



LAWFOYER INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DOCTRINAL LEGAL RESEARCH

[ISSN: 2583-7753]

Volume 4 | Issue 3

2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70183/lijdlr.2026.v04.272>

© 2026 LawFoyer International Journal of Doctrinal Legal Research

Follow this and additional research works at: www.lijdlr.com

Under the Platform of LawFoyer – www.lawfoyer.in

After careful consideration, the editorial board of LawFoyer International Journal of Doctrinal Legal Research has decided to publish this submission as part of the publication.

In case of any suggestions or complaints, kindly contact (info.lijdlr@gmail.com)

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the LawFoyer International Journal of Doctrinal Legal Research, To submit your Manuscript [Click here](#)

THE PRODUCTION OF DISPOSABLE LIVES: THE MODERN REINVENTION OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

Mihika Shetty¹

I. ABSTRACT

Civilization has always demanded a body. Formerly, it lived in the shadow of temples and witnessed blood soaking its stone floor in the name of gods, harvests, wars, and survival. It invoked violence as sacred. Now, it trembles with horror at the thought of sacrifice in ritual and believes it is far from the barbarism of ancient times. Yet the cries have not ceased. They have merely been buried under factories, borders, prisons, battlefields, falling buildings and sterile discourse. A laborer drowns under concrete that is part of a city to which he will never belong. A girl relinquishes her hands to industry before her age of knowing exploitation arrives. A mother witnesses her family being consumed in war, leaving behind numbers of loss read aloud as quickly before dinner is served to the remainder. Entire groups of people starve softly while economies grow and markets boom and the government speaks clean-mouthed promises of progress. It is argued here that rather than eliminating it, modernity has merely hidden human sacrifice. Altar was replaced by an institution. Ritual by administration. Violence by policy. Death became profitable. There exist those under the auspices of capitalism, nationalism and the state that are constantly deemed sacrifice able, allowing those remaining to live securely and without complicity. Using structural violence and expendability as theoretical lenses, this paper discusses how modern civilization maintained itself through orchestrated suffering by masking sacrifice behind legality, policy and modern advancement. Through an examination of law, power and the disposable bodies upon which our comfort is founded, it addresses the grim question of whether the world we live in is any less violent, or only less honest.

II. KEYWORDS

Human Sacrifice, Structural Violence, Human Expendability, State Power, Bureaucratized Violence.

¹ Student 9th semester pursuing BA LLB at St Joseph College of Law (India). Email ID: mihikashetty488@gmail.com

III. INTRODUCTION

Human sacrifice has for long held a distinct position in humanity's moral imagination. It remains in our memory not simply as an act of violence but as the epitome of primitive barbarity; an action in which humans were laid at the altar of gods, states, harvests, and wars in the interests of collective survival. Ancient communities shed blood publicly and ritually, seeking suffering to procure fortune, divine favour, political order, or salvation from catastrophe. Today, modern civilization condemns such an act with certainty; it frames its own renunciation of ritual sacrifice as the testament to a human moral revolution.

Law, democracy, human rights and modern states serve as proof that society has overcome the brutality of antiquity. The modern state sustains itself on sacrifice. A suffering exists that is systematic, routineized, and rendered invisible. Factories collapse and people die. Prisons overflow with those whom modernity deems politically expendable. Borders and their militarization continue to render specific human bodies into politically tolerated sacrifices. Poverty, displacement, hunger, and abandonment leave entire communities in ruins while states continue to pride themselves on their political stability and economic prosperity. The suffering endures, but its visage has been transformed from the overt, physical shedding of blood to an indirect yet equally effective form of violence. Sacrifice has moved from the ritual to the institutional, from public spectacle to bureaucratic management.

This article does not claim that contemporary society replicates the ancient practice of human sacrifice in its literal form. Instead, this essay asserts that the logic of sacrifice persists within modern civilization itself. Modernity has not eradicated sacrifice, but it has re-articulated its function to ensure the continued production of sacrificial bodies that are systematically disposed of while obscuring the nature of the violence through legality, policy, governance and economics. In the absence of the altar, institutions take its place and bloodshed is replaced by structural violence which becomes so integrated in everyday life that it is no longer considered violence at all.

In the frame of structural violence, introduced by Johan Galtung, violence occurs not simply as a direct act of the perpetrator against the victim, but indirectly through the

very fabric of society, economy and politics. In structural violence, there is no guilty party because the perpetrators responsible for the suffering and pain that they perpetrate do not appear as culprits and, crucially, because these participants believe that their actions are merely the acceptable by-products of modernization, capitalism, nationalism, security and development.

Certain humans are then reduced to politically tolerable losses. Through the concept of structural violence and human expendability, this paper examines the complicity of legal and political structures of modernity with the process of modern sacrificial production of disposable lives. It traces the link between sacrifice, state power, capitalism, nationalism and governance in modern states and raises questions as to whether the modern states have abandoned sacrificial violence or instead perfected their concealment. In doing so, this essay will shed light on a disturbing possibility: that civilization's dependence on sacrificial production persists beneath layers of morality and progress; humans are offered to its welfare quietly, continuously and systematically.

A. Research Problem

Contemporary society condemns human sacrifice as a barbaric and primitive ritual, yet it continues to operate through institutional arrangements that sacrifice human life, dignity, and well-being for the advancement, stability, and security of the State and society. From labourers who perish in the name of progress they may never experience, to civilians treated as 'acceptable losses' during war, and communities rendered disposable for development, the problem lies in examining whether modernity has truly abandoned sacrifice or merely transformed it into a bureaucratic and legally mediated process.

B. Research Questions

1. Has modern society genuinely moved away from human sacrifice, or has it translated sacrifice into institutional, legal, and bureaucratic forms?
2. How do law, capitalism, nationalism, and State power contribute to the production of expendable or disposable human lives?

3. Does Indian labour and constitutional law substantively prevent structural violence, or does it merely regulate and legitimise conditions of exploitation?
4. In what ways are poverty, displacement, unsafe labour, war, incarceration, and border control normalised as acceptable costs of progress and governance?
5. Can the concept of structural violence explain the continued sacrifice of marginalised communities within modern legal and political systems?

C. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the shift of human sacrifice from ritualistic to institutional and structural violence under conditions of modernity.
2. To inquire into the ways in which law, state, capitalism, and nationalism produce expendable humans.
3. To explore structural violence and the process by which human suffering is rendered normal under modern institutions.
4. To inquire if modern law in fact safeguards marginalized populations, or rather, whether it manages and hides the structure of exploitation.
5. To explore the relationships between the power of the state, the functioning of the bureaucracy, and the rendering of institutionalized suffering normal.
6. To inquire into the contradiction between modern civilization's assertion of a moral advance and its continued dependence on the consumption of expendable lives.

D. Research Methodology

This research takes as its starting point the assumption that violence did not vanish along with the end of human sacrifice; it merely transmogrified into other forms. Blood no longer streams in torrents under the sanctity of altars or temples, but human pain continues to sustain modernity in less conspicuous and more socially acceptable ways. This includes a worker lying dead under the concrete of a city she helped build, a refugee stranded and refused entry at heavily militarised borders while States

debate questions of legality, and a child labourer compelled to work long before they come to understand the term 'exploitation.'

It also includes whole societies languishing in hunger, war, displacement, and exhaustion while governments continue to celebrate development, progress, and national growth. All of the foregoing forms the basis of this study. This paper employs a primarily qualitative, socio-legal and theoretical methodology. While recognizing violence as manifested through acts of brutal and direct suffering, this research endeavors to investigate forms of hidden and systemic suffering inherent in the systems of governance, capitalism, nationalism, labour and state authority that make up modernity. The study endeavors to find out how violence gets reified in legality, administration, policymaking, economic imperative and bureaucracy to the point that exploitation itself appears to be merely normal or ordinary.

The research extensively utilizes secondary sources in the form of constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial precedents and commentary, journal articles, human rights reports, academic writing, policy documents, labour studies and socio-political theories. Constitutions provide rights, (e.g. Articles 21, 23, 24 of the Indian Constitution have been analyzed) which are enforced by the judicial and legislative system (legislations concerning bonded labour, child labour, trafficking, labour exploitation etc.) but in certain instances, there are blatant and systemic lacunae or failures on the part of law and the state that must be brought to light by a legal/theoretical understanding.

Landmark Supreme Court decisions, for example *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v Union of India* and *People's Union for Democratic Rights v Union of India* are considered to investigate the nature of constitutional obligation imposed on the state in protecting human dignity and the legal understanding of forced labor. This research also broadly incorporates and integrates the work of Johan Galtung, Hannah Arendt, Achille Mbembe, Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault into its argument. Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence provides an analytical tool to probe the embedment of human suffering in social structures instead of only directly witnessed forms of brutality.

Hannah Arendt's discussion of banal evil illustrates how systems normalize violence through the functioning of administration and bureaucratic procedure, and obedience as a social practice. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics has been critically deployed to understand how the modern state has acquired the power of determining which human lives may be allowed to be saved and which ones can be abandoned to mortality. Giorgio Agamben's idea of 'bare life' also serves to discuss the position of certain excluded communities who remain inside a political system but are deprived of a voice or genuine protection.

Methodology of this research therefore lies in combining doctrinal analysis with critical theory and sociological enquiry. The study does not simply seek to show exploitation and violence exist in modern society but strives to understand how society continues to maintain itself through the structured and systemic suffering of its members, distanced and detached from the act of violence which upholds its structure, comfort and order.

The research endeavors to analyze whether the end of human sacrifice as a ritual indeed brought an end to it as an institution or, it merely metamorphosed into a bureaucratic process embedded within institutions and the everyday life of modern human beings.

IV. RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

A. Constitutional Framework

"India has enacted broad constitutional and statutory provisions designed to prevent citizens from exploitation, bonded labour, trafficking, and conditions that render human being's disposable. The Right to Life and Personal Liberty is guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which has been interpreted by the Supreme Court as including the right to live with dignity. Articles 23 and 24 of the Constitution prohibit trafficking, bonded labour, forced labour, and the employment of children in hazardous industries. However, despite these constitutional guarantees, exploitative labour practices and structural violence remain deeply entrenched across India.

B. Statutory Framework

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 was enacted to abolish bonded labour, extinguish bonded debts, and invalidate obligations arising from forced labour. It was intended to combat an exploitative labour system rooted in poverty, caste hierarchy, and economic dependence. However, even after decades of its enactment, bonded labour continues to survive in sectors such as brick kilns, construction work, mines, and domestic service, often concealed through informal terms of employment.

Similarly, legislations such as the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which has subsumed the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 and now regulates protections for inter-State migrant workers, Section 143 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which criminalises trafficking, and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 attempt to address structural violence that preys on the most vulnerable. Yet, implementation remains extremely problematic with weak enforcement, bureaucratic apathy, class exploitation, and caste bias frequently identified by courts, activists, and civil society organisations as the root of continuing modern-day slavery and expendability.

The shift from the 1979 Act to the 2020 Code is also analytically significant because the Code's special provisions for inter-State migrant workers apply to establishments employing ten or more such workers, thereby raising concerns that smaller and more informal establishments, where migrant labour is often most vulnerable, may fall outside the practical reach of statutory protection.

The enactment and enforcement of the four Labour Codes also require attention within this analysis, particularly because modern labour regulation increasingly operates through consolidation, formalisation, and administrative standardisation. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which came into force on 21 November 2025, is especially relevant because it subsumes several earlier labour enactments and contains provisions concerning occupational safety, working conditions, contract labour, and inter-State migrant workers.

While such codification may appear to modernise and simplify labour governance, its deeper significance for this paper lies in the question of whether consolidation alone can prevent structural violence. Migrant workers, informal workers, contract labourers, and workers in hazardous or precarious sectors remain vulnerable not merely because of the absence of law, but because enforcement often fails to reach the social and economic conditions in which exploitation is normalised. The Labour Codes therefore illustrate the central contradiction of modern legal systems: the State may formally recognise vulnerability and create regulatory mechanisms, yet they lived experience of workers may continue to be shaped by informality, dependence, unsafe conditions, and weak bargaining power.

In this sense, the legal framework becomes both protective and managerial; it acknowledges the worker as a rights-bearing subject, but may still permit the continuation of labour arrangements that render certain lives economically expendable. This reinforces the broader argument that modern sacrifice does not occur outside law alone, but often survives within legal and administrative systems that regulate suffering without fully eliminating its structural causes.

C. Judicial Interpretation

This inconsistency was recognised in the landmark judgment of *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*. The Supreme Court held that bonded labour directly violates Articles 21 and 23 of the Constitution and affirmed that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity. The Court also criticised the State for failing to identify, release, and rehabilitate bonded labourers. Crucially, the judgment demonstrates that constitutional promises remain incomplete when exploitative practices continue beneath the surface of bureaucratic inaction.

D. Analytical Position

The situation in India therefore presents a glaring contradiction: the law explicitly condemns exploitation and promises dignity, freedom, and security, while structural violence continues to operate within the economic and social fabric that law often fails to reach. The coexistence of strong legal guarantees with continued labour exploitation and human suffering raises the central question of this paper: whether modern legal

systems penalise violence only in form, while silently condoning the conditions that recreate disposable lives.”

E. Scope of Study

“This thesis transcends the classic notion of human sacrifice—an archaic affair steeped in blood and offering up souls at an altar. It ventures into the low-frequency hum of modern violence where sacrifice is not made before a god but at factories, in prisons, across borders, on battlefields, within migrant camps, during economic collapse, and the quiet mechanisms of state. It inquiries into how modern civilization still saves itself through suffering that is managed, routinised, and hidden in the language of law, progress, development, national identity and economic expansion.

This study delves into the existence of lives stranded below the radar of such systems; workers whose very bodies are fed to the industry of their labour, civilian bodies reduced to a blank, forgotten canvas beneath war and state authority; children who are reduced by labor and poverty to a mere object of sustenance and support; populations whom an institution can manage not by succoring but by being resigned to the fact of their continued torment. Violence does not just take the shape of overt brutality but is perpetuated through negligence, exploitation, displacement, indifference and systematic deprivation.

Drawing on legal and social theory, this thesis poses questions to the way law and governance can create, condone and perpetuate structures where disposable lives are created through human sacrifice even as law and state institutions represent tools for civilized living and human ethics. It shows how legality, administration and institutionality are not necessarily forces that obliterate violence but institutions that mask it and enable modern states to remain oblivious to the fact that their present peace is built on the continuing existence of such violence.

Therefore, this study aims at probing into human sacrifice, a concept that does not only reveal the reality of structural violence and disposability of human life but also highlights that modern society has not ended human sacrifice, rather has converted it into an unseen, muted yet acceptable mode of operation.”

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR REFORM

1. **Law must translate to robust enforcement, not mere legislation:** The constitutional safeguards and labour laws that exist must not be relegated to symbolic status. Strict enforcement machinery, independent inspections, and stricter accountability for abuse, bonded labor, trafficking, unsafe working conditions and systematic neglect, must be put in place so that the problem cannot survive under a cloak of administrative neglect.
2. **Recognise the reality of Structural Violence within Law:** The definition of violence in law should go beyond visible signs of injury and suffering. Systemic exploitation, institutional neglect, economic compulsion, unsafe labor conditions, displacement and preventable suffering must be acknowledged as Structural Violence, capable of violating human dignity and constitutional rights.
3. **Re-orient labour law towards human dignity over economic benefit:** All labor systems should be built around human dignity over economic output. Compulsory rights regarding adequate remuneration, healthcare, insurance, acceptable work hours, mental well-being, physical safety and social security, should be enforced, especially where informal workers, migrant labor, and gig workers remain highly vulnerable to abuse.
4. **Holding State power to account:** Both governments and state institutions must bear legal and moral responsibility for policy decisions that expose marginalized groups to avoidable hardship. Economic policies, developmental projects and state interventions must be subjected to strict human rights scrutiny to ensure they do not result in displacement, abandonment or institutionalized suffering.
5. **Enhancing Protection of Vulnerable and marginalized groups:** Remedial, welfare, educational, and protectionary mechanisms must be developed more stringently to include the bonded, trafficked, displaced, refugees, children and all vulnerable segments who bear the hidden cost of modern systems.
6. **Regulation of Capitalist and Corporate Structures from an ethical standpoint:** Laws and regulations governing industries and corporations that

profit from exploitative labor, should include transparent enforcement mechanisms and legally binding human rights commitments, because profit cannot justify reducing human beings into expendable economic tools.

7. **Focus on human rights for public policy and governance:** It should not be the sole focus of the State to encourage economic development at the cost of human suffering. Economic progress should not be deemed legitimate as long as it is predicated upon invisible sacrifice.
8. **Promoting public awareness and social responsibility:** The society too must confront its participation in structures supported by hidden suffering. Education, public awareness and the role of media, as well as scholarly contributions must strive to expose those invisible forms of labor exploitation that are treated as normal, by modern society, due to ignorance and distance.
9. **Judicial extension of Right to Dignity:** Courts should continue to interpret Article 21 of the constitution broadly to include evolving forms of structural exploitation and institutional violence and ensure that this right not just focuses on the right to life but includes the right to life with dignity, security, and humanity.
10. **Re-humanising Law and Governance:** Above all, reform should translate not merely into amendment of laws, but a re-orienting of systems so that the value of the human being is not measured by economic utility or productivity. Civilisation will fail to prove itself human if it requires human suffering to exist alongside comfort, order and growth.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is a terrifying prospect, an advanced society that no longer requires the viewing of the sacrifice on which it lives.

The traditional world, at least, did not shy away from seeing its violence: Sacrifice was not brought quietly into a temple or ritual space, but dragged to the town square so that the populace might know what it was that was to be killed in order to survive, prosper, be safe, gain power. In modern life, something much more chilling is occurring. It is attempting to dissociate suffering from sight; it teaches us to desire the

benefits that suffering provides without ever needing to examine the body that experiences it. The worker is allowed to die unseen beneath the weight of production, and business resumes in the morning. The refugee may pass from the picture at a border, and politicians will speak of border control and national security.

The girl may sacrifice her future to the production of cheap goods while industries proudly proclaim that production is rising; the populations exist in exhaustion, war, displacement, hunger, and abandonment while we celebrate our progress, humaneness, and civilization. That is where the violence of the modern world lies-not in its existence (for the suffering of some may benefit others), but in its normalization.

What this work shows is that the logic of sacrifice has not been destroyed; it has been perfected. Violence is no longer that which appears bearing weapons and a threat; now it takes the form of contracts, policy, algorithms, production systems, prisons, heavily fortified borders, the financial instruments that structure and sustain economies and societies, and language so detached, clinical, and abstract that human lives being destroyed seem merely administrative. The death of human beings becomes data. Fatigue becomes productivity.

Exploitation becomes opportunity. Human life becomes an input, a calculation, a commodity, a disaster (in which case, we try to control it to our advantage) long before it ever comes to be thought of as a human being.

The law struggles against this contradiction too-constitutional rights must promise dignity while the systems of modernity work to strip us of it, and rights are meaningless while the disadvantaged continue to live in conditions that slowly destroy us body and spirit. This condemnation of visible cruelty goes on while at the same time the continued ability to enact hidden violence on a mass scale allows our societies to continue to function, to prosper economically and politically, and to maintain their collective sense of order and their continued feeling of collective ease, so that we continue to believe that our society does not perform violence because that is not how violence is identified or discussed.

This might be what makes the modern world so much more frightful than the old: that the latter demands sacrifice and the former demands quiet. That the latter allowed our

society a form of distance and complicity in sacrificing lives while the former attempts to create for us a distance in morality, from the bodies on which we continue to rely- the body of the consumer enjoys the commodity and ignores the body's exhaustion, the nation is thrilled by rising economic status and ignores the dispossession and abandonment; we celebrate progress in concrete, buildings and profit and overlook the bodies in the ground.

What is it that we ask at the close of this paper-do modern societies still kill? Or are they so adapted to organized suffering that we no longer identify violence unless a body bleeds in front of our eyes? Perhaps the altar has not gone away. Perhaps it is the world now.

VII. REFERENCES

1. Theory Analysis, The Sacrifice of Man for Progress, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/02632764241229203>.
2. Scholarly Article, The Modern State Sustains Itself on Sacrifice, available at <https://egarp.lt/index.php/aghel/article/view/403>.
3. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-slavery>
4. Agamben, Giorgio, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998) (referenced via "bare life" theory).
<https://www.thing.net/~rdom/ucsd/biopolitics/HomoSacer.pdf>
5. Arendt, Hannah, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1963).
https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/arendt_eichmanninjerusalem.pdf
6. Foucault, Michel, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/>

7. Galtung, Johan, Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, 6(3) Journal of Peace Research 167 (1969).

https://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_7/Galtung_Violence,%20Peace,%20and%20Peace%20Research.pdf

8. Mbembe, Achille, Necropolitics, 15(1) Public Culture 11 (2003).

<https://read.dukeupress.edu/public-culture/article-abstract/15/1/11/31714/Necropolitics?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

9. International Labour Organization (ILO), Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Trafficking in Persons.

<https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons>

10. Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India, (1984) 3 SCC 161.

<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/595099/>

11. People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India, (1982) 3 SCC 235.

<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/496663/>

12. The Constitution of India, 1950:

- Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty.
- Article 23: Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour.
- Article 24: Prohibition of employment of children in factories, etc.

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/parts/part-iii/>

13. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-new_delhi/documents/genericdocument/wcms_300625.pdf

14. The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/19582/1/the_child_and_adolescent_labour_%28prohibition_and_regulation%29_act%2C_1986_no._6_1_of_1986_date_23.12.1986.pdf

15. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, including its special provisions relating to inter-State migrant workers. The Code subsumes and repeals the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979.
<https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/22041>
16. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
<https://socialjustice.gov.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/The%20Scheduled%20Castes%20and%20Scheduled%20Tribes.pdf>
17. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, § 143. The provision replaces the earlier trafficking framework under § 370 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, following the coming into force of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 on 1 July 2024.
https://www.unodc.org/cld/en/legislation/ind/indian_penal_code/chapter_xvi/articles_370370a/section_370_-_370a.html