing any special classification of the ‘young persons’ class among the labouring children⁵². The young people of India developed at an earlier age than the young people of the West, and were often married at the age that it was proposed to legislate for them. In their opinions, a fixed twelve hours’ day would mean working by one shift, and an enormous number of labourers would be thrown out of employment and if the “young persons” class were created, it would contain persons who were married, and they would be prevented from earning a full day’s wages for the support of their children. A reduction of hours would also mean a curtailment of the European staff, the members of which earned high wages⁵³. Situations in the jute industry in Calcutta were eagerly “sought after” by Dundee men as the excessive working hours with a rapid force of child workers were very ‘suitable’ for industrial production⁵⁴. The Civil Surgeon of the mills was the medical officer of the 24 Parganas and claimants said that he had only rejected about twelve children in ten years due to their ‘inappropriate’ ages⁵⁵. All new children were presented to him for examination. If a child was “well developed” she was placed on full time irrespective of age. The age qualification was disregarded so far as full-timers’ work was concerned⁵⁶. When the doctor paid his quarterly visit he could see the children in one shift then at work⁵⁷. He would consequently only see half the children

⁵² Ibid, 248.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 248-253.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908).

in the mill.⁵⁸ If facilities were provided for the daily inspection of children he usually had no objection to their having to obtain a certificate before commencing work. In the hot and humid weather of Bengal batches of children came down from up-country every day, and so nothing less than a daily inspection would suffice⁵⁹. The mill authorities used to keep the children's age-proof certificate. Thus the certification of children's age constituted one principal mechanism whereby exploitation in the jute industry was sustained. Part of the structure of this mechanism was embedded within the workplace itself, in the forms of fraudulence and corruption in hiding the children's correct age and keep the vicious cycle of recruiting under-age children as full-time workers undergoing. The major part, however consisted in the delicate way in which the structures of age certification were attached to the colonial politics of 'ageism' and in the segments of colonial regulatory structure whose porousness accelerated the in-built tendencies to evade the regulations.

The duty of certifying the ages of children, as well as the inspection of factories as regards sanitation, and the employment of women and children remained in the hands of Deputy Sanitary Commissioner under the Indian Medical Service. The process of certifying the children was as such- they were in the first instance was certified by the factory surgeon, and their names entered in a register, which was checked by the inspector in his last visit⁶⁰. A strong opinion against the construction of a 'young persons' class was that a youth of 16 was capable of taking care of himself as much as a grown-up man of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ East India (Factories) Report (1891), London, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

25⁶¹. How the official duty of certification was considered as an ‘imperial duty’ can be discerned from the fact that even if a single officer of the Indian Medical Service was employed as medical inspector, it was necessary to confine his duties to the examination for age⁶². Mr. H.T.S. Forrest, the Magistrate of Howrah stated that in the cases of employment of a child or converting a half-timer child to a full-timer ‘adult’ it was necessary to take bio-metric test in the form of thumb-impressions of the children⁶³. The fraudulent attitude of colonial government was masked in benevolent measures when they considered the urgent social issue of provisioning separate latrine accommodation for the child labourers should be insisted upon the “interests of morality”⁶⁴. Mr. Forrest witnessed many young and ‘under-sized’ children in the mills, and when he first came to Howrah he spoke about it to the then Civil Surgeon Colonel Gibbons, who said that there was no general evasion of the law, and so nothing further was done.⁶⁵ He had not attempted to make further investigations with a view to putting into force the provisions of the law relating to children, beyond talking to the Civil Surgeon on the subject⁶⁶. There had never been a prosecution of an owner or manager for employing a child under nine years. Moreover, these ‘under-sized’ children were never certified, thus the official recruitment of under-aged children was continuing within the purview of “paternal” government, but without any official documentation. Regarding the determination of the children’s age, there prevailed

⁶¹ See *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices (1908)*, Report and Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Consider The Working Of Factories in the Bombay Presidency, Bodleian Libraries material, University of Oxford.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908)*, p. 233.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

divergent opinions among the colonial officials. While Lieutenant-Colonel of Howrah, J.F.Drury⁶⁷ was in the favour of considering the children's general appearance and physique to be taken into account, Major W.D.Hayward,⁶⁸ the Police Surgeon of Calcutta to consider dentition to correctly estimate a child's age. While he held dentition as the primary determinant, didn't overlooked the factor of general appearance also. The dates of the general appearance of the teeth, were like the following⁶⁹-

Central incisors : 7th year

Lateral incisors: 8th to 9th year

Canines incisors: 11th year

Anterior bicuspid : 9th to 10th year

Posterior bicuspid: 12th year

Anterior molars : 6th to 7th year

Second molars : 13th to 14th year

Posterior molars : 18th year.

The Union Mill, of which he was an inspector since April, 1907, showed general reluctance in bringing up children for inspection which was substantiated by the fact that the book of certificates kept at the mill showed that no children had been certified in that

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 234.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 235.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

mill from the period April 1907 to 1908⁷⁰. The Government Circular No. I.G.G., dated the 23rd June, 1892 stated that “the policy of Government in working the Factory Act has been to cause the least interference with manufacturing industries which might be consistent with safeguarding the interests of the children employed. Inspectors, by making the examination of every child compulsory, would give to owners and managers of factories the maximum of trouble and to Government the maximum of expense, without conferring any compensating benefit on the majority of children employed. The wording of section 4 of this Act is perfectly clear on the point that all children whom the Inspector ‘has reason to believe’ to be under age to be examined, not that examination is to be insisted on in the case of every child without exception. In the case under notice, therefore, the Commissioner’s views of the law and the method of enforcing it were quite correct, while the Magistrate’s ideas on these points were altogether incorrect”⁷¹. Mr. C.A. Walsh, Special Inspector of Factories, Calcutta defended his act of non-prosecution of the mills employing under-aged children by stating that pending the medical inspector’s visit, when he objected to any young children being employed, the manager turned them out, but ‘they went to another mill’⁷². He reported the employment of under-age children in the Sibpur Jute mills to the Magistrate, but no prosecution was initiated. With the introduction of electric light, the demand for labour was so great, that the mills took on employing under-age children more massively. In Hastings Jute mill, Rishra, the number of hands employed was like⁷³-
Men: 4209

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 237.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 236-37.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 238.

Women: 903

Children: 713

Total Workers: 5827

YEAR	DAY	WORK	AVERAGE PER DAY	NIGHT	WORK	AVERAGE PER NIGHT
	DAYS WORKED	HOURS WORKED		NIGHTS WORKED	HOURS WORKED	
1898	308	4009	13.01	309	2374	7.08
1899	305.5	3974	13	304	2348	7.7
1900	308	4031	13.09	310	2384	7.7
1901	309	4076	13.2	310	2382	7.7
1902	309	4062	13.1	310	2386	7.7
1903	305.5	4020	13.1	303	2341	7.7
1904	307.5	4360	14.1	134	1020	7.68
1905	303.5	4549	15	134	1020	7.68
1906	287.5	4013	13.96	134	1020	7.68
1907	304	4560	15	134	1020	7.68

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908)*, p. 238.

The manager of the Hastings jute mill was of the view that,

“Jute mills are all worked in shift system, and there is no need for a time limit. I am not in favour of inspectors being brought from the United Kingdom. The language difficulty, too, would place the home inspector entirely in the hands of his interpreters. If a new Factory Act be brought into force, with radical changes, let it be brought in gradually, especially where age limits are concerned. It is millowners’ interest to provide good quarters, so as to keep ‘good’ labour. The labour in our jute mills for years past has always been very short in the months of April, May, and June. I would suggest that a means be introduced whereby unemployed men working on famine relief works could be drafted down to our jute mill centres, where ample employment could be found for them. As long as there was a surplus of labour night work was all right, but the production per hour was not so high as during the day.”⁷⁴

The women and children were generally employed in the batching, preparing, spinning, and winding departments⁷⁵. The probable number of young persons employed was one-fifth of the whole, in the departments named⁷⁶. The foreign factory inspectors were non-conversant with the systems of the country⁷⁷ and couldn’t efficiently record the relative information of the child workers who generally were imported from such districts as Orissa, Madras Presidency, North-West Provinces, and distant districts of Bengal, such as Dacca, Serajunge

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil, *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, 1990, Indian Council for Historical Research, pp. 270-74.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

and Behar⁷⁸. They usually came with their families and one of the attractions to their parents in coming to the urban industrial area was that their children would be able to get suitable employment on good remuneration⁷⁹. The mill managers did often argue that most of the parents were very poor and if the age limit of the child labour would be raised, it would be a 'hardship for the parents', and probably would keep large numbers of them from coming to the mill areas of Bengal⁸⁰. As most of the evidences upon which the factory inspectors substantiated their reports were entirely based on the commercial experience⁸¹ within the industrial domain. Following these 'commercial experiences', the colonial government used to mould its perception regarding the policy formulations on the labouring poor.

In the Bengal mills, the half-timers were arranged in squads of 14 each and never more than 10 children used to work at a time under one squad⁸². The sirdar arranged the half-hour interval for the boys, who knew exactly at what hours they had to come and go⁸³. Even though no particular half-hour was specified on the half-timer's time-schedule, yet the half-timers actually received a definite half-hour off in addition to the odd minutes *wasted here and there* outside the surveillance of the sirdars⁸⁴. The half-timers sets were properly arranged, and a child would stop working if he did not receive his half-hour interval⁸⁵. Actually, the system of half-timers was compiled with the Factories Act of

⁷⁸ See Broughton, G. M., *Labour in Indian Industries*, London, 1924.

⁷⁹ The official perception.

⁸⁰ See *Indian Factories Act*, Act XV of 1881 and Act XI of 1891.

⁸¹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), pp. 61-68.

⁸² Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, pp. 91-101.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

1892⁸⁶. How the justification for the working-hours of the factory children starting in the early morning was being rationalized can be discerned from the words of the mill managers that⁸⁷, “In the hot days it was better for them to work in the cool of the morning than the heat of the day, and in the cold weather they were better off in a warm mill than outside”. According to the official estimation, in the Rishra Jute Mill 2 percent of the half-timers were under nine years of age out of 713 children and about 6-7 percent of the young full-time spinners were under 14 years of age⁸⁸. In the India Jute Mills of Serampore, there were employed 3196 men, 879 women, and 592 children, making a total of 4667 hands⁸⁹. A table is given below here showing the number of working days in each month of each year from the period of 1898-1907-

NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS											
MONTH	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	
JANUARY	25	26	26	27	27	26	26	26	25.5	26	
FEBRUARY	24	24	24	24	24	24	25	24	23	24	
MARCH	27	27	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	
APRIL	26	21	25	26	26	26	26	23	25	26	
MAY	26	27	27	27	27	26	26	23.5	27	27	
JUNE	24	25	25	25	24	24.5	25	25	24	21	

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), pp. 248-55.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.240.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

JULY	26	25	25	26	26	27	25	26	23.5	23.5
AUGUST	27	27	20	27	26	26	26	27	22	27
SEPTEMBER	26	26	25	25	26	23	26	26	22	25
OCTOBER	23	23	23	25	24	26	23	22	27	23
NOVEMBER	26	26	26	26	25	26	23	25	26	25
DECEMBER	27	26	26	26	27	27	25	26	14	26
TOTAL	307	303	299	310	308	307.5	304	290.5	285	302
WORKING DAYS										
AVERAGE WORKING HOURS PER DAY	11.23	14.21	14.21	14.23	14.22	14.20	14.23	14.27	13.20	14.24

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 240.

JUTE MILLS	MEN	WOMEN	CHILDREN	TOTAL

Samnuggur	4328	1649	828	6803
Titaghur	8560	2195	1644	12399
Victoria	5347	1238	832	7417

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 244.

One recurrent excuse behind the opposition of the mill managers against the obligation related to providing elementary education to the factory children was that a school built at the expense of the mill and otherwise substantially aided by the mill was never taken advantage of by the children of the ordinary operative, and the school in question became one for the sons of ‘babus’, who would otherwise have sent their children to neighbouring public school⁹⁰. The working class parents were also not in favour of sending their children to the factory school, because the gross poverty tended them to get their families into a wage-earning position as soon as possible and as much as possible. The government’s reluctance was primarily based on its despotic attitude as well as on the witnesses and evidences against child labourers’ education produced by the factory inspectors. This “imperial question”⁹¹ regarding children’s education remained unresolved till the end and with the upsurging Indian freedom movement this issue received a nationalistic fervour while holding a contentious ground among the nationalist leaders.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 242.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The origin of the shift system among the spinners to the fact that their work was much heavier than that of the weavers⁹². In the early days the industry used to devote its attention to the coarser yarns, but later it had developed in producing more finer yarns⁹³. Consequently, the act of spinning grew more rapidly and moderate supply of women and children were required to perform the job⁹⁴. In this increased production system, the fixation of the working hours of the ‘young persons’ to the limit of twelve hours and engaging the children in the spinning and weaving department simultaneously could have caused *serious inconveniences*⁹⁵ to the mills. So, the shifting pattern along with the split-set system was invoked to meet the increasing demand of the production system. How the factory system was being carried out was recorded in the report of Royal Commission of Labour in India, 1931, “as soon as work is commenced of a morning, and at each change of shift,

INDIA JUTE MILL AT SERAMPORE		
MEN	3196	
WOMEN	879	
CHILDREN	592	

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 251.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, pp.176-188.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

the European overseer in charge of each department goes round to see if all his workers are present. In cases of absenteeism, this is recorded against the name of that particular worker in the register. At the end of each week, wages books are prepared by departmental babus, checked by the European overseer, and submitted to the general office where they are rechecked, and number of bands working compared with the departmental complement number⁹⁶. After the books are checked, wages tickets are made out in general office, checked for comparison with wages books, and then each ticket is initialed by the departmental European overseer⁹⁷. Although a complement of workers in piece-paid departments is laid down, no fixed amount in wages can be adhered to; but a check is made by calculating the total production of each section of the department, so that the total amount actually earned by production must equal the amount to be paid out.”⁹⁸

The children were brought in by the sirdars, but were always shown to the European overseers before they were put to work⁹⁹. There were no reports regarding the abuse of children’s labour to the European staffs, owing to the sirdar’s oppression and the difficulty there was in telling the age of a child. The probable reason behind the incapability of the inspectors to do justice the cases of child abuse was their “lack of time” to deal with such “petty cases”. Even when there was a huge influx of up-country children in the factories of Bengal, the mill managers complained of having the ‘scarcity of labour’¹⁰⁰. To ensure that the children of one mill couldn’t go to the another mill for better wages, the mills used to retain their certificates and *it was the practice in Calcutta for the mill to*

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, pp. 372.

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 80-81.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

*retain the age certificate*¹⁰¹. Previously, it was the practice in some mills not to have certificates at all, but the certifying surgeons insisted upon obtaining their four-anna fee, and so the children were presented for examination¹⁰². There was no doubt that a considerable time used to be elapsed between each visit of the civil surgeon¹⁰³. The European assistants were at the mill for the commencement and conclusion of work, but had long periods off during the day. A large percentage, more than half, of the European assistants renewed their engagements at the end of their terms for hiked incentives¹⁰⁴.

Regarding the effect of working days of varying lengths on (a) production, (b) wastage, (c) economical working of a factory, the output was generally proportionate to the number of hours worked, but the wastage percentage decreased as hours increased, because the greatest amount of wastage was made at the daily start and finish of the various processes of manufacture¹⁰⁵. The longer the day, in reason, the more ‘economically’ could a mill work, because the increased production, together with the relatively reduced percentage of wastage, materially helped towards the reduction of the overhead fixed charges¹⁰⁶.

The linguistic expression of the mill managers and the factory inspectors towards the children labour denotes their truly despotic attitude and colonial mentality. To prove themselves righteous and philanthropic, the usage of the terms like “healthy bodies”, “improved physique”, “bright-alert-vigorous-youngsters” by them to define the factory

¹⁰¹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), pp. 258-62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁶ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 239.

children stands sharply in contrast with the stark reality of unlimited child mortality in colonial industrial sectors. Even they didn't hesitate to twist the real situation by stating that, "their work which is generally bobbin shifting is light, and with very frequent intervals, which they usually devote to romping about the premises, they are with difficulty kept out of mischief, which is a sufficient refutation of the charge of physical deterioration, or of overwork"¹⁰⁷. The chief and almost sole need for children in a jute mill was for the *very light work of bobbin shifting*. They were 'useful' at that work entirely owing to the known quickness of movement and "manual dexterity" appertaining to children, and as they matured, they used to lose in a great measure that early nimbleness of movement¹⁰⁸. To have young persons and adults doing the work of children would lead to inefficiency, as they would be "clumsier and therefore more slower and costly"¹⁰⁹. The adult workers would have promptly objected to work alongside of children getting smaller wages, or on the other hand they objected to do a 'man's job' unless on a 'man's pay', and the young persons or the 'older children' were not as efficient as the children workers for the special work of doffing or bobbin shifting¹¹⁰. It would have been a harmful policy for the colonial interests to have large numbers of the younger people employed on men's wages, as it would tend to raise the scale of wages, and make children 'scarce', as the latter would "naturally seek to obtain man's work and pay"¹¹¹.

Source: *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence* (1908), p. 251.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Report and Apendices*. (1908).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 246.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

MEN	5000
WOMEN	1500
CHILDREN	1100
HOWRAH MILLS COMPANY	

SHIBPUR MILLS COMPANY	
MEN	4000
WOMEN	1500
CHILDREN	700

Chapter Two

CHILDREN AND THE WORKING-CLASS HOMES

“The housing of the people in our country is a serious problem, but in India it is far more serious, for disgustingly bad housing conditions prevail generally so far as the working classes are concerned. Wherever one goes in the different parts of the country, whether it be in the villages, in the moderate-sized towns, or in big cities, and whatever may be the design or lay-out of the houses, whether they be the single-roomed or double-roomed dwellings built in ‘lines’ or tenements, or the single-roomed dwellings dotted about separately in some places, they are all unutterably bad, and cannot in any decent sense be regarded as ‘Homes’.”

Messrs. A.A. Purcell, J.Hallsworth (in the Report of British Trades Union Congress Delegation of 1927-28).¹

¹ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 166.

This chapter attempts to explore the politics of colonial discourse on the materiality of working class-homes in the specific industrial setting of Bengal jute mills and how it affected the child labourers' lives. The Report of Mr. C.A. Walsh, A.M.I.C.E., Special Inspector of Factories in Bengal evidently dealt with the problematic issue of working-class homes in Calcutta and vehemently demanded stringent legislative intervention on the part of the colonial state to "reform" the homes of the labourers². He pointed out the climatic differences between England and India and put emphasis on the "special treatment" of the labourers' household which was the site from where the direct pool of labour was reproduced thus creating the future generation of workers³. In the nineteenth century with the general anxieties of colonialism accompanied by a rapid advent of modernity and the societal reconstruction of different classes, there emerged the discourse of the sentimentalization of home and family. This kind of ideological paradigm constructed the family as an idealized space and was made the most desired subject in any policy-making and welfare measure⁴. Suddenly, Indian families became the responsibilities of the state and destiny of the nation. Along with these problematics this research also aims at exploring the politics of recruiting women and children by the colonial state which transfigured the prevailing domestic relations. In the colonial process of knowledge production, the indigenous homes had always been perceived and categorized as manufactories of labour thus bringing this sphere of manufactory under

² Ibid, p. 312.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See detailed discussion on this area in Bose, Pradip Kumar, '*Sons of The Nation: Child Rearing in the New Family*', in Chatterjee, Partha(ed.), "*Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*", University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1995.

their continuous surveillance and supervision. The colonial state essentially being a capitalistic one, always upheld a theoretical paradigm of profit maximizing economy in which the workers' 'effective' bodies became the sole eligibility for their recruitment in the factories. As the native homes were the location of social reproduction⁵ and the generation of "utilizable" bodies was a dire necessity of the colonial state, the private sphere of the workers came under the scrutiny of the govt. to increase their productivity output. The commodity-producing economy of nineteenth century India blurred the distinct boundary between private and public sphere of the urban poor by adjoining home-reproduction to the market-production. The industrially advanced society with rapid agents of modernization changed "Asiatic mode of production" kind of economy on the one side, on the other they transformed the existing domestic structure of the natives. While the middle class Indian families were into the mode of a structural adjustment based on Victorian ideals of home and family, the home of the labouring poor mutated merely into the site of consumption, production and reproduction. Family members of the working class entered the labour-force of the factories and in the form of wage-labour brought the market to the home. Previously, the very 'being' of a 'home' exerted a sense of familial security to its members as this home used to shield them from the harsh realities of the public sphere. But as market entered the private sphere of the labourers, the domestic relations and moral precepts of the family life altered and colonial state remained the principal agent behind this transfiguration of their home and domestic relations. The readjustment of the family-order satiated the capitalistic thirst of the economy and made home an appurtenance of the mill. The shift in the working-

⁵ Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Pluto Press, 2017.

class family life repudiated the social credence that home and market were two distinctive parallel spheres which should never be merged as it would lead to the phenomenal disruption of the home-relations and family structure. Here, comes the gender issue and division of labour. While the dominant norms of the “ideal” family life prevalent in the middle class Indian house supported the distinctive gender roles and gendered division of labour, the gendered notion of labour i.e. confining women only to the household sphere somewhat changed in this newly transfigured families of the labouring poor. As capitalism always sought for productivity and wages are determined only by work rate and output, women and children’s labour were looked down upon as underproductive, unskilled because of the allotment of fixed set of works to them so that they remained underpaid. While unfolding laws for the labour process itself and defining various stages of the modes of the production Marx examined the upshot of accumulation upon the working class.⁶The need for capital accumulation led capitalists to engage cheap labour in a economic system based on extremely exploitative labour relations. Women and Child labour had a distinctive role to play in a colonial capitalist production system. The colonial capitalism employed labour so that new labour could be extracted of its full labour-power for the utilization of maximum profit. This could be done only with either increasing the number of people at work or by lengthening the working hours⁷. But both of these had a natural limit to get increased after a optimum level. Some elements of population were kept away from production earlier like women, children, paupers⁸. But as capital accumulated, sources of providing new

⁶ Shakti Kak, and, Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia*, Delhi, Primus Books, p. 22.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 30-36.

labour must had to be expanded with it. With the ever increasing cravings to squeeze labour, the colonial capitalist economic system had to draw women and younger children within its working-class fold. The physical production of these “special classes” and their using up in the process of labour⁹ were to keep the cost of production low and to increase the intensity of the work. As the colonial state machinery itself was in experimental mode due to the unknowingness of the new land, people and the new industrial economy in a backward country like India ,they were instigated to get into various forms of reforms, legislative interventions and regulatory mechanisms in the large scale factory settings. The abundance of the cheap labour in the guise of women and children led them to test the nature of production process in the most profitable manner thus reducing the probability of the costly mistakes of unproductivity¹⁰.The continuation of such exploitative practices can be explained by how the capitalists and labour perceive the process of labour use and capital accumulation. According to Marx, “capital is dead labour, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”¹¹ In his *Capital* he asserted that the capitalist “takes his stand on the law of the exchange of commodities. He, like all other buyers, seeks to get the greatest possible benefit out of the use-value of his commodity.”¹² In this new production system the feminization of the labourforce led to the transformative role of women as they had to bear the ‘double burden’ i.e. to perform the household chores and production along with the factory works. Mr. Andrew Small, manager of the Lower Hooghly Jute

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Punekar.

¹¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/karl_marx, accessed on 8th December, 2018 at 11.10 A.M.

¹² See *Enslaved Innocence*, ibid.

Mills at Buddertollah¹³ asserted that, "...Non working children should be prohibited from accompanying workers, unless the mill has a nursery with capable women at large". Here, the mention of non-working children meant little children who used to come with their mother and laid on the shopfloor under the supervision of their working mother albeit in a very unhygienic condition. It was not a rare picture in the mills of jute industry that the mothers operating heavy machines carrying babies with them (Sen, 1999). The mill authority considered this type of occurrence hampering the productivity output of the mothers having diverted their attention to their children. So the government soon prohibited the working women to carry with them children unless they were of the 'working-class age'. But officials like Mr. H.C. Streatfeild¹⁴, the representative of the Government of Bengal opined that, "It is impracticable at present to prevent young children from accompanying workers to dangerous and unhealthy parts of factories. It would be extremely difficult to define such parts, or to punish breaches of such a rule if made, and it is probable that workers would greatly resent any interference with the custom by which mothers take their infants with them wherever they go". Mr. H.T.S.Forrest¹⁵, the Magistrate of Howrah proposed of an enclosure provided inside the compound and the non-working young children of the factory workers should be looked after by elderly women. They ensured this much 'security' to the non-working children after realizing the fact that if all non-working children were excluded from the mill, it might affect the supply of female labour¹⁶. Mr. C.A.Walsh, Special Inspector of Factories,

¹³ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 312.

¹⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2-Evidence(1908)*, p. 231.

¹⁵ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Report and Appendices (1908)*, p. 264.

¹⁶ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2-Evidence(1908)*, p. 233.

Calcutta commented that on an average there was about one accident a year to non-working children¹⁷. All the children labour were required to carry the certificate of age to distinguish themselves from the non-working children. The certified children could go from mill to mill without causing much inconvenience to the factory managers¹⁸.

Along this line, the 'home' was unable to resist the 'pollution' of the outer sphere i.e. the marketplace from disrupting the norms, values and moral precepts of the family life of the jute mill labours. The traditional intimate bonding between the members of the Indian household was pulled apart because the "coolie-lines" or mill bustees (as the habitats of the jute mill labours were termed) had reduced merely to "sleeping quarters"¹⁹ due to the rigorous work-schedule of the factories. In the Calcutta jute mills the workers were required to be at the mill by 5 A.M., and they had frequently to walk two or three miles before arriving there.

"The operatives are mostly Bengalis living in surrounding villages up to 3 or 4 miles off. The first warning whistle is blown at 3 A.M. Enquiry showed that a half-timer, a child of not more than 7 years, selected by the commission at random, had to leave his home every morning at 4 A.M. and walk 2 miles to the mill."²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 236.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, pp. 160-169.

²⁰ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908),p. 13.

According to the official estimation, the total period of absence of the workers from their homes exceeded 14.5 hours and for women it was even longer. In the colonial eyes the 'habits' of the Indian factory operatives were determined by the fact that they were primarily agriculturists or a labourer on the land. In the most of the cases of migrant labourers their hereditary occupations were agriculture or home-based production.²¹ Unlike Europe and England, the Indian rural society contained no factory population consisting of a large number of operatives trained from their youth to one particular class of work and dependent upon employment in the future based on the skill of that work only to obtain a livelihood²². The factory owners had complained to the members of the Royal Labour Commission that the jute weavers of Bengal used to visit their native villages taking a holiday of nearly two or three months along with their families. As the whole of their families were the operatives in the jute factories, the mill managers seemed to be discontent with that "production loss for a long period"²³. Whenever factory life became "irksome", the operatives tried to escape it by going to the villages²⁴. How the colonial dictum used to operate in a multilayered system can be understood by going through the following:

"The position of the operative has been greatly strengthened by the fact that the supply of factory labour undoubtedly is, and has been, inadequate; and there is, and has been, the keenest competition among employers to secure a full labour supply. These two main causes- the independence of the Indian labourer, owing to the fact that he possesses

²¹ See Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908).

other and congenial means of earning a livelihood, and the deficient labour supply-govern the whole situation. In jute mills, where the operatives in the spinning and preparing departments work on an average 10 hours only, there is not nearly so much loitering; but the hands take a longer holiday-varying from one to three months each year-in order to return to their homes and the number of workers on leave during the hot weather is frequently so large that the production of the mills falls as much as 25 percent below the normal".²⁵

The wages of operatives in the jute mills varied from mill to mill, but were everywhere considerably lower compared to the load of work and to pursue a decent life.²⁶ Taking the jute manufacturing factories all over Bengal, monthly wages or daily piece-rate wages on a monthly basis varied within the following limits²⁷:

1. Half time children from Rs. 2.50 to Rs. 4.50.
2. Full-time boys and girls between 14 and 17 years of age from Rs. 5 to Rs. 13.
3. Ordinary children and women hands in the spinning department Rs. 7 to Rs. 18.
4. Male labourers from Rs. 25 to Rs. 35.

The Indian Industrial Commission reviewed the situation in respect of housing the labour. The millowners for many years did nothing to improve the housing system and living conditions of the labour as they did in imposing

²⁵ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 36.

protectionist legislative measures upon them to increase their work output. But more 'rational' ideas were gaining ground and this rationality was based on the fact that the quality of work of the Indian mill operatives stood lowest on the world's list of factory operatives. The colonial mill-managers sought justification of this lower performance to the higher officials through the argument that the poorer quality housing of the labourers and provision for their old age were not only dehumanizing for the worker and 'his' family, also not profitable for the millⁱ. The commission found the coolie-lines unfit for human habitation and overcrowded by the "poors". The fact of deplorable condition of the working-class homes can be corroborated by the evidence from Factory Inspection's findings,

“According to the custom of the country a single room 12 feet by 10 feet lodges a family, and in the present instance five persons is the proposed limit of number which shall occupy it. Eight adults frequently sleep in a room 10 feet by 10 feet during the rains, each man having just 12.5 square feet of floor space and one hundred cubic feet of air space. This they can do with door and window shutters closed, without being stifled. They sleep naked, which assists respiration, but, although no deaths are reported from this habit it cannot fail to be injurious. The rent of each is thus reduced to from four to six annas per month or less than 1d. to 1.5d. per week....all water supplies are to be carried from a standpipe or well, no water connection being allowed within the

rooms. The latrines are detached, and are proportioned at the rate of one seat for ten rooms.”²⁸

The politics of colonial provisions regarding the household reformation of the mill-workers evoked from the shrewd political motive that staying in comparatively open houses, the workers would be healthy and clean and they will work more ‘enthusiastically’ and ‘spiritedly’ than before and this qualitative improvement would increase the quantity of production which would lead to more benefits to the mill-owners. The earlier mills and factories in Northern India and Bengal were put down as near as possible to a ‘labour centre’ and the town itself was expected to furnish the required quantity of workmen²⁹. The available supply in the towns soon failed and workers flocked in from the country³⁰. They had to hire rooms in the town at very high rates and the result was great discomfort, overcrowding and general insanitary conditions³¹. Howrah with its large population of mill and dock hands had the actual recorded density of 17,292 per square mile³². In the Bengal jute industry, when sites with a frontage to the river could no longer be obtained close to a town, arrangements had to be made to house imported labour³³. The Gauripur and Alliance Mills, had constructed many rows of substantial tile-roofed houses with good drainage and water supply at an average cost of about rs. 200 for one room and verandah³⁴. Other mills

²⁸ S.D.Punekar and R. Varickayil (1990), *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891-1917: Volume 2: Factories*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Historical Research, p. 152.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 154.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 154-61.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. p. 146

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

preferred to give land free to their Sirdars or jobbers on which to build workmen's dwellings, and in one village where there was Nazul land the Municipality itself had constructed sanitary house³⁵. There is no doubt that the up-country labour who went to the jute-mills for work had come to prefer those settlements with their sanitary conveniences and freedom from epidemics to the pestilential and overcrowded bazaars of Howrah and North 24 Parganas³⁶. Such companies as the Howrah Mills Company and the Hooghly Mills Company which had the advantage of a large population living close to the mills had been of late worse off for labour than the mills up the river, probably because they had not as yet made complete arrangements for housing the workers,³⁷

“The present quarters are not sufficiently spacious nor in spite of their court-yards private enough for permanent habitation and do not adapt themselves readily to the joint-family system, while sanitary restrictions such as those on the keeping of cattle and goats which are necessary when a large number of people are living in a confined space would not be required if the sites of houses were more open. There are no facilities for religious observances and no sort of corporate life.

On 11th June, 1929, the Director of Public Health, Bengal, addressed the Indian Jute Mills Association, indicating that the question of the housing of industrial operatives had

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 144-168.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 146-47.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 147.

recently been receiving the consideration of the Govt. of Bengal, and that a report was required on the affairs existing in the jute mills adjacent to Calcutta³⁸. The associated mills sent the completed report to the Director on 6th August, 1929 which revealed that,

- a) About 30 percent of the total workers in the jute mills were housed in lines built by the various companies.
- b) Housing was not provided by the Government or other agency.
- c) The majority of workers lived in private lines owned mostly by sirdars working in the mills, or by shopkeepers trading in the bazaars.
- d) A large number of Bengali workers lived in their own houses, as did most of the sirdars³⁹.

There were no facilities for the acquisition of land for workers' houses, and the government provided the 'reason' that it was owing to the demand of such facilities "that most mill areas were so crowded and congested"⁴⁰. In the official it is stated that in the Howrah district, terms for the purchase of 40 bighas of land for housing, schools and a clinic for women and children were arranged to the 'satisfaction of the mill and the landlord' in 1927⁴¹. The official self-justification went in such a way, "in many districts the worker elects to remain in a congested unhealthy bustee area, instead of taking advantage of the sanitary quarters provided by the mill owners, which in most cases, are available at a cheaper rental than is being paid for the quarters provided by the sirdars. The usual type of accommodation in mill areas is a number of rooms built

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 159-164.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 142.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. p. 149.

either in a row, or round the four sides of a square courtyard. The lines provided by Mills are a vast improvement on the private lines. These are pucca built, and are kept in good repair. Each room has a door, a window, a ventilator in the roof, and a verandah with cooking place.”⁴²

Mr. A. Wighton, Chairman of the Indian Jute Mills Association was of the view that it was a strategically sound policy for the mills to build *pucca* brick houses for the labourers to ensure ‘smooth running’ of the mills⁴³. Many of the mills were situated in the areas where there were no villages and the owners had to adopt the policy of constructing ‘coolie-lines’ to house and retain the labour which they had imported⁴⁴. From the sanitary point of view such buildings were absolutely fatalistic to the health of the workers. Besides the coolie-lines, certain sections of the labourers used to reside in their own bamboo huts which generally were situated within 3 to 4 miles from the radius of the jute mills. The District Magistrate of Howrah commented that the high rate of mortality and disease among the coolies in Howrah were chiefly due to the way in which they crowd and “pig” together in insanitary huts, in order to “save rent-charges”.⁴⁵ He considered that the average Behari mill hand was of rather better physique than the average agricultural labourer one saw in the Behar Districts. *They came to Calcutta to make money, and saved half their pay* in his opinion⁴⁶. The fact of

⁴² Ibid. p.155.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 151.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the mill children's poor health was attributed not to the overwork, but to the insanitary condition under which they lived. Concerning the employment of under-aged children, the Civil Surgeon told him that there was no general evasion of the law, and the Civil Surgeon saw the factories a good deal oftener than the Magistrate did. In the matter of pay and hours the men had combined to enforce their demands⁴⁷. The Fort Gloster Mill hands struck an account of the hours and the local hands of the Belvedere Jute mills had struck as a protest against the employment of up-country labour⁴⁸. In Calcutta some mills had given land free to their sardars to build houses for the workmen, but the sardars preferred to build on sites for which they paid high rents to zamindars in order that they might not be bound altogether to an individual mill⁴⁹. Sites for this purpose might however be acquired by the Municipality, demarcated in plots of a reasonable size and leased out to intending residents of the proper class, due provision being made for roadways and drainage⁵⁰. The models of inhabited dwellings exhibited by Mr. Owen Dunn at the time of demolition disclosed an appalling state of things⁵¹. Men, women and children were living in crowds in smoke blackened chambers without ventilation, without chimneys and almost without light. The monthly rent per room is from Rs. 3 to Rs. 7 and these were

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 160.

⁴⁸ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2-Evidence(1908)*, p. 257.

⁴⁹ See Punekar, pp. 186-198.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 165.

“howels-but no homes”⁵². The horrible housing facility can be discerned from the report of British Trades Union Delegation in 1927-28,⁵³

“There were scores of people sleeping on the ground with, apparently, a very thin mattress, for bed and a thin rug for covering. Words fail me to picture the squalor, the darkness and the misery of some of the chawls we saw...I had constantly to remind myself that it is not always possible to measure Eastern conditions with Western measures, but even when every allowance is made for differences of climate, habits, tradition and religion, the housing of Indian workers is a disgrace and a blot on the record of any govt., whether British or Indian”.

The overcrowding and insanitary conditions of the labour-houses in Bengal demonstrated the callousness and wanton neglect of their obvious duties by the authorities concerned. The Director of Public Health, Bengal stated in 1926 that 131000 infants died in Bengal less than a month after they were born⁵⁴. This was in addition to 60,000 children who were still-born. Another 68,000 died between the ages of one and six months and 51,000 between six and twelve months. 87,000 children died between five and ten years old, and 50,000 between ten and fifteen years⁵⁵. Altogether 545,000 children died in 1926 at ages which the director considered far below what might be termed of any economic value⁵⁶. The Director estimated also, that from 60,000 to 70,000 mothers died

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 166.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 167.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

either in childbirth or conditions directly related to childbirth⁵⁷. The Reports of Dr. Batra, Mr. Beale and the Deputy Commissioner of Bengal reveals that there was the prevalence of cholera, malaria, hookworm, and other ‘tropical diseases’ in the coolie-lines and the adjacent areas of Calcutta.⁵⁸ There were provisions for the baby creches, subsidizing local hospitals, segregation wards and subsidized schoolrooms for the child labour in the jute mills⁵⁹. It has been recorded in the Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India that there was a growing incidence of decreasing morality and increasing juvenile offences amongst the factory children due to the immoral environment of the bustees. As there were comparatively fewer women among the migrant labourer and was lack of privacy in the congested situation of the coolie-lines, open prostitution was quite common there which hindered the sound mental development of the children. Mr. H.C.Streatfeild, who considered his evidence might be taken as representing the views of the Government of Bengal, asserted on the condition prevailing inside the factories that, “It is at present impracticable to prescribe an analytical standard of purity for air in factories. The same remark applies to the standard of moisture. *The extreme humidity of the climate at certain seasons would render the enforcement of a standard impossible in any case. As to the standard of purity for the water used for humidifying purposes, it is understood that the use of anything but pure water ruins the apparatus used for these purposes. Moreover, the fixing of such standards as are suggested above would imply an elaboration of the system of inspection over factories, and an amount of interference with their working, which present conditions do not warrant. The standard*

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 268.

*of latrine accommodation should probably be fixed at 1 seat for every 40 workers and separate urinal accommodation should be provided. The standard of 1 seat for 25 workers is unduly high, especially where the work is done in shifts, and would mean very heavy expenditure on the part of the factories. All doors of working rooms should open readily from the inside outwards, in case of fire. No definite further precautions seem necessary as regards fencing machinery. Inspectors should, however, have power to insist on fencing where they consider it necessary, subject to an appeal to government.”(italics mine).*⁶⁰

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF INFANT MORTALITY IN CHOLERA
1918	225
1919	1901
1920	170
1921	617
1922	169
1923	183
1924	317
1925	89

⁶⁰ Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2-Evidence(1908), p. 231.

1926	570
1927	120

YEAR	NUMBER OF CASES OF SMALL-POX	INFANT MORTALITY FROM SMALL-POX
1923-24	50	6
1924-25	202	28
1925-26	1129	126
1926-27	361	51
1927-28	1374	162

CAUSE OF INFANT MORTALITY	1927-28	1926-27	1925-26
RESPIRATORY DISEASES	1045	1101	1107
FEVER	922	722	667
CHOLERA	125	462	206

DYSENTERY AND DIARRHOEA	167	77	193
INFLUENZA	-	-	-
SMALL-POX	51	162	126
OTHER CAUSES	3335	3562	3245

Source: Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, p. 190.

The first enquiry into the conditions of women's labour in Bengal industries, with special reference to maternity benefits was held in 1921-22 by Dr. Dagmar F. Curjel, whose report was published as Bulletin No. 31 in the series entitled "Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour" published by the Government of India⁶¹. In 1924, the Government of India asked for a report showing how far employers had voluntarily undertaken maternity benefit schemes, and the substance of the report was reproduced under the Industries and Labour Department of the Government of India entitled "Indian Maternity Benefit Schemes"⁶². It was revealed from the factory inspector's report of 1924 that a charitable dispensary for women and children was started by the Bhatpara municipality. The average daily attendance during the year were 16.3 percent women and 33.3 percent children⁶³. In the year 1926 the maternity clinics on the lines of that of the Tittaghur jute mills had been started by the Kankinarrah and Angus mills and trained nurses and midwives were appointed to organize and carry out the services⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, pp. 173-181.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

In the baby creches adjacent to the jute manufacturing factories there found 12 small children by the factory inspectors within the enclosure where they had been placed by their mother⁶⁵. Miss. Curjel's report reveals that the women labourers were in precarious conditions before and after child birth and were not getting the measures of Maternity Benefit Bill. In jute mills the non-domestic character of most of the women employed rendered maternity conditions unsatisfactory⁶⁶. Miss. Dagmar Curjel's report reveals that three experiments in the maternity welfare had been made; one in the Kelvin mills, another in the Baranagore mills and the third in the Titagarh mills⁶⁷. Those in the two former were experiments in the granting of monetary benefits to women during absence before and after childbirth, and they proved a failure owing mostly to evasions of the condition that a woman should not work during the receipt of the benefit. The Titagarh scheme was more elaborately conceived and substituted benefits in kind for benefits in money⁶⁸. The benefits included an institution in the nature of a clinic on the mill premises, classes for indigenous dais, for each attendance at which they received 2 annas, and general classes for women and girl children at which they were taught mothercraft and sewing⁶⁹. Experiments of this kind served another purpose of the Government i.e. to test the attitude of the employers towards the labourers.

This chapter would conclude by analyzing the politics through which the colonial state ensured a steady supply of women's and children's labour from the labouring households. The labour of women and children in a industrially advanced economy has

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 173-81.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

always been viewed theoretically from the problematic of market demand side i.e. the massive cry for child labour on the part of a capitalist economy due to its 'cheapness' and the 'suitability' for certain kinds of works . In this accordance, some definitive legislative measures and policies had been taken by the colonial government of India to 'protect' this 'special category of labour'. But the supply side of the labour market equation must not be ignored in a archetypal colonial setting of Bengal jute industry. Apart from the recruitment of the children by the jobbers by various means there was a direct pool of child labour from the working class families themselves living within the radius around the jute mills. This should be explained by realizing the specific condition created by the colonial govt. to exploit the labour for profit maximization. The regular wages of the adult workers (both male and female) in the jute mills were kept so low that the working class families were bound to send their children to the factories to augment their family income which was not sufficient to make both ends meet. The children who were working as half-timers, most of the times they were pressurized by their families to start work as full-timers. Thus while being a most valuable addition to the labour force as the nimbleness of their figures were essential for piecing the jutes, their whole day wages tempted their parents also. . According to Marx, 'the value of labour power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the labourer...His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a labouring individual.' It is necessary that the value of labour power should remain above the minimum level of sustaining an individual worker 'himself' because an adult male worker also had to maintain his wife and children⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ See Shakti Kak and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), (2012), *Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia*, Delhi, Primus Books for this discussion.

As family had always played a strategic and crucial role behind reproducing a steady supply of regular labour, sustaining the capitalist system. But in such a profit maximizing economy as that of colonial India, the capitalist class couldn't get rid of the temptation for increasing the working hands in the factories, be that hands appearing in the miniscule form. The insufficiency of the adult income was deliberate on the part of the capitalist commodity-producing economy to keep the gross household income of the working class families low and to include their children in the industrial labour force to increase the labour power based on the profit motive. How the working class families were delved into indebtedness in an exponential rate is revealed from the Royal Labour Commission Report. It was reported that as many as 75 to 90 percent of the labourers were in debt. Loans up to the extent of four weeks' wages were given by the Kabuli and the mill durwan without any additional security but in cases when a large amount of money was taken, personal securities were insisted on⁷¹. Weekly payments were insisted on by the creditors doing business amongst the labouring class. Among the causes of indebtedness primarily the "impermanency of labour, sickness and infrequently intemperate habits" were held responsible instead of the meagre amount of the daily wage rates allotted by the Government⁷². The labourers had no other source of income, except their wages in the jute mills. The average debt per head of a labourer amongst 30000 was found on a rough calculation to be Rs. 18.90⁷³. Even it was pointed out in the Factory Labour Commission Report of 1908 that the parents in India desired their children to become wage-earners at the earliest possible moment and as there was no question of "conscious cruelty" on the

⁷¹ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, pp. 383-387.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

part of the parents, the children were in fact made to work as soon as they were capable of earning even the smallest addition to the family income⁷⁴. Thus keeping the male wages low to safeguard the regular supply of women and children was a distinctive strategy of the colonial employers. One persistent rationalization of the mill employers against the stagnant wage rate of the male labourers was that a rise in wages, by enabling the workers to earn a larger sum in a given time, would result in their absenteeism from work for longer periods and the savings from their hiked wages would ensure more 'idleness'. This kind of argument was there to justify the logic of domination which indomitable made the working-class homes poverty-ridden, grief-stricken and led to the mechanization, machinization and dehumanization of the working class families in Bengal.

⁷⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2-Evidence(1908)*, p. 253.

Chapter Three

CHILDREN, CAPITALISM AND THE COLONIAL STATE

The transformative forms of labour and its related social institutions under the evolving nature of colonial capitalist production system marked a new dimension of the binary domination-subordination in the industrial relations. The structures of subordination in the colonial India must be analysed within the dialectic paradigm of Marxism where a class based approach would methodically define the creation and production of surplus value, bourgeoisie exploitation of the labour-power, appropriation of the surplus value and the subjugation of the labourers under the all-embracing and encapsulating forms of dominance of the colonial capitalist class over the labourers' 'productive' bodies, workplace, home and the buying and selling of the labour power in a market-economy. In colonial industrial economy the reduction of the labouring class to a "exchangeable commodity" and the intensification of the phenomenon of polarization of the class-relations within the social structure marked a significant departure from that of a pre-colonial one. Without relating the formative process of class consciousness with the nuanced notion of collective identity and conflictual dialectics of heterogenous character of the labourers. Through the process of proletarianization the entire class the colonial construction of the working class as a heterogenous entity tried to reduce their potentiality of collective resistance against

capitalism and to disregard their uniform and ultimate identity of “working class”. In his 1847 work *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx uttered that¹, “Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the of the country into workers....The mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself, in the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself.” The position of the children workers in this conundrum was rather political and strategic because the generation and persistence of child labour in an era of high industrial growth and underemployment amongst adult men and women points to an economic system based on extremely exploitative labour relations. Low wages, job insecurity and non-existence of any “true welfare measures”² like suitable public health care facilities or proper hygienic housing arrangements and continuous politics of “otherization” by the factory authority put the poor working population under severe existential pressure to devise their own survival strategies³. The power hierarchies of caste, community and gender also became a determining factor about the nature of work children perform. The powerful in the village, caste or community historically met their demand for cheap labour by employing children. In agriculture, children were useful for taking care of the cattle and in performing the household chores of the landlord’s family⁴. As part of the family in home based work, these working children became invisible in their historical specificity. Young girls, in particular, were employed as care-givers, domestic workers and as workers in any home-based activity⁵.

¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Indian History Congress, 1982, Presidential Address, Modern Indian History.P, p. 2.

² See Shakti Kak and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), (2012), *Enslaved Innocence: Child Labour in South Asia*, Delhi, Primus Books.

³ Ibid, pp. 2-15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

They were historically contextualized as workers and the aspect of the employment of children and adult workers on subsistence wages which made it necessary for each member of the family to enter into the labourforce. It has been proved by historical researches that in the industrially advanced countries the working class mothers and fathers found it compulsory for their children to accompany them to the workplace to add to their incomes, thus intensifying the capitalist production cycle by engaging them in the “unskilled” sections of a capitalist production process. As argued by Lavalette, “children’s labouring activities throughout the period of capitalist development” needs to take note of “complexities and contradictions of socio-economic processes and development”⁶. The commodification of work in the capitalist production system and the exponential economic exploitation of children by the factory authority utilizing the loopholes in the colonial legislations led to the development of capitalist competition within the market and strengthened the logic of surplus value extraction. Between the spheres of socially recognized ‘male’ labour and the ‘stigmatized domestic labour’ there is a liminal space. The factory children’s labour fell in this space in colonial India which “recognized” the “utility” of their labour in terms of the cheapest labour-resource in a capitalist set of industrial economy but that ‘recognition’ was actually the ‘non-acknowledgement’ of children’s labour by terming them ‘unskilled’, ‘unproductive’ and ‘marginalized’. This colonial construction of the children’s marginality and recapitulating their labour as ‘peripheral’ emanated from the mercantilist demand of imperialism, colonial knowledge production and a process of continuous negotiation between colonialism and capitalism. The naturalization of the children’s subjectivities in the factory domain owed much to the historicization of children’s bodies as sexually inferior,

⁶ Ibid.

unproductive and containing a sort of ‘lack’. This fabrication of the notion of ‘lackness’ considered children ‘incomplete’ from the adults and always sought for their maturity and development up to the adults⁷. So, how would this ‘development’ be carried out by the society and state; definitely by disciplining and subjugating their bodies and existence. According to Foucault, both the ‘disciplining’ of the ‘body’ and the ‘regulation’ of the population constituted the twin poles of the ‘organization of power over life’⁸. The children’s bodies’ disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility which all were found in the continuous endeavour on the part of the colonial government to design and ‘reform’ its cultural protectionist policies. The attempt of the colonial capitalist state to make them as a bourgeoisie-self led to the construction of the children as savage being who was in need of ‘civilizing missions’. Here, in the case of the children, the political strategy used by the colonial state was the “Repressive State Apparatus” as well as the Althusserian “State Ideological Apparatus”. In Marxist theory, the State Apparatus contains the government, administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons which according to Althusser were the Repressive State Apparatuses due to their ‘functions by violence’⁹. But the Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses (hereafter ISA) are a certain number of realities which “present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions”.¹⁰ They are: the religious ISA, the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘schools’), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications

⁷ See Ashis Nandy, *Reconstructing Childhood: A Critique of the Ideology of Adulthood*, in Aakash Singh and Silika Mohapatra (ed.), *Indian Political Thought: A Reader*, Routledge, London, 2010, pp. 203-214.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage Publisher, 1976, pp. 136-139.

⁹ <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm> accessed on 22nd April, 2019 at 8.20 P.M.

¹⁰ Ibid.

ISA and the cultural ISA¹¹. Except the plurality in the ISA, the main difference lies between these two apparatuses are their domains of performances. According to Althusser, while the Repressive State Apparatuses operates directly on the public domain, the effect of the ideological state apparatuses are more pervasive and hegemonic in the private domain which functions ‘by ideology’¹².

“it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. Thus schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc. to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family....the same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus.”¹³

I argue here that the colonial state apparatuses operated on the native children in a multilayered form. From being repressive in disciplining and controlling them through the institutions of sirdars, mill managers and protective legislations to being ideological in controlling them through the institution of family as the site of social reproduction and factory schools, the state penetrated into the every layer of the social hierarchy. In Marxist notion, in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce, it must therefore reproduce the productive forces and the existing relations of production¹⁴. The

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

reproduction of labour power is ensured by giving labour power the material means with which to reproduce itself: by wages.

“Wages feature in the accounting of each enterprise, but as ‘wage capital’, not at all as a condition of the material reproduction of labour power. However, that is in fact how it ‘works’, since wages represents only that part of the value produced by the expenditure of labour power which is indispensable for its reproduction: so indispensable to the reconstitution of the labour power of the wage-earner (the wherewithal to pay for housing, food and clothing, in short to enable the wage earner to present himself again at the factory gate the next day-and every further day God grants him); and we should add: indispensable for raising and educating the children in whom the proletarian reproduces himself (in n models where $n = 0, 1, 2, \text{etc.}\dots$) as labour power.”¹⁵

In the colonial capitalist production system the ‘quantity of value(wages) necessary for the reproduction of labour power’ was not determined by the needs of a ‘biological’ rather by the need of a ‘historically variable minimum’¹⁶. Althusser claims that this minimum is doubly historical in that it is not defined by the historical needs of the working class ‘recognized’ by the capitalist class, but by the historical needs imposed by the proletarian class struggle- a double class struggle: against the lengthening of the working day and against the reduction of wages.

“ To put this more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class in words.”¹⁷

As Tithi Bhattacharya argues that the social reproduction theory explores the true nature of the category capitalism and its animating force is mainly human labour, not commodities. In this new condition of capitalism, “it exposes to critical scrutiny the superficiality of what we commonly understand to be ‘economic’ processes and restores to the economic process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component; living human beings, capable of following orders as well as of flouting them”¹⁸. In this theory the commodity production for capitalism and reproduction of labour to meet the demand of labour-resource for capitalist production and it also questions oppression as a structural in-built mechanism of capitalist production only, not the intricacies of any economic process. She goes on to argue that if under capitalism the “child will always be a figuration of future labour power, then the retired worker is perhaps in capitalist terms, the termination of all possibilities”¹⁹. But a social reproduction framework which works as a methodology extends analysis beyond both wage labour and spaces of production while suggesting a broad understanding of human labour²⁰. Capitalism as a market of potentially exploitable labour power sucks the humane potentialities of the children thus continuously constructing

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Pluto Press, 2017, pp. 1-4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

a vicious cycle of making and socially maintaining the class of the labouring poor permanently.

In the 19th and 20th century India various pedagogical experiments were started regarding the primary schooling of the working class children. Although it all were the part of the “white man’s burden” and generated out of the “civilizing mission” of British imperialism, its economic profitability must not be overlooked while analyzing the nitty gritty of the factory children’s education. The colonial education system itself was modulated to produce docile subjectivities and primarily to administer the empire more effectively while furthering its financial maximization. The curriculum for the factory children was designed so strategically with a politico-economic purpose that only aimed at producing ‘effective labourers’ only. With a gimmick of welfarist attitude the colonial government produced a parallel discourse suitable only for the working children in the factories which was parallel in respect of the western pattern curriculum designed for the middle or upper-middle class children in nineteenth century Bengal. Sarada Balagopalan has argued that,

“For the colonial state, labouring children in the colony as well as children of labourers functioned both as a site of repetition (of reforms that had been undertaken in the metropole) and a site of rupture, where the rationalization for things not quite happening in the same way was naturalized within a language of lack, recalcitrant cultural practices and racial inferiority. Colonial schooling practices beginning from the mid-nineteenth

century worked with a ‘schizophrenic’ agenda where efforts to expand schooling coexisted with a deliberate restraining of the aspirations of children who enrolled.”²¹

The members of the Royal Commission on Labour prepared a preliminary report on the history of the past efforts in the matter of provision for educational provisions for the children of the labouring classes, mainly employed in the jute and cotton mills around Calcutta based on the census figures for the number of operatives in the various forms of industries. They saw how the enactment of factory legislation as a result of the recommendations of the Indian Factory Labour Commission of 1908 was followed by an enquiry made by Mr. Maclear, Inspector of European Schools²². The direct result of this enquiry was the establishment of a single school at Tittagarh for the children of the labourers at the two jute mills in the place. There were no ‘genuine’ efforts seen by the factory inspectors to “make the life of the would-be workers in mills a little better than before, by giving them some elementary education”²³. While making provisions for the education of the labouring children, they followed the Bill from the Provincial Legislative Council called the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Bill, 1929, which contemplated the ultimate introduction of free and compulsory primary education in the Province²⁴. Labour employed in industrial centres was skilled and unskilled. According to the census of 1921, of the skilled labourers only one-fourth were born in Bengal while of the unskilled labourers 2/11 were Bengalis²⁵. The rest of the labourforce, both skilled and unskilled

²¹ Sarada Balagopalan, *Inhabiting ‘Childhood’: Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014, p. 60.

²² *Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India*, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, p. 51.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 52.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

were immigrants from outside Bengal²⁶. Although the mill managers were against the child labours' primary education and setting up of schools inside the factories initially, in the later stage they somewhat changed their opinions to some extent. The reason for which is explained in the factory commission's report,

“There is a marked change in the attitude of the employers of labour towards their employees getting elementary education. From an attitude of actual hostility to the introduction of compulsory primary education among labourers in the days of the Indian Factory Labour Commission of 1908, there has been a salutary change to one of sympathy and cooperation. There is a considerable amount of feeling among the employers that perhaps elementary education may keep the labourers away from the influence of the professional agitator, as ignorance and illiteracy often lead to wild rumours and bazaar gossip gaining incredible currency, within a very short time, in places where large numbers of labourers are congregated. There is also the feeling that no welfare work among operatives is possible until they have been able to neutralize their native superstition by some amount of enlightenment following a knowledge of the three R's.”²⁷

The factory inspectors were quite doubtful regarding the ‘special quality’ of the teachers in the factory schools because “if broad minded sympathy, a wide outlook and a fair amount of general knowledge be the sine qua non of a good teacher in a school attended by children of the bhadralok class, how much more so are they needed for one dealing with the children of such primitive people.....An Inspector with

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 52-53.

imagination and a zeal for his work can possibly make education more popular with these unsophisticated people than anybody else. In order to be able to do his work efficiently he must be tactful, smart, young and intelligent enough to impress the employers.”²⁸ Thus by exercising the language of liberal benevolence the colonial government attempted to institutionalize the apparatus of factory schooling in the production of utilizable effective labour. Schools in the labour centres naturally divided themselves into two types, namely 1) those for the children of skilled labourers and 2) those for the children of the unskilled labourers. Following this differentiation there was a difference in the syllabus of studies followed in the two types of schools, those for the children of skilled labourers following a more technical syllabus which was introduced at Ludlow Jute Mill, Kanchrapara Technical School, Kharagpur Technical School and Pahartali Apprentice School²⁹. The others were of a non-technical character giving only a rudimentary knowledge of the three R’s, e.g. those at the Bally, Tittagarh and other mills and the free primary schools under Mr. Biss’ scheme³⁰. The official intention was only to create a feeling of mutual understanding between labour and capital to maintain the uniformity amongst the large number of labourers from diverse backgrounds who had come to stay in the mills for a comparatively shorter period due to their migratory character³¹. The factory inspectors witnessed at the Bansberia Jute Mill that the workers “could not much appreciate any health, hygiene or educational films in the cinema shows, often exhibited at the mill, for the benefit of the workers, simply because they could not follow the printed texts on the screen, giving the purport of the films. Thus the only

²⁸ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 53-55.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 54.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 51-55.

things that could amuse and exhilarate them were pantomime and comic sketches shown on the screen.”³² The Chief Inspector of Factories, Bengal and Assam, said in the Report of 1928 that,

“The development of welfare work must necessarily be slow, primarily on account of the illiteracy which prevails among factory labour as a class. Want of education prevents them from taking advantage of activities started for their benefit, and besides, there are age-long jobberies and corrupt practices which place insuperable difficulties in the way of many much-needed reforms. The first step, therefore, towards real progress must necessarily be the introduction of a free and compulsory education”.³³

In the nineteenth century with the general anxieties of colonialism accompanied by a rapid advent of modernity and the societal reconstruction of different classes, there emerged the discourse of the ‘sentimentalization of childhood’ (Liza Tsaliki, 2016). This kind of ideological paradigm constructed the child as an idealized creature and made children the most desired subject in any policy-making and welfare measure. Suddenly, the children became the responsibilities of the state and destiny of the nation. But this didn’t ensured children’s agency in the social or economic sphere but fortified colonialist surveillance over the children. This governmental concern over their already subjugated body and mind of the child found new meaning in the newly established industrial economy especially within the factory domain. Colonial capitalism started to reckon the children workers in the “adult labour-child labour” dualism. Children’s sexual body became a site of contestation in terms of their efficiency of production. In fact, children’s bodies became

³² Ibid, pp. 52-54.

³³ Ibid.

the sole criterion or eligibility per se of recruiting them in the factories. The ‘colonial gaze’ was muddled by the ‘adult gaze’ which continuously found in the children’s bodies the quintessential appropriateness of performing certain kinds of jobs.

Whereas, to the Indian Factory Labour Commission, one labourer named Abdul Barik who was working at the Central Jute Mill of Howrah, complained that the children and women were coerced to perform the “male jobs” in his factory, but with a meagre wage³⁴. The same accusation was pursued by a female labour from the Ghusuri Cotton Mill of Howrah that there prevailed diverse rules and regulations in the different mills of Bengal and the open flouting of laws were being overlooked by the factory inspectors. Here, one a problematic pertaining to the continuous evasion of factory laws by the mill managers may be relevant i.e. why did they flout the colonial laws despite being European staffs. The state imposed regulations were not accepted by the mill managers and this very fact reveals a kind of conflict of interests between the two stakeholders. The factory owners modified the state written laws as their own and the conflictual relationship between the two sets of laws led to the evasion of the state regulation which ultimately proved detrimental only to the workers. The unwanted intervention of the state on the ‘internal’ affairs of the factories was in negation of the interests of both European and indigenous trading companies. Bipan Chandra has argued that the indigenous trading companies found the intervention as problematic because they found it against their bourgeoisie interest³⁵. But they opposed to the existing working condition and inhuman oppression on the

³⁴ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908),p. 23.

³⁵ Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1966, pp. 343-344.

labourers in the factories³⁶. It expresses the ‘nationalist’ character of the newly emerged Indian bourgeoisie. The mill managers thought the state interference in the newly born industry as an ‘attack’ and mentioned the state as a ‘predator’³⁷. Even, there was no space for negotiation between them because while the colonial state had been compelled to take some humanitarian measures due to the external pressure from the Dundee Chamber of Commerce and the liberal government to ‘save its face’³⁸, the factory owners had no such political or moral obligation towards the workers, so they could freely become ruthless without being hypocritical. Bengal Chamber of Commerce reflected the opinion of the mill managers and stated that the new Factory Act would do nothing but generate dissatisfaction among the factory owners and they would non-cooperate with the government³⁹. The native industrialists like the manager of Bangalakshmi Cotton mill, Mr. Hemendralal Choudhuri stated in front of the Factory Labour Commission in 1908 that the age-limit of the children workers must not ever be above 9 years and the working hours of them should never be under 13 hours per day⁴⁰. Other Indian managers were even against keeping full-time doctors in the factories and argued for recruiting 8 year old girls in the jute mills. They also spoke for ‘equal quantity of works’ for the female and male labourers. Secondly, the mill managers used to ‘believe’ that due to a huge climatic difference the laws and regulations of England must not be imposed on India and the British government of India had mistakenly invoked the English laws in India. Bengal Chamber of Commerce was of the opinion that the Indian workers used to take long holidays frequently in return of daily

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, Proceedings-A, No. 1-44, May 1879, (West Bengal State Archives).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal(1903-1908)*, Permanent Black, 2011, pp. 192-193.

15 to 18 hours of work. But the English labourers were not habituated in going to such 'vacations. The mill manager of Bauria Jute Mills, Mr. Downs claimed that the Indian workers used to take holidays for petty reasons like doll's marriage, local theatre or plays etc⁴¹. So, more stringent laws were required in India to keep in check the native labourers. In the nineteenth century India, there existed two economic groups, one group propounded the ideals of active state interventions in the matters of agriculture and industry while the second group supported laissez faire policy in the economy⁴². The second one only supported limited, recognized and justifiable state intervention in the economic spheres. The proponents of the first group were Lord Mayo, John Stratchey and most of the members of the Viceroy Council⁴³. Their logic was that to protect the underdeveloped industries in the undeveloped countries, some extent of conservative state control was necessary. To eradicate the stagnancy of the oriental backward economy and Asiatic mode of production the state interference was the panacea in the opinions of this group.

Actually, the Factory Acts legislated by the colonial government were supposed to be of 'universal' character i.e. to maintain the interests of the factory owners and labourers irrespectively. But the factor of 'colonialism' added a dynamic singularity to its universalism, i.e. only to protect the interest of the imperial state. The governmental self-interest overpowered the welfarist factors and reduced the factory legislations merely to a colonial apparatus to extract from the labour-power all of its productivity. As the factory owners and mill managers mostly consisted of the European staffs, their bourgeoisie interest matched

⁴¹ General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, Proceedings-A, No. 28-33, May 1879.

⁴² Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Laissez Faire in India* in Bisheshwar Prasad(ed.), *Ideas in History*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, pp. 233-235.

⁴³ Ibid.

with that of the state, rather aggravating it. But the real victim was the labourers and their fundamental rights were undermined to the extremes. Secondly, despite its despotic and bourgeoisie motives, the Factory Act couldn't escape to incorporate within itself some benevolent paternalistic and welfarist elements due to the growing influence of the ideologies like liberalism, utilitarianism and humanism in contemporary Britain. Mary Carpenter had played a crucial role in drawing the attention of the British government to utilize the legislative apparatus in the welfare of the labourers through her organization "National Indian Association", founded in 1870⁴⁴. In 1874 in an annual conference held in Bristol, she proposed for the necessary changes required in the factory legislative processes which in fact inspired Indian Cabinet member Mr. Sallisbury to transfigure the Factory Act in India.⁴⁵ Ms. Carpenter also gathered public opinion in both Britain and India in the favour of the women and children employed inhumanly in the factories of British India. Her activities had stirred the British Parliament in India and promoted debates and discussions regarding women and children labour in India. In February, 1875, a member of the House of Commons, Mr. Anderson produced a report in the British Parliament that stated the inertia of the British government to take any welfarist measure against the women and children labour⁴⁶. He emphasized on the coercive attitude of the mill managers towards the child workers to work even on the Sundays in the name of "only machinery cleaning"⁴⁷. The members of the House of Lords also pressurized the British Government to modify the factory laws⁴⁸. Thereafter, the then Indian Cabinet Minister ordered the provincial

⁴⁴ Amal Das, *Rashtra Karkhana Aain o Shramik (1881-1908)* in Nirban Basu(ed.), *Anusandhane Shramik Itihas*, Setu Publication, Kolkata, 2013, pp. 69-71.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

governments of Bombay and Bengal Presidency to survey and record the conditions of the labourers in these regions⁴⁹. The imperial economic factor demanded special scrutiny to secure the 'vested interest' of the British trading companies operating in India who were in the unequal competition with their British counterpart. That the Indian government should impose restrictions on the works of the Indian labourers like the ones prevailing in England to bring to an end to that unequal undercutting competition. Following the footsteps of Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, the Dundee Chamber of Commerce pressurized the government to maintain an equilibrium in the competition between India and Dundee.⁵⁰ They even grounded their demand on a 'humanitarian' ground stating that in most of the mills, the children were working for 22 hours out of 24. Masking their vested interest with the veil of humanitarianism actually bore fruit and the Indian government felt the dire necessity to transfigure the existing factory legislature.

The vulnerability and helplessness of the children were manifested in their incapability to leave a mill and join the other or leave working altogether. Whereas the adult labourers could join the work as they wished which they usually did out of utter dissatisfaction to the attitudes of the factory owners, the child workers were entirely dependent on the parental consent. The notable labour rights activists during the swadeshi movement were Aswinikumar Bandyopadhyay, Premtosh Bose, Prabhatkusum Raychoudhuri and Apurbakumar Ghosh⁵¹. They generally used to gather mass opinion in favour of the labour rights, organized protests and founded associations, even used to provide support to the jobless labourers. Prabhatkusum Raychudhuri proposed a proposition in the District Congress of 24

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sumit Sarkar, *ibid*, pp. 194-242.

Parganas to stop working in night-shifts in the factories.⁵² The labour rights activists and the trade unionists attempted to improve their conditions inside the factories and provide them education. But they never thought of eradicating the children's subjectivities. They fought for their rights but those rights spoke only with the 'adult gaze' refraining from understanding the specific socio-economic subjugation of the children labourers.

The master-servant relationship between the labourers and the owners in the jute mills had intensified in the case of the children labour due to their feebleness and lack of resistance power. The existence of the children as 'bonded labour' inside the factories were ensured more by the native sirdars than the European mill managers. In the reports of Indian Jute Mill Association the sirdars and assistant sirdars have been called as "the lower subordinate supervising staff".⁵³ They were generally employed as the 'foreman' of the mills. In most of the cases, there was a direct contract between the factory owners and the sirdars to ensure the steady supply of labour in the factories. This contractual relationship had given birth to the ill-famed "sirdari system" in the industrial sphere whose spiralling control over the labourers' bodies had even surpassed that of the mill managers. Those "subordinate supervising staff" of the jute mills were 'conveniently' divided into two classes.⁵⁴ In the first class there were the more or less educated 'babu' who had never been a mill operative himself, who was engaged as an apprentice on a nominal salary and having gained experience they were promoted to the supervisor work, though possibly were incapable of doing the actual work themselves. In some mills there was one babu in charge

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931, pp. 280-281.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

of each department under the European overseer.⁵⁵ His duties were to check attendances of the children, to keep attendance registers and the age certificates of the children workers and generally to assist in the supervision and work of the department. There was also a separate clerical establishment employed in the mill offices and stores to look after production, wages, stores, etc. and to compile the various statements and reports on the working progress of the factory children⁵⁶. The babu establishment was recruited for the most part from the locality in which the mill was situated, young applicants were employed in the less important and lower paid posts to begin with, and were promoted according to merit as vacancies occurred. The second class included sirdars and under sirdars, who constituted the lower subordinate supervising staff of the mill. They were selected from the rank and file of the mill labour force, on the recommendation of the managing staff, according to capability, efficiency, service, and the authority which they displayed over the ordinary labourers⁵⁷. The dealing of sirdar-control over the labourers were cleverly handled by the colonial government in their official report, "relations between the staff, European and Indian, and the rank and file of the workers are, with rare exceptions, harmonious without being intimate. Upsets must and do occasionally occur, and are due, in the majority of cases, to oppression on the part of the subordinate supervising staff. This is severely dealt with by the management, to whom every encouragement is given to interest themselves in the personal health and general welfare of the mill employees. All grievances brought to the notice of the management are carefully investigated, either by the European in charge of the department or by the mill manager, who is always accessible for the hearing of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 280-82.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

complaints either by the workers themselves or by a deputation of sirdars. The employees have a right of appeal to the managing agents, to whom questions affecting wages are invariably referred”.⁵⁸ The direct recruitment of the labourers were conducted by the sirdars. As the domain of the changing character of the authority and control of the sirdars over the labourers is not an unscathed area in the labour historiography. Scholars have focused on the politics of formal and informal recruitment pattern by the sirdars, their dialectic but cohesive relationship with both the employed and the employers and their pivotal role in maintaining the steady supply of labour in the factories. The crux of the labour force was consisted of the migrant labourers. From the 1905 Report of the government official B. Foley⁵⁹ it’s known that in the 1880-90s, most of the jute mill labourers were Bengali people. But with the flow of time, the up-country people occupied their position and most of them came with their families. So the socio-economic condition was quite ripe to transform them from *dehati pariwar* to *mazdur pariwar*. This construction of the social class i.e. the working class family in around the jute mills may be contributed to the crude politics played by the sirdars. While “utilizing” his kin-caste-religious ties with the fellow villagers in gaining their trust, the sirdars also provoked them to engage their children in the factories so that the family could have better materiality. Foley was told by a sirdar that he would go to his village in Ghazipur in the summer and would “collect labour as much as is required by the managers” without any difficulty⁶⁰. The 1921 Census report also substantiate the fact that a large number of children migrated in Bengal with either both of their parents or with only their ‘single’ mothers and joined the jute

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ B.Foley, Report on Labour in Bengal in *Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India*, Vol. 5, Part 1, London, 1931.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

manufacturing factories in Howrah, Hooghly, 24 Parganas and the suburbs of Calcutta⁶¹. In the case of single parent the probability of sending the child to the mill was much higher due to the non-availability of any care-giver at the home. Thus when in the infantile stage they constituted the category of “non-working children”, a few years afterwards they joined the machine production thus categorized as the “working children”. This categorization ‘helped’ them to secure separate legislative provisions and ‘amenities’ allotted to them. Indrajit Gupta argues for the recruitment of the ‘gangs’ of non-Bengali up-country labourers increasingly in the jute factories along with their families and the intermediacy of the sirdars in using their regional commonality further intensified the sirdari control over them. In the Howrah Jute Mill there were 8,240 workers from Balia District and 2,593 labourers from the Azamgarh District out of the total 14,092 labourers. So, the sirdar from Balia exercised greater control than the Azamgarh sirdar. From U.P. only the quantity of labourers were such⁶²:

Calcutta and its suburbs: 53 percent

24 Parganas: 22 percent

Howrah: 25 percent

In 1866, Sasipada Banerjee turned his attention to the labouring classes in the local jute mills of Baranagore, his native place⁶³. He was an inspired disciple of Baboo Kesav Chandra Sen. On 1st November, 1866 he called a meeting of all workingmen of that locality to

⁶¹ *Report on the Census of India, 1911, Volume 5, Part 1.*

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ K.L.Chatterjee, *A Pioneer of Workingmen’s Uplift and Welfare Work in Bengal: Sasipada Banerjee* in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya(ed.), *Essays in Modern Indian Economic History*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Indian History Congress, 1987, pp. 284-289.

discuss their condition and explained to them how due to ignorance they were being exploited by the employers. He founded the first ever established night school for the workers in India. At that time, most of the workers resided in Kamarpara, Ariyadaha and Kutighata near Baranagore where Borneo Company had a jute mill.⁶⁴ Its General Manager, Mr. Maire permitted Sasipada to establish a night school within the mill area and allotted a small room for it.⁶⁵ He also raised his voice for the improvement of the condition of the children in the jute mills. But as K.L.Chatterji has argued that having a much illusory faith in British liberalism, despite his passionate attachment to the cause of the working people of India, spread among them, not an embryonic nationalistic or anti-imperialistic consciousness, but rather tried to inject the “Paternalistic” idea about British rule.

The children employed in the jute mills were only from the non-tribal population which marked a significant departure from the labouring children population of the mines and plantation industries. The variations in the wages within the jute industry led to the variegated pattern of wage rates given to the children who were mainly employed in piece-rate wages. The inductive analysis of Ranajit Dasgupta on the colonial Bengal’s labour market deserves mention here:

“Of course under capitalism wage labour always entails an element of compulsion. Economic circumstances, to be more specific, the fact of the labourers’ separation from all means of production compel them to sell their labour power to the capitalists. Further, once having sold the labour power, the labourers are subject to discipline and

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

supervision.....none of these industries wage labour did evolve in a way where the only constraint was economic....both the entry of the labourers into the labour market and their subordination in the process of production came to be structured not merely by the exchange contract but also by dependency and constraints other than those arising from the exchange contract. The labourers were secured, supervised and exploited not only through market mechanism but in addition through a wide range of non-wage and non-market mechanisms...Colonial capitalism imparted to wage labour most diverse, highly complex and peculiar forms- semi-servile indenturing, semi-serf tenancy arrangement, contract labour of non-penal nature, formally 'free' labour subject to various types of mediated control, and various combinations of some of these forms where one form of labour control merged with another.”⁶⁶

From the 1921 Census Report it is known that in the Bengal jute mills the rubric of “skilled workmen” comprised of 169860 adult males, 9771 adult females, 2119 male children under 14, and 224 female children under 14 and under “unskilled workers” the figures were 363610 adult males, 137300 adult females, 54822 male children under 14, and 32716 female children under 14⁶⁷. The jute spinning and weaving mills of Hooghly, Howrah and 24 Parganas were composed of 260342 adult males, 53678 adult females, 16939 male children below 14, and 940 female children below 14⁶⁸. The number of skilled workmen who were born in Bengal was only 31.56 percent of the total and

⁶⁶ Ranajit Dasgupta, Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India, *Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 16, No. 44/46, Special Number (Nov., 1981)*, pp. 1781-1806.

⁶⁷ Royal Commission Report, *ibid*, pp. 3-28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

among them most were the children of the immigrant labourers⁶⁹. In South Calcutta a considerable portion of labour was recruited from the surrounding agricultural districts who used to come in from the villages in the morning and return at night and pursued cultivation in their “spare time”⁷⁰. The children labourers were supposed to engage in playing football or hockey in their leisure time to strengthen their bodies and increase their productive power in the factory inspection reports. Thus the young children’s play which is generally considered a free space creating a imaginative world for the children ensuring their overall development thus started to denote another component under colonial capitalism as a growth factor of productivity.

Not only playing a crucial role in the recruitment network, they also performed a major role in arranging the habitats for the working class families which I have discussed in details in the previous chapter. To say briefly, to cope up with the glaring problem of housing in and around the congested urban space the labourers were dependent upon the sirdars and the sirdars used to rent their ‘bustees’ to the workers as a lucrative investment and thus facilitated the process of “slumification”⁷¹ in the industrial area. The Foley report also corroborates to the fact that the sirdars used to rent their cheap dwellings to the labourers from their *biradaris* at a higher rate and the dwellers’ existential dependence upon the sirdars led them to adopt even much higher rate than the usual⁷².

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Anthony Cox, *Empire, Industry and Class: The Imperial Nexus of Jute, 1840-1940*, Routledge , 2012, p. 1.

⁷² Foley Report, *ibid.*

The basis of the personalized control of the sirdars over the labourers was obvious and intensified in the case of the children workers due to their over-subjectification and super-vulnerability amongst the other workers. The major part of the children's meagre wages went into the garb of the sirdars in the forms of dali, dasturi, bakhshish, saharabani⁷³ etc. According to historian Amal Das the custom of this kind of economic transaction was not 'bribes' in its true sense, rather we may associate it with the nazrana system of the Mughal period. As the children were engaged in piece-rate work, the swallowing of a large portion of that meagre wage by the sirdars augmented economic misery and thus making their vulnerability more sharpened. The political bond between the child workers and the sirdars was quite different in character than that of between them and the adult workers. Any kind of economic transaction in a capitalistic set of economy leads to a sort of alliance or tie-up between the interest groups. The system of giving 'nazrana' to the sirdars led to the development of per contract relation between the adult workers and them which in turn proselytized mutual negotiation, personal relations, be those built on power-relations exclusively. In case of women workers, that personal relation went beyond the boundary of economic transaction leading to vehement sexual exploitation. In the case of the children workers there was no question of contract or mutual negotiation because that was a unilinear and unidirectional mode of exploitation. The personal interests of the children have all been overlooked historically by the society or their interests have been moulded according to the societal consent. As there was no scope of getting their rights recognized by

⁷³ Amal Das, *ibid.*

society, the industrial sphere was also not spared from this historical wound⁷⁴. They bound to give dasturi to the sirdars in exchange of nothing and the casual nature of the children's recruitment process and the system of giving wages in piece-rate was much to the sirdars also. The sirdari control over the children was in the form of a master-servant relationship and it was also the primitive form of the ultimate domination of the mill authority. The children workers while giving witnesses before the Royal Commission on Labour in 1929 told about the forceful extraction of money from them which had been an unwritten rule. Mr. Ommanney, an Assistant Collector, addressing the Commission on the 13th November, concerning these factories, stigmatized them as being about as cruel a way of making money as anything he could think of⁷⁵. The sirdars were also against the legislative intervention of the state in the matters of the labour like the mill authority. In their witnesses they stated that, "we feel, however, that, with respect to legal regulation here, we must be moderate in our recommendations, the result of legislative interference may be to deprive these wretched women of their employment and to their place being supplied by men, or to lower the small pit they receive to such a point as would counterbalance the disadvantages attaching to their employment by the legislature".⁷⁶ They recommended that too much interference with them might drive the labouring classes to parts like the overcrowded cities of Bengal, while in time of scarcity or famine they might usefully supplement the efforts of Government to support those in want.⁷⁷ According to them the women and children

⁷⁴ Charles Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, p. 26, accessed from elplandehiram.org on 7th May, 2019 at 10.35 A.M.

⁷⁵ Royal Commission Report.

⁷⁶ *Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 1- Reports and Appendices* (1908), p. 135.

⁷⁷ IBID.

must be allowed employment for sixteen hours with two hours' rest which seemed appropriate to them for the temporary factories which were set up for maximum months to quicken up the production process in short trips⁷⁸. The officials were quite in agreement with them and they considered that two hours of rest was necessary for the production process to "give the hands rest" and "give the machines rest".⁷⁹ The worthiness of the labouring bodies was reduced to only to the 'hands' and the mechanization of the labouring bodies was not merely a material condition but a complex psychological construction also. Mr. B. Foley, I.C.S. commented that there was no need to limit the working hours in the factories in Bengal because "they were short enough". Ranajit Dasgupta has opined that in the jute industry the labour was 'bonded' to the employers and a whole array of intermediaries- the departmental head, usually a European overseer, the Bengali babu (office clerk) and assistant, and the head sardar and the sardar. They were also tied to the owners of bustees and moneylenders all of whom had a direct or indirect relation with the jute mill management and "use of abusive language, harsh treatment and even rough handling by sardars and European supervisors constituted a regular feature of the system to keep labour docile and under control".

Another sharp feature which can be discerned from the official documents was the conscious strategy of the government to gather testimonies on the working and living conditions of the workers not from the workers themselves but from mill directors, shareholders, managers and expert professionals delivering their opinions on the basis

⁷⁸ IBID.

⁷⁹ *Report and Proceedings of the Commission Appointed to Consider The Working Of Factories in the Bombay Presidency*, Bodleian Libraries material, University of Oxford, pp. 10-24.

of the labourers. Even when the children were presented to the inspectors to state existential experiences, a specific group of children was presented, so that they maintain the fixity and standardization constructed by the mill managers. The fact of collecting witnesses only from the mill managers, civil surgeons and other officials is on two dimensions. One, commenting and suggesting on the existential experiences of the proletariat class while the self-positioning is far above that very class position, but it ignores the facticity and objectivity of the reports of the Factory Commissions. Secondly, overlooking the locational factor of the workers and relying on the statements of the mill managers whose self-interests reflected vividly in those claims denied not only the official purpose but also led to the distortion of facts based on which the 'welfare' policies would be formulated. For instance, the mill manager of Khardah Jute Mill defended the existing 15 hours as the ideal one because, "in 1905 a twelve hours' day was tried for six months, but it was not so economical as the present system, and the workers themselves were dissatisfied with the shorter hours.... A manager should not be held responsible for any child found working in the mill without a certificate. It would also be a hardship to the children if they were detained in Calcutta for several days pending examination and not allowed to work."⁸⁰ (italics) and Mr. H.C. Streatfeild, the representative of the Government of Bengal put a statement like this, "Nine appears to be a proper age at which children may be allowed to work in the factories. Their earnings after that age are of value to their parents if not working, they would be neglected and loose on the streets."⁸¹ One fact

⁸⁰ Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908).

⁸¹ Report of Indian Factory Labour Commission: Volume 2- Evidence (1908), pp. 231-32.

noteworthy here, while the factory commissions of 1875 and 1884 collected testimonies and witnesses from officials only, from 1890 onwards the commission started to gather oral testimonies from workers themselves. But it was dubious in nature and was structured in a falsified manner. The inspectors attempted to structure the enquiries in a formal, rigid questionnaire which contained close-ended questions only. While the mill managers or civil surgeons were asked to freely convey their opinions, the workers were asked certain factual questions regarding their age, working hours, wages, marital status, and recruitment age. The condition of the child workers was as usual more precarious than the other workers. The standardized pattern and fixed scheme of the racist, imperialist ethnography not only caused the unilinear and incomplete responses from child respondents, but the deliberate colonial politics of “ageism” caused a communication gap also, which the government was entirely failed to address. Here, ageism did not mean only a particular conscious discrimination against a specific community based on its age, rather when this stereotypical hierarchy is put on a colonialist ground, it acquires a much broader meaning in respect of its breadth and width of domination. Being an “oriental child” was no better than being a “factory-child” and the fact of having an existence as a “colonial-child-labour” could have probably put triple-burden on the child being, thus making the banner of oppression all-pervading. Seeing through the eyes of the colonial government and factory inspectors, the construction of ‘oriental child’ was obviously an European invention, be it ontological or epistemological. But this colonial construction didn’t restrict itself to being a mere psychological imagination, it started appearing and describing the paradigm of reality also, in which paradigm, bri

the child workers under the colonial “enumerative modalities”⁸² served the cu
artefact of imperialism where even the issue of child workers’ education remained :
‘imperial question which must be left with the government only’.

⁸² See Bernard Cohn, *Introduction* Part in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 1996.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the development of an industrial labour-force and their using up in the process of capitalist production has been always perceived as the resultant of a process of colonial modernity. This 'modernization' always kept away the notion that women and children can be the vectors of modernization. The deliberate state-instituted proletarianization of women and children was responsible for this exclusion which also accelerated the procedure of their being proletarianized. Amongst the myriad of politics on the shopfloors, the most influential one was the gender-based identity politics. From the empirical and theoretical establishments of the previous chapters it is a well established fact that the multifaceted discriminations against the women and children inside the factories and in the 'homes' were solely based on the very gendered orientation of the colonial heteronormative politics. On the one hand the pressure from the capitalism's demand and the colonial patriarchal power-relations on the other, had caused a sort of alienation of the women and children workers. In the colonial politics of ageism the creation of the class of the young persons who were categorized as the 'immature adults' further enhanced their multifarious domination by relegating them to the category of the adult labourers. There was the alienation from their labour, alienation from their identity and alienation from their existence. The instrumentalization and disciplining of the children's labour within the factory domain was attached with the process of their being and becoming of capitalist subjects and unbecoming of human-beings. The exercise of their mechanization had reached to such an extent that probably they were personified only during the time they were at work.

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¹ General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, Proceedings-A, No. 28-33, May 1879.

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