

Tribhuvan University

An Ethical Reassessment of Modern-day Slavery and Systemic Failure in

McCormick's *Sold* and Washington's *Up from Slavery*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "An Ethical Reassessment of Modern-day Slavery and Systemic Failure in McCormick's *Sold* and Washington's *Up from Slavery*" submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, is my original work. I have duly acknowledged all ideas and information borrowed from various sources in the course of writing this dissertation.

The results presented herein have not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree or for any other purpose. Furthermore, no part of this dissertation has been published in any form prior to this submission. I take full responsibility if any evidence is found contradicting this declaration.

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Bhoj Raj Karkee

Date :9 April 2025

Approval Letter

This research work entitled "An Ethical Reassessment of Modern-day Slavery and Systemic Failure in McCormick's *Sold* and Washington's *Up from Slavery*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Bhoj Raj Karkee has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This dissertation compares Patricia McCormick's *Sold* and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, two works written a century apart, to examine the persistence of slavery in contemporary society. While Washington reflects on the historical oppression of African Americans and their struggle for freedom, McCormick's novel narrates the harrowing experience of Lakshmi, a young girl trafficked into the sex trade. Although slavery is widely believed to have been abolished, Lakshmi's story exposes how it continues to exist in hidden and systemic ways. Despite the existence of numerous laws prohibiting slavery, its persistence raises a critical question: why do such exploitative conditions endure worldwide? This dissertation argues that the root cause lies not in the absence of legal frameworks but in the failure of authorities who often prioritize personal interests over their duty. The systemic failure enables modern-day slavery to thrive. Overall, these texts call for a collective response in which every individual, government, NGOs, and INGOs, prioritizes ethical responsibility over self-interest. Only through a coordinated and committed effort may slavery-like conditions be meaningfully addressed, if not entirely dismantled.

Keywords: Modern-day Slavery, Systemic Failure, Slavery-like Situation, Contractualist-Deontology, Mass-Awareness.

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Chapter I: Narratives of Enslavement in *Sold* and *Up from Slavery*

General Overview

As its primary texts, this dissertation examines *Sold* (2006) by Patricia McCormick, an American journalist and writer, and *Up from Slavery* (1901) by Booker T. Washington, an influential educator during the Reconstruction Era. By analyzing these narratives—written nearly a century apart—this study seeks to comprehend the nature of chattel slavery in nineteenth-century America and explore how similar forms of exploitation persist in contemporary global contexts. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington reflects on the systemic remnants of historical slavery and expresses doubts about its resurgence in future. So, enhancement of his community through education is all what he does to minimize the cycle. These concerns find unsettling resonance in *Sold*, where the protagonist, Lakshmi, is deceitfully trafficked from the Himalayan village of Nepal to a brothel in India, and she is forced into sex labor, a fate she neither imagined nor consented to. Many human rights activists and humanitarian organizations may call it as a form of 'modern-day slavery.'

Although the term, modern-day slavery, has not yet been explicitly defined in international law, the national laws of several countries—particularly the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and Australia—have recognized and criminalized it. So do the major humanitarian organizations and advocacy groups such as the United Nations (UN), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Walk Free Foundation that they acknowledge it as a violation of human rights. Therefore, they have established their own principles and standards to combat and dismantle the issue.

Even though these laws and directives may define modern-day slavery within their specific social contexts, they share an understanding in common—it refers to

contemporary slavery-like conditions in which individuals, particularly in the context of employment, are subjected to coercion, exploitation, and forced labor. Such situations are commonly experienced by the workers who, due to economic hardship, become vulnerable to exploitation in their pursuit of employment. Exploiters often take advantage of this vulnerability through deception, threats, intimidation, and other coercive tactics. Recently, Walk Free Organization, an international human rights group based in Perth, Western Australia, defines, "Modern slavery takes many forms and is known by many names. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, or deception "(Walk Free). These lines clearly suggest that the circumstances where people are trapped and made unable to leave refer to this condition.

An example can be drawn from the case of Lakshmi, the protagonist of *Sold*, who undergoes a harrowing experience similar to the conditions described by the Walk Free Foundation. Financially vulnerable and desperate for work, Lakshmi is deceived and trafficked by a group of individuals—including her stepfather, Aunt Bimla, and Uncle Husband—who manipulate her trust and organize her transport to a brothel in India. There, she is forced to work as a sex worker under the constant threat and control of the brothel owner, Mumtaz. The brothel is ironically named 'Happiness House,' where Lakshmi endures suffering and exploitation. In fact, her situation reflects the grave violations of human rights. From a human rights perspective, Lakshmi's ordeal is a clear example of modern-day slavery, where coercion, deception, and abuse of power entrap her into forced labor and sexual exploitation.

The literature review of the study reveals that modern-day slavery no longer manifests through explicit legal ownership as in the historical slavery. Instead, it has evolved into more complex forms that are often hidden in plain sight. These include

child-labor, human trafficking, sex trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, and forced marriage—practices that violate fundamental human rights yet persist in various parts of the world. These modern forms of exploitation are often maintained through coercion, deception, and systemic vulnerabilities, making people unable to detect and eradicate easily. At the heart of this issue, there lies a pressing question: despite the existence of laws or prohibitive measures, why do slavery-like conditions still continue to persist across the globe?

There are a few possible explanations to answer this question—either a lack of adequate legislation or significant shortcomings in the enforcement of existing laws. However, a review of abolitionist history suggests that the former is unlikely to be the primary cause because numerous national and international laws, directives, and frameworks have been established by states and humanitarian organizations to combat it. Therefore, the core issue may lie not in the absence of legal mechanisms, but in the failure of those in positions of power to implement these measures ethically and honestly. In this regard, modern-day slavery can be viewed as a lingering remnant of historical practices that has its root systems. Unaddressed, it may cause institutional and governance failures.

Tracing the roots of modern-day slavery to systemic failures, it becomes evident that the institution of slavery has the potential to re-emerge in new forms if underlying structural issues remain unaddressed. In the aftermath of historical slavery, following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Booker T. Washington proposes a solution focused on the promotion of skill-based education for vulnerable communities. His vision was particularly compelling in the context of newly freed individuals, who sought better employment opportunities—opportunities that were largely unattainable without formal education and vocational training. Washington's

emphasis on education aimed to empower these communities, providing them with the tools necessary to break free from cycles of poverty and exploitation. However, in the present day, despite the widespread availability of education and skill training, individuals still find themselves trapped in slavery-like conditions, which shows that education alone may not be enough to address the deeper systemic issues at play.

Accordingly, Washington pursues his own education at Hampton Institute and later establishes the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama that emphasizes practical, hands-on learning in the fields such as carpentry, brick-making, agriculture, and construction. However, this historical solution may not fully address the complexities of modern-day slavery, where even highly educated and skilled individuals continue to face exploitative, slavery-like conditions in their workplaces. This contrast underscores the evolving nature of systemic exploitation and the need for broader structural reform beyond education alone.

Relating this slavery-like situation now in employment, many workers—particularly in countries like Nepal—are deceived by employers or middlemen when they seek job opportunities overseas. *Sold*'s protagonist, Lakshmi, represents not just an individual case but a broader reality faced by many migrant workers who leave home with hopes of supporting their families. Making her believe that she is going to work as a maid, the stepfather sells her to Bimla who transports her to the border between Nepal and India a brothel and Uncle Husband takes her to the brothel to sell to Mumtaz. Analyzing closely to their motif behind this, it is their self-interest to make money that motivates them to perform an illegal act. Moreover, this narrative parallels the experiences of many migrant workers, who are often misled by false promises and become trapped in exploitative labor environments. Such systemic indifference perpetuates modern-day slavery and underscores the urgent need for

ethical recruitment practices, legal safeguards, and informed choices of employment.

In light of this scenario, it is indefensible that policymakers have failed to establish an effective ombudsman system to actively and continuously oversee the actions of authorities. If such a system were in place, vulnerable communities would be less susceptible to deception, and the cycle of slavery could be significantly reduced or even dismantled. For instance, had a strong ombudsman mechanism existed at the border between Nepal and India, Lakshmi's tragic experience could have been prevented. This highlights the critical need for effective oversight to protect vulnerable individuals from falling prey to exploitation and trafficking.

As it is the issue rooted in the intentions of those in power, policymakers face significant challenges in addressing it. It seems almost impossible to exactly know what may motivate individuals to work for illegal. Ironically such actions are sometimes justified through the manipulation of legal frameworks where individuals may use deceptive tactics to validate their false claims. For example, Uncle Husband easily justifies his actions to Lakshmi by claiming that the policemen at the border are bad people, the goondas who will never understand her feelings. In this context, a nuanced perspective becomes essential to resolve the problem or, at least, minimizing its cycle. One possible framework to guide this approach is Contractualist Deontology proposed by Harvard Professor T.M. Scanlon in his *What We Owe to Each Other*.

Scanlon, building upon Kantian ethics, interprets actions through the lens of moral justification. For Scanlon, determining right and wrong is not a matter of simple definition but rather a process of mutual agreement, where both parties—the actor and the acted upon—cannot reasonably reject the terms. He argues, "An act is right if and only if it is justifiable to others on terms they could not reasonably reject. For a utilitarian, however, what makes an action right is having the best

consequences" (189). This suggests that a morally right action is grounded in mutual duty and respect, rather than personal gain. This stands in contrast to utilitarianism, which focuses solely on the outcomes of actions, often prioritizing the greatest good for the greatest number at the expense of individual rights or justice.

This perspective provides a potential solution to the issue, if not completely, then at least partially. The root of the problem lies in the systems that perpetuate exploitation and oppression, and these systems can be corrected through the proper application of laws. However, the key to ensuring effective change is the intention of those in positions of power. Simply having laws and frameworks in place does not seem to be enough, those entrusted with enforcement and decision-making must act with a sense of duty and responsibility. The actors in positions of authority must approach their work with integrity and a commitment to justice by ensuring that they are not driven by self-interest or the pursuit of profit, but rather by a genuine concern for the well-being of vulnerable populations.

To sum up, this paper presents a few key implications. First, it aims to contribute new knowledge to fields such as Labor Studies and Migration Studies. Second, by exposing the systemic factors that fuels slavery-like conditions today, it seeks to provide valuable insights for policymakers to help develop more effective strategies for protecting vulnerable populations from exploitation. Additionally, it aspires to stimulate new discussions in academic discourse by raising mass awareness. In addition, this interdisciplinary study advocates for a deeper understanding of social justice with a special focus on promoting equity and human rights across diverse communities.

Lakshmi's Passage into Bondage in *Sold*

Sold (2006), authored by Patricia McCormick, an American journalist-writer,

narrates the story of a trafficked victim, Lakshmi. Lakshmi is a thirteen-year-old girl child who hails from a village of the Himalayas, Nepal. She is deceitfully transported by a group of people—her stepfather, Bajai Gita (a local tea shop owner), a city woman (Bimla), and a man (Uncle Husband) to a brothel in India called 'Happiness House'. Her story begins when she thinks of working as a maid in the city so that she can elevate the family's poverty. What makes her think this way is her stepfather's unusual behaviour that he works for nothing to generate the family's income. Instead, he spends all his days by just engaging in futile political talks with his friends at the local tea shop of Bajai Gita. As a result, the family has to undergo such financial crisis that they even have to sell everything they possess such as the cattle and cucumbers for their survival.

The stepfather manipulates her emotional vulnerability and convinces her that she is going to the city to work as a maid. In reality, he plans to sell her to a city woman named Bimla for easy money. Early the next morning, he takes her to Bajai Gita's tea shop, where Bimla is temporarily staying and facilitating the trafficking of vulnerable village girls. At the shop, Bimla and the stepfather haggle over Lakshmi's price. Bimla inspects her, finding her too plain and too small-hipped to be worth much, but eventually agrees to pay eight hundred rupees—half upfront and the rest after Lakshmi proves her worth in the city. After sealing the deal, the stepfather takes the money and uses the money to indulge in cigarettes, sweets, rice wine, a new hat, and a bottle of Coca-Cola. In this way, Lakshmi's first sale completes in the backroom of a tea shop that marks the tragic beginning of her journey.

As soon as the negotiation is done, Bimla makes Lakshmi walk towards the city on foot. Carrying a bundle of her belongings on her back, Lakshmi follows Bimla for a couple of days. As she walks, she imagines the city and its people. She pictures

houses with golden roofs and believes the city dwellers to be civilized and educated. Overwhelmed by her imagination, she eagerly asks Bimla numerous questions about the city and the city people but Bimla remains silent. Instead, she tells Lakshmi to wait and gather her own experience once she gets to the city herself. Left with no choice but to console herself, Lakshmi reflects, "My bundle is light. My burden is heavy "(60). This statement captures both her anticipation and the weight of her responsibility to earn money for her family.

After "walking for two days and a half ... passing through seven villages, up and down the hills, sometimes following dirt path" (61), they finally reach at a city-like place near the border between Nepal and India. Lakshmi wonders if this is the city she had imagined about. Meantime, a middle-aged man comes to them, and he starts bargaining with Bimla in a foreign language that Lakshmi barely understands. The only thing she can grasp is the frequent mention of numbers in their conversation. She assumes that they are negotiating the price of water buffalo because such transactions are common in her village while buying and selling water buffalos. She narrates the scene: "They are speaking in a strange language, but it seems that they are trading numbers. Auntie goes high. The man goes low. I do not know ... But I do know this: he gives her nearly enough money to buy a water buffalo"(75). Finally, after settling on a deal, Bimla accepts the man's offer and heads back to the village.

After Bimla departs from the place, the man introduces with Lakshmi naming himself as Uncle Husband. Appearing kind to her, he buys her a packet of chocolates. He then warns her that the policemen at the gate are bad people who may stop her crossing the border because they do not understand her problem that she has faced at home. Claiming that the policemen are cruel to others, he insists her to call him husband. By giving such misleading instructions, he tells her to get onto a rickshaw.

As they approach the border, he engages in a brief conversation with the policeman at the gate and shows him something, "...an important- looking piece of paper" (79).

Looking on the piece of the paper, the policeman asks Lakshmi, "Is this your husband" (79)? She reluctantly replies him yes, he is. Then, he easily allows them to cross the border with no further inquiry.

As soon as they cross the border, Uncle Husband urges her to walk as quickly as she could to get to the train station, so they do not miss the train to the city. He hurries her up to the station, and during the journey, Lakshmi asks the man many questions about the city, the city people, and her work. However, he responds her nothing in the same manner that Bimla does before. Instead, he warns her not to speak to anyone there saying, "We are in India now... don't speak to anyone here. If they hear you talk, they will know you're from the mountains and ... take advantage of you" (81). After a long day of travel, the man tells her to get off the train at a place surrounded by jungle.

Contrary to her imagination, Lakshmi finds the place even poorer than her village in Nepal and calls it 'A City of the Dead ', remarking, "No roof of gold. No date or mango or orange trees and no movie stars"(87). Despite her disappointment, Uncle Husband pushes her to walk faster as the day begins to darken. After walking for about fifteen minutes, he stops her at the gate of a big house named 'Happiness House'. He opens the gate himself with a key he had in his pocket, and leads her inside to meet a woman, Mumtaz, the owner of the house.

Uncle Husband and Mumtaz begin a heated conversation to negotiate the price of something in a foreign language—in fact the price of Lakshmi. Lakshmi understands no single word, except the numbers they use in the middle of their conversation. She guesses that this must be the place where she is supposed to work

as a maid, and Bimla must have brought her there to teach her the work. She recalls the moment, "How Much?" she says to Uncle Husband. "Fifteen thousand ... Uncle goes high, the woman goes low. Eventually, she writes down the number 10,000" (92-93). Once they settle on a price of 10,000 rupees, Uncle Husband walks out of the house by leaving Lakshmi alone inside.

Confused and unable to communicate in the foreign language, Lakshmi is locked in a room without food or drink for three days by Mumtaz. After the three day's isolation, Mumtaz comes to her and tells her to get ready for work. Still unsure what work she means, Lakshmi agrees. Then, Mumtaz takes her to the downstairs into a room where a fat man was lying on a bed who tells her to be ready for sex. Now, Lakshmi fully realizes she has been sold into the brothel as a sex worker.

She opposes the man by saying that she was supposed to work as a maid, and runs out of the room, but Mumtaz catches her up in the corridor and beats her with a leather strip almost till death. Then, she brings a diary written 10,000 rupees on it to be paid off by Lakshmi. Found no choice, Lakshmi has to accept her fate. Mumtaz continues threatening and abusing her daily, and forces her to obey whatever she orders her. Trapped in this oppressive environment, Lakshmi is coerced into a life of exploitation with no means of escape.

Realizing that she has no escape, Lakshmi reluctantly accepts her fate in the brothel. Her first customer, a man named Habib, enters into her room who tells her that she is lucky to have him as her first. From that day on, many men come and go, using her as they please, regardless of her resistance. A few days later, Mumtaz moves her into a common room with other girls and tells her that she is no longer a virgin, so her value has dropped down. Also, she warns her not to try to escape, or she has to be ready for hot chilies in her private part. Trapped and controlled, Lakshmi

has to continue working in the brothel for an uncertain period of time.

As Lakshmi observes the other girls in the brothel, she finds each one struggling with their own hardships—some infected with diseases, others pregnant or having children. One girl, also from Nepal, has a ten-year-old son who loves playing football and idolizes David Beckham. Lakshmi calls him the David Beckham boy. The boy, who knows a little English, teaches Lakshmi some words and sentences in English. She remarks, "Today the David Beckham boy teaches me some words. I learned some sentences "My name is Lakshmi. I am from Nepal. I am thirteen "(165). Now, Lakshmi becomes able to communicate few things about her in English.

Also, she witnesses a strange thing happen one day that a group of policemen enters into the house in such strength that they are going to close the Mumtaz's business today. All the girls around her hide under the stair cases, and so does Lakshmi. However, to her surprise, the policemen harm no one because she sees Mumtaz giving them a bundle of money each. So, Shahana, her mate in the brothel shares her idea with Lakshmi, "Policemen are supposed to stop people like Mumtaz from selling girl. But she gives this one money each week and he looks the other way "(159). It highlights the wrong intention of the policemen that they do not seem to be dutiful enough on what they are actually assigned for, but all what they focus on is their personal gain that benefits them.

A few days after the raid, Lakshmi believes that she must have paid off her debt since she has not refused any customers. She approaches Mumtaz to calculate it, but Mumtaz adds various other expenses like medical fees, food, and utilities, and tells her that she has to work there at least five more years with her. Lakshmi realizes that Mumtaz will never let her go and decides to run away, regardless of any risks that Mumtaz may take against her. However, the other girls warn her that Mumtaz's men,

the 'goondas,' may find her and harm or kill her.

Despite their warnings, Lakshmi determines to find a way out. One day, an American man, having a smartphone, asks her whether she likes her work there in the brothel. Knowing her desire to escape, he promises to help her. After a month of waiting, the man accompanied by a few others arrives to free her. Lakshmi recalls the moment, " I see my American. There are other men with him, Indian men, and American lady from the picture. My name is Lakshmi; I say 'I am from Nepal. I am fourteen years old "(263). After all, she is freed, and the novel ends without revealing her post-bondage life where and how she starts her new living.

Washington's Ascent from Bondage in *Up from Slavery*

Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901) chronicles his remarkable journey from enslavement to becoming one of the most influential African American educators and advocates of his time. Through a series of reflective chapters, Washington in this autobiography shares his personal experiences of slavery. He highlights its inhumane nature describing why it necessitates its urgent abolishment. As expected, they achieve freedom, but he notes that the freed individuals faced even worse conditions afterward due to systemic issues. They were often relegated to dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs, and exploitation resumed through unpaid or underpaid labor. In response to these ongoing challenges, Washington emphasizes the importance of education as a means to overcome these systemic injustices and uplift the African American community. He believes that through education, these issues can be addressed and slavery cycle can be minimized.

Washington begins his narrative by describing his early years of enslavement on a plantation in Virginia. He highlights the harsh conditions of the enslaved individuals by recalling the lack of basic necessities such as proper clothing, food, and

shelter. He vividly describes his childhood in a small, cramped cabin with no windows and minimal furnishings and hardships they faced. He recalls, "The cabin was only our living-place ... also used as a kitchen for the plantation. The cabin was without glass windows. It was too small made the room very uncomfortable"(2). Depriving them of food, shelter, and clothing but only forcing them to work on the plantation was inhumane he means, so it necessities their emancipation itself.

On the day when the Emancipation Proclamation was announced, they were filled with joy. Booker T. Washington reflects on this moment and describes it as a time of great celebration. He recalls the scene, "A man who seemed to be stranger made a little speech and then read a long paper —the Emancipation Proclamation, I think... we were all free "(12). These lines are the straightforward recounting of the moment when the news of their freedom was officially communicated to them.

Although Booker T. Washington acknowledges the legal freedom granted to the enslaved individuals, he remains critical on the uncertainty and challenges they were likely to face in future in their new living. Therefore, he notes, " The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated colored people lasted but for brief period. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves"(12).These lines indicate that even if freedom was crucial and desirable the true challenge for them was to find ways to survive and manage their lives on their own.

After the proclamation, Washington and his family move to Malden, West Virginia, where his stepfather has secured a job in a salt mine. However, life in Malden proves to be even more deplorable than the life on the plantation itself ,particularly in terms of the shelter they live in and the food they eat. Also, their hardships persist because they are forced to take low-paying jobs, often owned by former enslavers, in industries, mines, factories, and domestic works. He remarks,

"At that time salt-mining was a great industry ...Malden was right in the midst of the salt-furnaces. My stepfather had already secured a job of the salt-furnace, and also he had secured a little cabin to live in" (15).The wage they earned by working in the mines becomes insufficient for a decent living, and Washington realizes that it is the lack of education that has relegated them to a secondary position once again.

He believes that education was the only way to break the cycle of inequality, but the newly-freed individuals lacked access to it. Therefore, he first seeks his education himself as a step toward achieving freedom and advancement. He says, "I was on fire constantly with one ambition, and that was to get to Hampton" (25). Determined to receive an education, he embarks on an arduous journey to Hampton with very little money, traveling miles on foot to reach his destination. Upon his arrival, he faces an unusual entrance examination—cleaning a room. He completes the task with meticulous care that impresses the principal, who finally grants him admission.

Under the leadership of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the school instills in him the belief that African Americans can advance in society by demonstrating industry, discipline, and moral character. After graduating from Hampton, Washington returns to Malden to teach the black children with the hope to uplift the community. His success in teaching catches the attention of General Armstrong, who finally offers him a teaching position at Hampton. Later, when Alabama seeks a leader for a new school called Tuskegee Institute, Washington is selected by all members of the Hampton Institute.

At Tuskegee Institute, he implements his vision of industrial education. He believes that African Americans will achieve economic and social progress not through direct political confrontation but through vocational training and self-

sufficiency. The school, therefore, focuses on hands-on learning such as brick-making, carpentry, agriculture, and other trades, ensuring that the students graduated with practical skills can uplift themselves and their communities, and it helps minimize the slavery cycle.

This philosophy gains national attention, particularly after his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Speech. In the speech, he urges African Americans to seek economic advancement rather than immediate political and social equality by arguing that cooperation between races will lead to long-term progress. His stance, often called the 'Atlanta Compromise', attracts both support and criticism. Addressing to the frustrated black communities, he urges them to be calm down their emotion and metaphorically states his philosophy:

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal. 'Water, water; we die of thirst! The answer from a friendly vessel at once comes back, ' Cast Down your bucket where you are. A second time signal, 'Water, water, send me water!...was answer Cast Down your bucket where you are. The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heaving the injection, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon river.

(128)

After this speech, white leaders, including Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie, endorse Washington's approach and provide funding for Tuskegee. However, other African American intellectuals, most notably W.E.B. Du Bois, criticize his accommodationist stance. They argue that African Americans should demand civil rights and higher education rather than accept a subordinate economic role.

Despite criticism, Washington's influence continues to grow. He becomes an

advisor to U.S. presidents, meets world leaders, and travels to Europe, advocating for his vision of racial progress. This autobiography reflects on these experiences, which highlights the challenges of racial uplift and the role of education in overcoming systemic barriers. In this regard, *Up from Slavery* is both a personal memoir and a historical document that captures the struggles and aspirations of African Americans during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. His legacy remains a subject of debate, but his contributions to African American education is undeniable.

To sum up, Booker T. Washington highlights the inhumane nature of slavery system that necessitated the shift called Emancipation Proclamation. While the newly freed individuals achieved the long-desired goal of liberty, they soon faced an even greater challenge—the systemic inequality that still marginalized them. He emphasizes that, although freedom was important, the real struggle was to overcome the ongoing barriers of social and economic equality. Therefore, he argues that education—particularly practical, skill-based education—is essential for empowering newly-freed individuals and that helps them compete equally with enslavers. Doing so, he believes that slavery-cycle minimizes slowly and gradually towards the path of its eradication.

Chapter II: Global Perspectives on Modern-day Slavery

The Evolution of Slavery

Throughout human history, slavery has evolved through distinct phases—Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and postmodern—each shaped by the socio-political structures of its time. As history progresses, social structures also transform with significant changes to the nature and practice of slavery. The issue of slavery may thus, be as old as human civilization itself. For instance, in ancient societies such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome, slavery was a widely accepted institution driven by warfare, conquest and economic necessity. Likewise, during the medieval period, slavery in Europe gradually transforms into serfdom and in the modern era—particularly the nineteenth century's the Middle Passage witnesses a large-scale human bondage across continents. Now, in the contemporary postmodern era, slavery has been legally abolished; however, it continues to persist in many forms such as human trafficking, forced labor, child labor, and debt bondage, and it functions in guise to which it may be termed as 'modern-day slavery' through humanitarian perspectives.

The term, modern-day slavery, refers to slavery-like condition that exists at present under various pretexts. Even if the traditional slavery has been legally abolished, exploitation continues in ways by mirroring coercion and dehumanization. This term is actually associated with Kevin Bales, a pioneering scholar and activist in the field of contemporary slavery studies. Bales, an English professor and human rights advocate, brings this concept into academic and public discourse through his *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. In the work, Bales explores how the globalized economy has created new opportunities for human exploitation. He argues that millions of people around the world continue living in the condition

that resembles the historical slavery—even if they are no longer bought and sold in traditional markets.

Also, Bales argue that modern-day slavery is driven by factors such as population explosion, economic globalization, and the modernization of agriculture, which collectively contribute to poverty and the vulnerability of individuals.

Reviewing *Disposable People*, Jo Beall, a British economist and researcher, in his essay entitled " Review of *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*" observes:

Bales sees the causes of new slavery as the population explosion that has flooded the world's labour markets; economic globalization and modernization of agriculture that has led to landlessness and dispossession; and the resulting 'chaos of greed, violence and corruption'. All these reinforce poverty and vulnerability, which in turn are the life-blood of new slavery. The economic returns from new slavery are much greater than old slavery and the risks are fewer. While just as controlling of people's lives and choices, new slavery is short-termist, characterized by job insecurity and 'just-in-time' production strategies. (181)

Beall's argument suggests here that due to these socio-economic shifts, individuals today are often forced into low-wage labor or unemployment, making them more vulnerable to exploitative practices. This vulnerability is considered the life-blood of modern-day slavery, which is now widely regarded as a grave violation of human autonomy and dignity.

After the abolition of the institutionalized slavery, the newly-freed African Americans had few options for economic independence. Lacking land, education, and financial resources, they were often forced to accept low-paying, exploitative jobs in

the mines, factories, or domestic work—jobs that were ironically controlled by their former masters or other white landowners. As historian W.E.B. Du Bois notes in his *Black Reconstruction in America*, the system of sharecropping and debt peonage became a new form of exploitation that trapped freed people in a cycle of debt, similar to slavery. He argues:

Thus, the old difficulties and paradoxes appeared in new dress. It became easy to say and easier to prove that these black men were not men in the sense that white men were, and could never be, in the same sense, free. Their slavery was a matter of both race and social condition, but the condition was limited and determined by race. They were congenital wards and children, to be well-treated and cared for. (3)

These lines clearly suggest that they were free in name but not in practice as they lacked the power or resources to escape the exploitation they faced.

Many of the jobs that the newly freed African Americans found were in very difficult conditions, especially in mines and factories. They earned very little money, and sometimes, their wages were not paid at all or were barely enough to meet their basic needs. This forced them to work for their former enslavers or in industries that directly benefited from their cheap labor. In *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present*, historian Philip S. Foner states, "Black workers were often paid significantly less than their white counterparts" (63). This statement suggests that Blacks were freed, but they were economically trapped in bondage, which is one of the key features of modern-day slavery situation.

Modern-day slavery has become a pressing global issue now. Scholars across various disciplines have examined the persistence of slavery-like practices. Siddhartha Kara, a British Academy Global Professor and Associate Professor of Human

Trafficking and Modern Slavery at the Rights Lab of the University of Nottingham, extends this discussion in *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective*, where he provides detailed field research and case studies on sex trafficking, bonded labor, and child slavery. Kara notes, "Slavery today is fueled by poverty, corruption, and inequality" (18). It clearly suggests the causes of slavery-like situation because of self-interest of authority who prioritize benefit rather than their duty. As a result, corruption prevails in society.

In a similar fashion, Julia O'Connell Davidson, a distinguished British sociologist, in *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom*, critically examines the traditional dichotomy between 'free' individuals and 'slaves'. She argues, "This binary oversimplifies the complex power dynamics at play in coercion and consent, particularly in the contexts of migration and labor" (12). This insight reveals that the distinction between freedom and enslavement is not always clear-cut. In many cases, people may appear to be free on the surface, but the conditions they face—whether it be through exploitative labor practices, economic vulnerability, or corrupt systems—make their freedom a fragile and limited concept. For instance, migrant workers may willingly take jobs in foreign countries in search of better opportunities, but once they reach the destination, they often find themselves trapped in situations where they are coerced into accepting harsh conditions, low wages, and the withholding of basic rights.

Similarly, Jean Allain, a leading scholar in international law, particularly known for his work on the legal dimensions of slavery, takes a legal approach to understanding the issue in his edited volume *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*. In this work, Allain examines both the historical roots and modern manifestations of slavery. Through his comprehensive

analysis, he clarifies how international law defines slavery and how these definitions have evolved over time. A central argument in Allain's work is that the failure to effectively enforce anti-slavery laws is not due to a lack of legal tools, but rather a failure of political and institutional will. He notes, "The failure to enforce anti-slavery laws is not due to a lack of legal tools, but is a political and institutional will "(10). This suggests that slavery-like conditions persist not because of insufficiency in laws but because those laws are not properly implemented, which finally results in ongoing exploitation and subjugation.

Recently, even states that hire foreign workers often exert control over workers in ways that indirectly contribute to modern-day slavery. Bridget Anderson, a prominent scholar in migration and labor studies, critically examines this issue in *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. Anderson's critical approach highlights the intersection of immigration policies, labor markets, and human rights. She emphasizes how these policies create systems of social inequality and exploitation. She argues, "Immigration control contributes to unfreedom" (104). For her, these policies limit the agency and rights of migrant workers that often forces migrant workers into the conditions that resemble historical slavery.

The Emergence of Modern-day Slavery

The Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 marks the beginning of modern-day slavery because the end of historical slavery gave rise to new forms of exploitation. It means that the newly-freed individuals were legally free, but they lacked the skills and education needed to succeed in the new social and economic system as noted by Booker T. Washington in *Up from Slavery*. As a result, they struggled to survive and often found themselves working in mines and factories owned by their former enslavers. These employers coerced them into dangerous, poorly paid jobs, exploiting

their labor in ways that mirrored the conditions of historical slavery. The shift from legal slavery to economic and social exploitation revealed the persistence of slavery-like conditions now.

The new slavery takes subtle forms such as discrimination, harassment, and isolation. While traditional slavery has been abolished, people continue to be exploited through unfair pay, forced labor, and abuse. Migrants and undocumented workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Debt bondage and human trafficking further trap individuals in forced labor or sex industries. These hidden forms of slavery deny people their freedom and dignity. Due to its abstract nature, slavery-like situations can be hard to recognize. So, to help diagnose the situation, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has published the "Eleven Indicators of Forced Labour" through its Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) in 1930. These indicators are widely recognized and provide a framework for understanding modern-day slavery or forced labor.

The indicators are:

- Abuse of vulnerability
- Deception
- Restriction of movement
- Isolation
- Physical and sexual violence
- Intimidation and threats
- Retention of identity documents
- Withholding of wages
- Debt bondage
- Abusive working and living conditions
- Excessive overtime

(ILO Indicators of Forced Labor). These indicators highlight how modern-day slavery or forced labor operates through a range of coercive tactics, from deception and physical violence to economic manipulation.

The "Eleven Indicators of Forced Labour" can be categorized into four primary areas: Coercion and Control, Deception and Manipulation, Physical and Psychological Abuse, and Economic Exploitation. Coercion and Control involves tactics like Restriction of Movement and Isolation, where victims are physically confined or cut off from social networks. Intimidation and Threats further cement control, with exploiters threatening harmful violence, deportation, or imprisonment to keep victims in line. Retention of Identity Documents also plays a critical role in this category because the exploiters withhold passports and IDs to strip victims of their legal identity that prevents them from fleeing.

In the category of Deception and Manipulation, Abuse of Vulnerability targets individuals in precarious situations, such as poverty or discrimination that actually allows exploiters to take advantage of their circumstances. In other words, deception traps victims by misleading them about the job conditions, pay, or nature of the work by creating false expectations that lead them into abusive environments. In fact, these manipulative tactics serve to keep victims in the cycle of exploitation.

Similarly, Physical and Psychological Abuse includes Physical and Sexual Violence, where exploiters use force or sexual assault to intimidate victims into submission, instilling fear and compliance. Additionally, Abusive Working and Living Conditions force victims into unsafe and degrading environments, contributing to their physical and mental deterioration, and reinforcing their dependence on the abuser.

Finally, Economic Exploitation encompasses Withholding Wages, where exploiters keep victims' earnings or pay them less than promised by trapping them in a state of financial dependence. Debt Bondage also plays a role because the victims are coerced into working to repay inflated debts, creating an endless cycle of labor that is

virtually impossible to break. Overall, these indicators reveal the complex and systemic nature of modern-day slavery, which operates through multiple forms of control and manipulation to exploit vulnerable individuals.

To sum up, the Emancipation Proclamation marks a formal end to legalized slavery in the United States, but does not dismantle the deeply rooted systems of exploitation. Instead, modern-day slavery emerges in new and covert forms, not under direct ownership, yet it perpetuates the same dehumanizing conditions. Practices such as forced labor, debt bondage, and trafficking operate under the guise of legality or social normalcy, often masked by poverty, migration, and systemic inequality. These practices, although less visible than historical slavery, are no less oppressive. The ILO's indicators help uncover these hidden mechanisms. Surfacing these realities, the framework helps identify the issue and also it provides insights to minimize its effects.

Preventive Measures Against Modern-day Slavery

After identifying the existence of modern-day slavery, which operates through complex and systemic means, numerous efforts have been made by prime humanitarian organizations, States by their national laws and global initiatives to combat it. One of the most influential efforts in this context can be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This historic document, particularly in Article 4, clearly states, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude" (UDHR). It reaffirms that forced labor and human exploitation are entirely unacceptable. By establishing a global standard, the UDHR upholds the fundamental right to freedom and dignity which emphasizes that no individual should be subjected to oppression or coercion.

The UDHR has inspired a wide range of legal frameworks that urge

governments worldwide to create and enforce policies aimed at eradicating these violations of basic human dignity. These policies include national and international laws that criminalize slavery, establish protections for vulnerable populations, and promote labor rights. By providing a universally recognized standard for human rights, the UDHR has become a catalyst for change that even compels states, international organizations, and civil society to work together in the ongoing fight against modern forms of slavery. Through these legal and policy frameworks, the commitment to abolishing slavery continues growing. It has reinforced the shared responsibility of the global community to protect human rights and uphold justice for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Over the years, various nations have enacted legislation aimed at criminalizing slavery, servitude, forced labor, and human trafficking. Among the most significant legal frameworks the Modern Slavery Act of 2015 is a landmark piece of legislation in the United Kingdom aimed at consolidating and strengthening previous laws against it. The Part 1, Section 1 of the Act explicitly states:

A person commits an offense if: (a) the person holds another person in slavery or servitude and the circumstances are such that the person knows or ought to know that the other person is held in slavery or servitude, or (b) the person requires another person to perform forced or compulsory labour and the circumstances are such that the person knows or ought to know that the other person is being required to perform forced or compulsory labour.(Modern Slavery Act 2015)

This provision underscores the UK's commitment to ensuring that no individual is subjected to slavery-like situation or forced labor. A key strength of the Act is its focus on corporate accountability.

Similarly, Australia's Modern Slavery Act of 2018 aims to combat forced labor, human trafficking, and child exploitation— particularly within corporate supply chains. The Act mandates large corporations to assess and mitigate risks of modern-day slavery within their business operations and disclose their findings. As stated in its objectives, "The Act complements other laws and international conventions that criminalise and forbid slavery"(6) is notable for its emphasis on transparency and corporate accountability.

Lately, The United States' approach to modern-day slavery is encapsulated in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), first enacted in 2000 and reauthorized multiple times. TVPA enacted by the U.S. Congress, established a comprehensive framework to combat human trafficking in its 3 'P' Paradigm. The US Department of State, in its webpage, writes, "The "3P" paradigm—prosecution, protection, and prevention—continues to serve as the fundamental framework used around the world to combat human trafficking "(US Department of State).Under this Act, the U.S. has imposed import bans on several Malaysian companies due to allegations of forced labor and other exploitative practices.

Global Initiatives to Combat Modern-day Slavery

Also, many global initiatives have worked to dismantle modern-day slavery. The organizations like the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) and the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS), have played crucial roles in addressing the issue. The RBA, for instance, collaborates with businesses worldwide to uphold ethical labor practices and improve supply chain transparency. It aims to improve working conditions, eradicate forced labor, and promote sustainable practices in industries like electronics, manufacturing, and agriculture. Central to the RBA's mission is its 'Code of Conduct'. The RBA establishes standards, "to ensure that

working conditions in supply chains are safe, and that business is conducted responsibly, ethical, and with respect for human rights and the environment " (Code of Conduct version 8.0). By collaborating with stakeholders across sectors, the RBA works toward creating a globally recognized platform for upholding labor rights and human dignity in the marketplace.

In parallel, the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) plays a crucial role in the fight against modern-day slavery— specifically targeting the recruitment process, which can often be a gateway to exploitation. IRIS, IOM's flagship initiative to promote ethical recruitment of migrant workers has been designed to ensure that labor recruitment agencies adhere to ethical practices by preventing common abuses such as charging workers recruitment fees or misleading them about employment conditions. It aims " to international recruitment fair for everyone involved: migrant workers, employers, recruiters and countries of origin and destination" (IRIS). In fact, IRIS contributes to a broader movement towards ethical recruitment practices and helps companies worldwide ensure their supply chains are free from exploitation.

Similarly, Fair Hiring Initiative (TFHI), based in the Philippines, now working worldwide is another key initiative, which aims to improve ethical recruitment practices in industries prone to labor exploitation. It has developed a special auditing body known as 'On The Level '(OTL) which focuses on ensuring that recruitment agencies operate transparently and fairly, particularly by preventing common abuses such as charging workers illegal fees or misleading them about employment terms. This program provides a comprehensive framework for agencies to align their practices with ethical standards, thereby it aims at helping to eliminate practices that contribute to modern-day slavery, including human trafficking and forced labor. In its

webpage, it states, "Agencies that wish to achieve OTL certification must undergo a rigorous process of assessment, which includes demonstrating their commitment to ethical recruitment through training, auditing, and continuous improvements" (Fair Hiring Initiative). By promoting these responsible recruitment practices, the OTL Certification Program plays a vital role in protecting vulnerable workers.

Additionally, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) plays a pivotal role in promoting ethical practices across various industries. As a global body that develops and publishes international standards, ISO helps organizations implement responsible and ethical management systems in their operations. By fostering transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior, its standards not only assist organizations in complying with international labor laws but also strengthen their efforts to combat modern-day slavery and ensure fair treatment of workers across global supply chains.

In the context of Nepal, Nepal has faced numerous challenges related to labor exploitation— particularly in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and the garment industry. So, in response, the Government of Nepal has implemented a series of legal measures aimed at addressing these issues and protecting vulnerable populations. One of the major legislative efforts is the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007, which criminalizes human trafficking and sets severe penalties for traffickers. In its preamble, it states, "Whereas it is expedient to control the acts of human trafficking and transportation, and to protect and rehabilitate the victims of such act by enacting law, the 'Legislature-Parliament' has enacted this Act"(Preamble). Moreover, the government has also established dedicated bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission and the Central Child Welfare Board to monitor and address issues related to labor exploitation and trafficking.

In addition to legal reforms, the government has made strides in improving the employment standards and working conditions for migrant workers— a key area where exploitation occurs. Nepal is a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and it has ratified key conventions such as ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and ILO Convention No. 181 on Private Employment Agencies, which guide the country's labor policies. To improve migrant workers' conditions, the government has introduced measures such as mandatory pre-departure orientation programs for labor migrants and efforts to regulate labor recruitment agencies to reduce the risk of trafficking and exploitation. Also, it has provisioned 'Free-visa , Free Ticket' policy to those going overseas to work.

Also, numerous academic efforts have been undertaken to address the complex issue of modern-day slavery, exploring the factors that sustain it, its impact on individuals and societies, and potential solutions. Universities, research institutions, and scholars across the world have contributed significantly to raising awareness about slavery's contemporary forms and its persistence despite legal frameworks intended to eliminate it. These academic efforts include multidisciplinary approaches, blending insights from fields such as law, economics, sociology, political science, and human rights studies.

Chapter III: Framework for Inquiry

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to provide a nuanced reading of *Sold* (2006) by Patricia McCormick and *Up from Slavery* (1901) by Booker T. Washington. By situating these texts within their respective historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts, the analysis explores how each narrative portrays slavery-like conditions. While Washington's autobiography reflects on the aftermath of legal slavery in the U.S. and the systemic barriers that continues oppressing the newly-freed individuals, McCormick's novel examines modern issue, human trafficking, which illustrates the persistence of slavery-like situation occurred despite numerous legal prohibitions. Through this comparative framework, the study highlights how different eras have confronted, yet fails to fully eradicate slavery by revealing deep-seated structural issues that allow exploitation to persist.

The central focus of the research is the role of systemic failure in law enforcement and its contribution to the continuation of slavery across different time periods. By analyzing the intersections of laws, ethics, and socio-economic factors, the study investigates how legal frameworks, corruption, and socio-economic vulnerabilities either prevent or perpetuate exploitation. Rather than merely documenting the existence of slavery, this research critically examines its structural causes and ethical implications. Through this approach, the study aims to provide insights into legal and policy shortcomings by offering a deeper understanding of the enduring cycle of slavery and potential strategies for its minimization or eradication.

Deontological Ethics

Deontology, also known as deontological ethics, serves as the theoretical framework for this research that emphasizes the inherent rightness or wrongness of

actions. Derived from the Greek word 'Deon,' which means duty or obligation, deontology focuses on the ethical obligations that individuals must follow specific rules, duties, or principles. Unlike consequentialist theories, which prioritize the profit-based outcomes of actions, deontological ethics maintains that actions should be judged based on their adherence to rules and principles, regardless of the consequences they may produce. This approach aligns with the research's ethical perspective, where the focus is on upholding ethical duties and preventing exploitation.

The key figures in deontological ethics is Immanuel Kant, who argues that moral duties are derived from reason or rationality, rather than from personal desires or emotions. Stephen Engstrom, a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and Harvard, in *The Forms of Practical Knowledge: A Study of the Categorical Imperative*, argues:

For it seems evident that if something is categorically prohibited by reason, then it must be bad regardless of circumstances. In deed Kant comes close to asserting this when at another point he says, "if I deviate from the principle of duty, this is must certainly bad" (G402). Another sign is that he takes the capacity to distinguish what is morally right from what is morally wrong to be shared by all persons and hence to be independent of any special fund of knowledge about the world.(16)

This concept suggests that distinguishing between a righteous action and a wrong one involves evaluating whether the judgment is agreeable to all. Contractualist deontologists further develop this idea by emphasizing the importance of mutual agreement and social contracts in ethical decision-making.

As mentioned above, this theory combines elements of deontological ethics, as

argued by Kant, with social contract theory, which seeks to determine moral principles and duties based on the idea of a hypothetical social contract. Under this contract, individuals agree upon principles under fair and impartial conditions. In other words, the theory suggests that individuals imagine themselves as rational beings with equal value and the capacity to make choices and engage in social activities. They consider what principles and rules would be fair and just for them as autonomous beings.

The main proponent of this theory is T.M. Scanlon, a philosopher and Harvard professor, who wrote *What We Owe to Each Other*. In this book, he states:

Many people might agree that an act is wrong if and only if it could not be justified to others on grounds that they could not reasonably reject. But they might say that is true only because what people could or could not reasonably reject is determined by facts about what is right or wrong in a deeper sense, independent of any narrower field, mainly of requirements arising from specific undertakings. So I have taken the phrase 'what we owe to each other' as the name for this part of morality and as the title of the book. (6-7)

Here, Scanlon means that moral obligations arise from agreements that rational people would make under fair conditions. These agreements should be based on principles that everyone can accept. By focusing on these principles, contractualist deontology provides a framework for determining what is ethically right.

In conclusion, *What We Owe to Each Other* introduces a contractualist moral theory, which focuses on the idea that our actions should be governed by the principles that no one could reasonably reject. This is different from utilitarianism, which defines moral rightness based on what produces the greatest happiness or well-being for the majority. For him, morality is about justification to others. That means

we must choose principles that respect each person's rights and perspective, rather than treating people as mere numbers in a calculation of the 'greater good.'

What matters morally is not just the outcomes of our actions, but whether we can defend those actions to others in a way that treats them as equals. He argues, "An act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject" (147). This means that for an action to be morally acceptable, it must be allowed by rules that all individuals, thinking rationally and fairly, could accept. If even a person has a reasonable objection, then the action may be morally wrong. Thus, Scanlon's theory values mutual respect, fairness, and individual moral standing, rather than simply aiming for benefit.

Relating it to the modern-day slavery context, Scanlon's deontology provides a strong ethical foundation for minimizing unethical labor practices, particularly those involving fraud and deception in employment contracts. This ethical framework emphasizes that moral principles should be based on the rules that no one could reasonably reject, which ensures fairness and justice for all parties involved.

When applied to labor practices, contractualist deontology demands that employment agreements should be transparent, mutually beneficial, and free from coercion or deceit. By enforcing ethical labor contracts that respect the autonomy and dignity of workers, this approach directly challenges exploitative employment structures that often lead to conditions resembling modern-day slavery, such as forced labor, wage theft, and contract manipulation.

In today's employment landscape, deontological ethics, which emphasizes treating individuals with respect, fairness, and recognizing their inherent dignity, has rarely been applied. Instead, the focus often shifts toward profit maximization and

efficiency. Most of the employers prioritize their financial goals over the well-being and rights of their employees. This utilitarian mindset, where the needs of the business are put above the needs of the individual, may lead to unfair treatment, exploitation and unsafe working conditions for workers.

Without a strong ethical commitment to treating employees as ends-in-themselves, rather than means to-end, workers face harassment, disrespect, and even coercion. This failure to apply deontological principles in employment not only fosters an environment where workers are undervalued, but also contributes to the normalization of abuse, potentially this creates the conditions that resemble slavery situations. By disregarding ethical duties to protect employees' rights and dignity, companies may inadvertently support systemic inequality and injustice. In essence, it leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation.

If both the employer and the workers adhere to deontological ethics, the relationship would be grounded in duty-based moral principles rather than outcomes or consequences. In this context, the employer has a duty to treat the workers with respect, which ensures the workers' rights are upheld, that they are paid fairly, and that their working conditions are safe and justifiable. The worker, on the other hand, has a duty to fulfill their role and responsibilities according to the terms of the contract, and to act in a manner that respects the employer's position.

However, if either party violates these duties, it would be seen as morally wrong, regardless of any potential benefits or outcomes. For example, if the employer exploits the worker by providing them unsafe working conditions or unfair wages, they would be breaching their duty, which is morally wrong under a deontological framework. Similarly, if the worker neglects their responsibilities or violates the terms of the agreement in a way that undermines the employer's rights, so they too would be

morally wrong. In this scenario, both parties would be expected to respect each other's autonomy, and any breach of duty would be morally objectionable. It actually emphasizes the importance of fairness, mutual respect, and adherence to ethical norms in their interaction.

Furthermore, it also can serve as a guiding principle for policymakers, employers, and labor organizations to establish and enforce fair labor standards. It promotes accountability by requiring that employment conditions meet ethical and legal standards that all rational individuals would accept, thereby reducing deceptive recruitment tactics, hidden contractual clauses, and exploitative loopholes. By embedding this ethical framework into labor policies and corporate governance, businesses and governments can create a work environment that upholds human rights by ensuring that workers are not subjected to exploitative conditions under misleading employment terms. In doing so, contractualist deontology provides a pathway toward dismantling systemic labor exploitation and fostering a fairer and more just workforce.

Interdisciplinary Approach

By incorporating insights from Labor Studies and Immigrant Studies, this dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach that allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the problem. Labor Studies, with its focus on labor rights, economic systems, and the dynamics of exploitation, provides crucial insights into the structural inequalities that enable slavery-like conditions. On the other hand, Immigrant Studies adds an important layer of understanding by exploring the vulnerabilities faced by migrants, including their legal status, lack of social protections, and the social and cultural challenges they encounter. The combination of these two disciplines not only deepens understanding of modern-day slavery but also

highlights the interconnectedness of economic, legal, social, and cultural factors that perpetuate the exploitation of workers.

Moreover, Labor Studies helps to reveal the economic underpinnings of modern-day slavery, particularly the role of exploitation in labor markets. By examining the structural aspects of labor systems, this field uncovers how demand for cheap, vulnerable workers often leads to the coercion and manipulation of migrant labor. Migrant workers are often exploited due to their economic need and the lack of job security, which may lead them to situations where they are forced into labor under abusive conditions. In industries such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work, where labor laws are often weak or inadequately enforced, modern-day slavery may thrive. Labor Studies highlights the failure of economic systems to protect workers' rights, especially for migrants who are often excluded from labor protections or face barriers in accessing legal recourse. Through this lens, we can see how economic forces create an environment ripe for exploitation, and why the fight against modern-day slavery must consider the dynamics of labor markets and wage inequality.

In parallel, Immigrant Studies provides a critical perspective on the role of migration policies, legal vulnerabilities and social factors that exacerbate the situation of migrant workers. Immigrants, especially those in an irregular or undocumented status, face significant legal and social marginalization, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation. The fear of deportation, lack of legal protections, and language barriers often prevent migrants from speaking out against poor working conditions or seeking justice for exploitation. It also explores how national immigration policies and border control mechanisms can often inadvertently contribute to the conditions that allow modern-day slavery to persist.

Close Reading

The primary data for this study has been drawn from the textual analysis of *Sold* and *Up from Slavery*. These two primary texts serve as the foundation for understanding the narratives of modern in relation to historical forms of slavery. And the secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, books, reports, and legal documents complement the primary texts and provide a broader context to enrich the study's analysis of the various dimensions of slavery, human rights violations, and the legal and ethical challenges surrounding the issue.

A detailed and systematic examination of these two primary texts has been conducted. This analysis focuses on how slavery is portrayed within these narratives with particular attention to human rights violations, ethical dilemmas, and the depiction of exploitation. Themes such as agency, resistance, systemic oppression, and dehumanization has been critically explored to understand how the characters navigate their respective circumstances and what these struggles reveal about the structures of slavery in different historical contexts.

The qualitative aspects of the texts, such as narrative structure, character development, and symbolism has been analyzed to uncover deeper meanings and motifs related to slavery. Additionally, it examines the themes related to exploitation, suffering of the protagonists. This focus offers a richer, more nuanced interpretation of both texts. Overall, it helps to shed light on modern persistence of slavery.

Historical Contextualization

To fully appreciate the significance of the two texts, historical documents and scholarly articles has been incorporated to provide contextual depth. *Up from Slavery* has been analyzed within the historical backdrop of the post-Reconstruction era in the United States, a period marked by the challenges of integrating formerly enslaved

people into the society shaped by systemic racism, segregation, and economic inequalities. This historical context is crucial to understanding Washington's advocacy for Black education, economic self-sufficiency, and gradual integration into American society, all while navigating the remnants of slavery's legacy.

In contrast, *Sold* has been examined in relation to contemporary issues such as human trafficking, forced labor, and the global systems that perpetuate the forms of new slavery. This analysis enriched by secondary sources such as international reports on human trafficking, legal frameworks, and contemporary scholarly work on global labor exploitation. By situating the novel in its contemporary context, the study reveals how modern forms of slavery are both distinct from and eerily similar to historical slavery, especially in terms of human rights violations and exploitation.

Overall, by combining close textual analysis and historical contextualization with the application of Scanlon's ethical framework, the study aims at providing a comprehensive exploration of slavery's complex dynamics from its historical roots to its modern-day manifestations. This multidimensional approach provides valuable insights into the moral, social, and political challenges to combat slavery-like situation now, and it contributes to the development of effective strategies for its minimization or eradication.

Chapter IV: An Ethical Reassessment of Modern-day Slavery and Systemic Failure

Unveiling the Mask of *Modern-day Slavery in Sold and Up from Slavery*

Slavery has been deeply embedded in socio-economic and legal structures throughout human history that evolves into various forms. It reflects its changes in political, economic, and social contexts of each era. Even though legally abolished, slavery's legacy continues persisting its forms through systemic exploitation as forced labor and human trafficking. Despite the existence of numerous legal protections, vulnerable individuals always remain at risk. One of the possible reasons why this happens may be those in power often tend to manipulate these safeguards to serve their own interests, rather than working for social well-being.

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* written in 2006 vividly illustrates this persistent issue. It sheds light on how exploitation thrives in societies when legal frameworks fail to provide adequate enforcement and protection. The novel follows the harrowing journey of Lakshmi, a young girl from Nepal who is deceitfully trafficked to India under the pretense of employment, but in reality she is forced into sex work. This exemplifies how systemic failures, corruption, and economic desperation contribute to the continuation of slavery at present, even if numerous laws that explicitly prohibit such inhumane practices. Through Lakshmi's experiences, McCormick not only exposes the brutal realities of human trafficking but also underscores the urgent need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and ethical governance to dismantle these exploitative systems.

The exploitative labor conditions appeared at present has its root in system. In Lakshmi's case, a clear systemic issue surfaces when the policeman at the border between Nepal and India prioritizes personal gain over his duty. This act of corruption

deceives vulnerable people like Lakshmi. The trafficker, Uncle Husband, here briefly converses with the border policeman and easily persuades him to approve fake documents by claiming that he is Lakshmi's husband. A thirteen-year-old girl marrying a middle-aged man is suspicious, yet the policeman unquestioningly accepts the forged papers. Lakshmi recalls the moment, "The border man points to the paper and asks me, 'Is this your husband?' " (79). She replies him, yes, he is. And the policeman allows him to take her across the border. This reflects the wrongful intentions of those in power, which finally contributes the whole system to fail. Had the policeman stopped the trafficker at the border gate, Lakshmi would not have endured her fate in the brothel.

Another significant example of systemic failure surfaces in the novel in the case of a policeman who visits every week in the brothel and takes bribes from Mumtaz. In return, he permits Mumtaz to continue operating her illegal business without interference. Observing the police officer, Shahana, another girl trapped in the brothel, explains the situation to Lakshmi, "Policemen are supposed to stop people like this Mumtaz from selling girls...But gives this one money each week and he looks the other way" (159). From Scanlon's perspective, the police officer's actions reflect a clear violation of his ethical duty. By prioritizing personal gain over his assigned responsibilities, he undermines the ethical principle of acting out of duty to others. In fact, this devalues the deontological foundation of law enforcement. Such conduct is indefensible under contractualist ethics, which emphasize acting in ways that are justifiable to others. In fact, it reflects not just individual corruption but a deeper systemic failure. As a result, slavery-like situation persists at present in global scale.

Based on the Forced Labor Convention of 1930, the ILO has recently drawn

its Special Action Program to Combat Forced Labor (SAP-FL) from both theoretical and practical experiences to identify key indicators of forced labor widely known as "Eleven Indicators of Forced Labour" which include: abuse of vulnerability, deception, restriction of movement, isolation, physical and sexual violence, intimidation and threats, retention of identity documents, withholding of wages, debt bondage, abusive working and living conditions, and excessive overtime. In the case of Lakshmi, each indicator is present. From deception and coercion to physical and sexual violence, her experience exemplifies the severe exploitation.

Lakshmi, as a financially vulnerable child, embodies an individual highly susceptible to exploitation. She comes from a background of extreme poverty, which forces her to abandon her education and seeks ways to contribute to her family's income. Her home is in a dire state, with water leaking through the roof, and financial stability is nonexistent. Her father does not work; instead, he spends his days idly at Bajai Gita's tea shop by engaging in futile political discussions that bear no real benefit to the family. Lakshmi describes her father's daily routine this way:

Most of the men his age leave home for months at a time, taking jobs at factories or on work crews far away. But no one, he says, will hire a one armed man. And so he oils his hair, puts vest and a wristwatch that stopped telling time long ago, and goes up the hill each day to play cards, talks politics, and drink tea with old men. (8)

These lines highlight the stark contrast between her struggles and his indifference. It is the economic hardship and her father's irresponsibility to the family that contribute to her financial vulnerability to exploitation.

Her father, unlike other men in the village who take up jobs in distant factories or work crews, remains unemployed. His physical disability—having only one arm—

becomes his justification why he does not seek works. Instead of making alternative efforts to support his family, he spends his time by indulging in leisure activities, such as playing cards, discussing politics, and just drinking tea. As a result, it reinforces the family's financial instability, and Lakshmi becomes a financially vulnerable child to whom the traffickers namely aunt Bimla and Uncle Husband take advantage to make money by selling her in the brothel in India.

Lakshmi's the tragic plight actually mirrors situation of African people during the era of the Middle Passage. The transatlantic slave traders, usually the Europeans would transport African men, women and children to the Americas and West Indies during the period and forcibly sell them to the plantation owners and make easy money out of it. Also, those Africans often would come from their impoverished background who lacked basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Colleen A. Vasconcellos, Professor of Atlantic History at the University of West Georgia, explores this stark reality in *Slavery, Childhood, and Abolition in Jamaica, 1788–1838*. In Chapter 1, titled "To so dark a destiny My lovely babe I've borne," she writes:

Many children were sold into slavery not only because they were easily controlled but also because their families, struggling under extreme economic hardship, saw no other option for survival. Destitute parents were often deceived by traffickers who promised their children better opportunities, only for them to be forced into brutal labor and exploitation. (23)

These words powerfully reflect how the vulnerability of African children during the slave trade parallels Lakshmi's own situation, both marked by inhuman suffering and exploitation.

Taking advantage of vulnerability, the agents or traffickers use trick

deceitfully under pretence of better job opportunities. In Africa, poor parents, struggling to provide basic needs for their children that time had no choice, but to sell their children was their only option. In Lakshmi's case now same thing has happened. She expects to work as a maid in the city, but convincing her hunger-stricken stepfather, Bimla deceives Lakshmi, the innocent child who just wants to help the family financially by working as a maid in the city, but Bimla never informs her about her job details.

This parallels the experience of African slaves during the transatlantic slave trade who were often unaware of their final destination or the purpose for which they were being transported. It reflects a systemic manipulation of the vulnerable individuals. Bimla leads Lakshmi toward the city on foot. Carrying a heavy bundle of belongings on her back, Lakshmi walks through several mountains. Despite her heavy bundle of belongings on her back, she feels the weight of her family's responsibility in her mind. So, she remarks herself, "My bundle is light. My burden is heavy" (60). It reveals how desperately she has been seeking job to elevate the family's condition that she even forgets all physical hardships she has to come across.

At this point, here comes the concern raised by T.M. Scanlon in his principle 'Contractualist Deontology', which argues, "An action is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any principles that others could not reasonably reject"(45). In Lakshmi's case, there is no mutual understanding or agreement. She is given no any information about her job, no details about how much she will earn, what her duties will be and what may be her working schedule every day. Instead, she is simply forced to travel to an unknown destination, unaware of every thing she needs to know about her job. This violates the principle of mutual agreement that Scanlon emphasizes on. Instead of informing her, Bimla replies her,

"You will have to see it yourself" (61). This statement clearly violates the labor right ethics to make freely chosen job opportunity, and consequently it fuels the cycle of slavery.

In a way, Bimla deceives Lakshmi's stepfather too. She lures him with easy money that may be possible if he sells his daughter. She offers him some money, supposedly eight hundred rupees, with four hundred given upfront and the rest promised later if he sells Lakshmi to her. He does the same. Lakshmi vividly recalls the moment, "How much do you want for her?" She asks My stepfather "One Thousand rupees," he says, "I'll give you five hundred". "I will give you half now and the rest when she proved her worth." She says "(53). This trick manipulates them and the most important thing is this offer reduces Lakshmi to an object for sale, which is the matter of grave attention to human rights.

After a couple of days' journey, Bimla transits Lakshmi at a city-like place near the border between Nepal and India. In the place, there comes a middle-aged man named Uncle Husband. Using foreign language, the traffickers negotiate Lakshmi's price in such a manner that they are trading for a water buffalo. Observing their conversation, Lakshmi narrates, "They are speaking in a strange language, but it seems that they are trading numbers...auntie goes high. The man goes low. I do not know what they have agreed to. But I do know this; he gives her nearly enough money to buy a water buffalo"(74-75). Lakshmi's realization here about their trade that takes her as a buffalo is inhumane in nature. It dehumanizes her merely reducing her to the position of a buffalo.

Also, this deceptive trade conversation highlights the issue of language barrier that frauds often use as their technique to deceive vulnerable people these days. In the past, the transatlantic slave traders also would apply this trick to transport African

people to Americas. In Lakshmi's case, the language barrier issue presents frequently throughout the novel. Firstly, she faces this challenge when Bimla and Uncle Husband negotiate their deal at the border. Secondly, during the conversation between Mumtaz and Uncle Husband when they negotiate her price in the brothel, she it is foreign language that becomes barrier to oppose the traffickers. So, she recalls the moment:

I stand upright, so she can see what a strong worker I am. She surveys me head to toe, the spits. "How Much?" she says to Uncle Husband. "Fifteen thousand," he says. ...Uncle goes high , the woman goes low. Eventually, Uncle shrugs and gives up. The woman takes a record book out from inside the folds of her dress. She writes down the number 10,000. (92-93)

Lakshmi here understands only the number they used in the middle of their conversation, but does not know why these numbers for. the sentence, 'She surveys me head to toe' denotes that they negotiate her price on the basis of physicality, but she fails to know it as she understand nothing what they talked about. Had she known the subject matter they talked about, the situation might have been different.

Owing to this scenario, the global initiatives such as the RBA, IRIS and OTL have established standards requiring that the terms and conditions of contract documents be translated into the languages that the workers can easily understand. Recently, IOM through its global social compliance scheme IRIS, emphasizes that recruiters must explain all terms and conditions in a language the workers understand before they are deployed abroad. This safeguard ensures that workers are aware of their rights in the workplace.

Andy Hall, a renowned Migrant Worker Management Advisor, reinforces this point in his blog post titled "Information on Migrant Worker Responsible Recruitment Schemes and Certification Programs – Where Are We at Nowadays?" Dhaka

Principle No. 2, by stating "All migrant workers' contracts must be clear, transparent, and in a language they understand (Hall)." This principle is crucial because the workers may easily be deceived by frauds switching codes, and they cannot communicate their problems effectively. Here in Lakshmi's enslavement language has played an important role to push her into in the exploitative labor conditions. Additionally, Lakshmi has become able to come out of her bondage only when she learns a little English to communicate with American man.

Neither Bimla nor Uncle Husband answers her queries about the city and city people. So, she imagines the city herself with golden-roofed buildings, civilized people and wealth. On the contrary to it, the place where she gets off the train looks poorer than her village. Surprised, she thinks to herself, "No roof of gold. No date or mango or orange trees and no movie stars" (87). Witnessing these, she slightly becomes suspicious at the traffickers' activity. But she really does not know what they are doing to her. It clearly proves that she has been deceived by not informing anything about her queries, which violates the fundamental human right —right to information. This also parallels the nature of chattel slavery in the 19th century, where individuals were often sold and forced into labor without knowledge or consent.

Her bondage life begins when Uncle Husband becomes able to take her into Happiness Home under Mumtaz's cruel administration. Whether it is a plantation owner or a modern employer like Mumtaz, they share a common exploitative tactic. One 'threat and intimidation' as a controlling technique as outlined in the ILO's indicators. When Lakshmi opposes the work conditions by stating that she was brought to work as a maid, not as a sex worker, Mumtaz beats her up with leather strips, almost to the point of death. Claiming that she has paid ten thousand rupees to

bring her in the job, Mumtaz forces her to obey her every command. She threatens her, "Hold still...or I'll slice your throat" (107). As a result, Lakshmi is compelled to comply with whatever Mumtaz orders, much like how Africans, once transported across the Atlantic, were forced to work for plantation owners. Those who opposed were often killed. In Lakshmi's case, the same fate awaits her, and she recalls, "Every morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beats me with a leather strap, and locks the door behind her ... she hits me on the soles of my feet" (109-110). Threatening or intimidating someone into working against their will is completely prohibited under labor laws.

. The reason why those laws came into effect is to elevate workers from every kind of threatening and intimidating situation in the workplace condition. In the past as described by Booker T. Washington in *Up from Slavery*, the nature of slavery was always inhumane and emancipation became necessary action to abolish the system. The enslavers restricted their movement with intimidation and threat and did not allow them the basic facilities like living, eating and clothing. So he describes the cabin in the plantation as, "The cabin was only our living-place, but was also used as a kitchen for the plantation...the cabin was without glass windows; it was only an opening in the side...it was too small, making the room very uncomfortable" (2). After the emancipation was declared, this is considered as illegal, and the point onwards labor laws strictly prohibits this happening. However, In Lakshmi's case the same thing has been repeated after a century.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, labor laws define every individual in relation to freedom. For example, the ILO identifies placing someone in a condition of 'restriction of movement' by isolating them in a room or within the four walls of their workplace as strictly illegal. This is one of the key indicators of a slavery-like

situation recurring in the workplaces now, and the ILO actively discourages such practices worldwide. However, in Lakshmi's case, same reality can be observed—Mumtaz locks her in an isolated room with no food and forces her into work she never imagined of. Such treatment is a matter of zero tolerance in labor ethics. Lakshmi describes her condition: "I awake for a moment, unsure of where I am. I yawn and wait for the scent of hearth smoke and baking bread. And what greets my nose is the stench of the privy hole next to my bed" (97). This kind of isolation has strictly been prohibited by law now considering an act of cruelty.

To be compelled to work against one's will is a defining characteristic of modern-day slavery that is condemned by numerous humanitarian groups including the ILO. However, the traffickers and Mumtaz continue exploiting this vulnerable child by using manipulation, threats, and physical violence. Lakshmi's first confrontation with coercion unfolds when Mumtaz asks her, "Are you ready to work?" (102). Confused yet obedient, Lakshmi replies with a hesitant 'yes,' expecting to begin her duties as a maid, but she is led to a room where a fat man lies on the bed, waiting for her. As the man unzips his pants, Mumtaz forcibly orders Lakshmi to submit that reveals the horrifying reality of her situation. Lakshmi recalls the moment:

Then Mumtaz flies at me. She grabs me by the hair and drags me across the room. She flings me onto the bed next to the old man. And then he is on top of me. He fumbles with his pants, forces my legs apart. I grasp air and kick and squirm. He thrusts his tongue in my mouth. And I bite down with all my might. (103-104)

Lakshmi resists with every ounce of strength she has, but her defiance is met with brutal punishment. This clearly reflects the slavery-like conditions that she is forced to endure, and it is the subject of zero-tolerance by laws.

Desperate to escape her fate, Lakshmi flees the room, but Mumtaz swiftly catches her in the corridor and beats her severely. In a final attempt to assert herself, she pleads, "There is a mistake. I'm here to work as a maid for a rich lady" (105). Instead of acknowledging her protest, Mumtaz coldly replies, "Is this what you were told?" (105), confirming Lakshmi's worst fears—she has been sold into slavery. This exchange exposes the deceptive nature of human trafficking, where victims are manipulated into false hopes and then subjected to inhumane treatment. The deliberate use of deception, coercion, and violence in Lakshmi's case is a clear violation of labor laws and human rights. Such practices constitute a heinous crime that reflects the harsh realities of modern-day slavery.

The central issue in the novel that exemplifies modern-day slavery is debt bondage issue. According to ILO indicators, forcing individuals to work in order to repay a debt, whether real or fabricated, constitutes a form of modern enslavement. In *Sold*, Lakshmi is initially told that she owes Mumtaz 10,000 rupees. However, Mumtaz later adds utility bills and medical fees and many other subjects that traps her in a cycle of debt with no clear end. Lakshmi narrates the situation as:

I push aside the curtain and enter her darkened room. She looks up, astonished. I say nothing. I simply hand her my ledger book. "You are a clever girl." She says. She gets out of her own ledger book, with entries more copious than mine. "The medicine I gave you, your clothes, the shoes on your feet, the electricity bills, the ceiling fan, 'who do you think pays the comforts I provide?' she says. 'The fans? The music? the TV you girls love so much? And then there is the interest. ...let me do the calculations for you,' she says. She pretends to be adding and subtracting "Yes." She says, "It's as I thought. You have at least five more years here with me." (226)

This passage vividly illustrates the mechanics of debt bondage, a form of modern-day slavery in which individuals are trapped in a cycle of debt that they can never realistically repay.

In slavery-like situation debt bondage is often used to justify their unjust actions. Mumtaz here uses a ledger book to justify indefinite servitude. She claims that basic necessities such as medicine, clothing, electricity, are debts owed by the victim. However, these costs are inflated, interest is arbitrarily added, and the victim is never able to pay off the alleged debt. This coercive arrangement ensures that the individual remains trapped in servitude for at least five more years with no real possibility of escape. Debt bondage, thus, is explicitly prohibited under the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 according to the act, "Debt bondage occurs when a person's labor is demanded as a means of repayment, but the terms are manipulated to ensure the debt is never fully repaid, effectively trapping the individual in forced labor"(TVPA). Mumtaz falsely claims that Lakshmi owes an unpayable debt for necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine which coerces her into prolonged servitude.

Due to the severe financial burdens involved, many workers become vulnerable to exploitation. To address this, the Government of Nepal introduced the Free Visa-Free Ticket policy a decade before, aiming to reduce financial vulnerability of migrant workers. However, data shows that the policy has not been effectively implemented. Similarly, several global initiatives have adopted a Zero-Cost Policy, which mandates that all recruitment-related expenses—including visa fees, transportation, food, accommodation, utility bills, hostel charges, and medical screening—must be covered by the employer. These measures are designed to prevent workers from falling prey to modern-day slavery caused by financial dependency.

Lakshmi's coerced labor closely mirrors the forced servitude depicted in classic slave narratives like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Like Lakshmi, Douglass was subjected to brutal treatment and forced labor, particularly under the cruel overseer Edward Covey, who used physical violence to break him into submission. Douglass eventually resisted, marking a pivotal moment in reclaiming his agency, much like Lakshmi's persistent attempts to escape despite relentless oppression. Similarly, Jacobs' narrative highlights the gendered nature of coercion, as she was not only forced into labor but also subjected to sexual exploitation under her enslaver, Dr. Flint—paralleling Lakshmi's experience with Mumtaz, who traps her in the brothel and forces her into sex work against her will. In all three cases, deception, restriction of movement, and threats are used to strip individuals of their autonomy, whether in 19th-century slavery or human trafficking now, it operates through the same mechanisms of power and control.

Mumtaz's treatment of Lakshmi exemplifies forced labor, where individuals are reduced to mere commodities, stripped of autonomy, and coerced through violence and intimidation. By stating, "Now that you are no longer a virgin, I cannot fetch a good price for you" (132), Mumtaz equates Lakshmi's worth to her market value. In fact she treats her as a product rather than a human being. This also mirrors the nature of historical slavery, where enslaved individuals were bought, sold, and exploited purely for profit.

Furthermore, Mumtaz reinforces control through threats, saying, "I will grind hot chilies and put them in your private part"(133). It demonstrates how physical pain is used as a tool of subjugation. Such tactics align with ILO's definition of forced labor, which includes coercion, restriction of movement, and violence to maintain dominance over workers. Just as enslaved people in the 19th century were brutalized

to prevent escape or resistance, Lakshmi is trapped in a system where fear ensures compliance that makes her exploitation indistinguishable from the forced labor practices condemned by modern labor laws.

Whether in historical slavery or modern slavery-like conditions, the fundamental driving force remains the same: the desire for personal gain. In the past, European traders openly trafficked humans from Africa to the Americas to profit from the inhumane trade. Today, the methods have evolved, but the underlying intention remains unchanged. Modern traffickers exploit legal loopholes and operate indirectly, often with covert connections to authorities. This shift in tactics makes contemporary slavery less visible but no less pervasive. Such exploitation is not merely an individual crime but it has become a systemic issue embedded within institutions that fail to enforce protective laws effectively.

Isolating someone from their family and entrapping them is a key characteristic of modern-day slavery, which the ILO refers to as 'Isolation.' Lakshmi experiences this firsthand. Once sold into the brothel, she is locked in a room without food or water for three days. Later, she witnesses a new girl, also confined to the same room, who tragically takes her own life. Reflecting on her own time in captivity, Lakshmi evaluates the days she has endured as follows:

A tear is running down my cheek. It quivers a moment on the tip of my nose, then splashes onto my skirt, leaving a small, dark circle. I have been beaten here, locked away, violated a hundred times and hundred times more. I have been starved and cheated, tricked, and disgraced. (182)

These lines reflect Lakshmi's intense emotional and physical abuse that encapsulates the essence of the ILO's Isolation indicator in slavery-like situation now. The ILO defines Isolation as one of the key characteristics of slavery, where victims are cut off

from their families, support systems, and the outside world, rendering them vulnerable and unable to seek help.

Moreover, in these lines, Lakshmi's experience vividly portrays the profound loss of human dignity and autonomy. Her tears, which she cannot control, symbolize the diminishing of her self-worth as she is locked up and isolated, both physically and emotionally. The repeated physical abuse she endures—being beaten, violated, and deprived—strips her of any autonomy over her body and her life. The sense of being cheated, starved, and disgraced highlights her powerlessness which underscores how her captors exercise total control over her that denies her the ability to make choices or assert her rights. This complete isolation, both from family and any form of support, not only deepens her sense of entrapment but also assaults her human dignity. In short, it reflects the dehumanizing effects of modern-day slavery, where the denial of autonomy and isolation from society lead to the erosion of one's identity and personal freedom or restriction of movement.

Untold Story of Excessive Overtime and Withholding of Wages

The untold story of excessive overtime and the withholding of wages is one that plagues countless workers, particularly in sectors such as domestic work, where exploitation is often hidden behind closed doors. Lakshmi, a domestic worker, she works long hours, around the clock, with her labor undervalued and her pay is never done. Her story is one of quiet endurance, where the invisible weight of overtime and unpaid wages becomes a self-understood burden. This exploitation is normalized in the sense that those like Lakshmi are made to believe that their hours are not their own, that their labor is worth less than others, and that their dignity is expendable in exchange for the roof over their heads and the food on their table. This dehumanizing cycle is perpetuated through a lack of legal safeguards and accountability, especially

for those working in domestic servitude.

In relation to domestic servitude, the issue becomes even more complex. Many workers in this field, particularly migrant women, are not given formal contracts or legal protections that make them vulnerable to excessive working hours, low pay, and arbitrary treatment. Governments often fail to address these concerns, as the nature of domestic work is often considered informal or undocumented, thus outside the purview of labor regulations. This lack of documentation means that many domestic workers, like Lakshmi, cannot report abuses or seek redress without fear of retaliation, which in fact makes their exploitation almost invisible in the eyes of authorities. Therefore, the aforementioned initiatives aimed at combating such exploitation worldwide now.

Lakshmi as a Symbol of Disposable People

Lakshmi serves as a symbol of the 'disposable people', vulnerable people as described by Kevin Bales in *Disposable People*. Like many vulnerable individuals, Lakshmi is trapped in a cycle of exploitation where her labor is extracted with little regard for her well-being, rights, or humanity. Her story is a reflection of how marginalized people, particularly women and migrant workers, are viewed as expendable within oppressive systems. She represents the millions who endure excessive work hours, the withholding of wages, and the constant threat of abuse, all while being invisible to the larger society.

Just as Bales illustrates the dehumanization of individuals who are reduced to mere commodities, Lakshmi's experiences echo the reality that many people in similar positions face: their suffering is normalized, their voices silenced, and their existence is often relegated to the background, unacknowledged and disregarded. In this regard, Lakshmi embodies the struggle of the 'disposable people, use and throw people, a

symbol of how vulnerable individuals are pushed to the margins, where their exploitation becomes not just an economic issue, but a matter of societal indifference and systemic neglect.

In fact, Lakshmi's story represents the harsh reality faced by many Nepali people, particularly women and children, who fall victim to human trafficking and exploitation. Her plight is not just a narrative within the pages of a book but a reflection of the larger, systemic issues that trap vulnerable people in cycles of exploitation, particularly in countries like Nepal, where socio-economic instability and limited opportunities make individuals susceptible to traffickers' manipulation.

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Immigration, between January 1 and December 31, 2024, over 856,422 individuals migrated for work—an average of 2,378 people per month. The data indicates:

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Home Affairs
Department of Immigration
Kalikasthan, Kathmandu

Nepali Departure Report - Purpose Wise (Summary Report)

Duration: 01 Jan - 31 Dec, 2024

SN	Purpose	Male	Female	Total
1	Family/Relation	54531	77256	131796
2	Temporary Residence Visit	56281	44536	100827
3	Tourism/Pilgrimage Visit	159043	115356	274428
4	Permanent Resident	34544	32287	66835
5	Employment	769890	96197	856422
6	Dependent	12114	21794	33909
7	Business	17405	2695	20101
8	Study	64335	55068	119409
9	Conference/Seminar/Training	17166	7089	24262
11	Health Treatment	10342	8364	18713
12	Official Visit	10101	3191	13293
13	Concert/Cultural program/Events	3705	1997	5703
14	UN Mission	5057	790	5847
15	Sports Event	2043	637	2680
Grand Total		1216557	467257	1674225

It shows that a large number of people from Nepal work abroad every year. However, reports say many face slavery-like situation or exploitation in their workplaces. Study also says that this condition often begins even before they actually leave Nepal.

In an essay "Foreign Labour Migration: Opportunities and Challenges in Nepal, has this kind of opinion. Amnesty International Nepal in the essay mentions:

Human and labour rights abuses of Nepalis who migrate abroad for work are widespread. Nepali migrant workers face several challenges during pre-departure, transit, and post-arrival in destination countries, and as returnees later in Nepal. The exploitation and abuse of aspirant migrant workers, especially during the recruitment process are widespread and yet unaddressed. Mostly the private recruitment agencies and their agents cheat and extort migrant workers with impunity. Amnesty International's report "Turning People into Profits" states that migrant workers pay on an average NPR 137,000 to recruitment higher than an average income of a Nepali household. (Amnesty International Nepal).

This passage clearly states the widespread human and labor rights abuses faced by Nepali migrant workers, especially during the recruitment process. Private recruitment agencies known as Manpower Companies or agents in Nepal exploit workers by charging excessive fees, averaging NPR 137,000, which is higher than the typical income of a Nepali household. This exploitation is largely unaddressed and happens with impunity. The lack of regulation and protection allows these recruitment agencies to profit from the vulnerability of migrant workers. As a result, the migrant workers have to be financially burdened, and they are at risk of mistreatment throughout their journey.

These migrant workers, much like Lakshmi in *Sold*, can be seen as disposable people, the individuals whose lives are exploited and treated as commodities by those in power. Just as Lakshmi is used for the benefit of others and discarded when no longer useful, Nepali migrant workers are exploited for financial gain during the recruitment process and throughout their journey. They are subjected to extreme financial burdens and abuse, only to be discarded once they have served their purpose. This systemic exploitation reflects a broader issue where vulnerable individuals are treated as consumable goods to others.

This raises a crucial question: are all manpower agencies in Nepal traffickers, or do they have any efforts to implement deontological measures that respect the principle of what we owe to each other? The answer to this is not easily clear-cut, as it involves a complex web of factors. However, it certainly requires serious investigation and a corrective action plan. What we owe to each other—respect for dignity and human autonomy—must be upheld. Recently, many global initiatives have made significant strides in Nepal that aims to educate recruiters to make them understand their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This seems like a very important step in addressing the issue of modern enslavement in their conducts.

As an effort to this, the government of Nepal has introduced the "Free Visa, Free Ticket" policy in 2015 as a significant measure so as to reduce the financial burden on migrant workers and curb exploitation by recruitment agencies. Under this policy, migrant workers are supposed to be provided with free visas and air tickets by their employers, which ensure that they do not have to pay for these expenses themselves. In fact, by making migration more affordable, the policy sought to protect workers from being overcharged by agencies, thus reducing their exposure to abuse and mistreatment.

The policy represents an important step towards protecting Nepali migrant workers and addressing the systemic abuses in the labor migration process. However, its implementation has faced significant challenges. Some agencies have found ways to bypass the rules, and enforcement has been inconsistent. In practice, recruitment agents are alleged to deceive vulnerable individuals by capitalizing on their fears and lack of understanding. They create myths and false narratives, telling potential migrants that 'anything for free is never good', so pay fees for good employment and so on. So, free visas and tickets policy turns to be a trap to vulnerable people. This myth mirrors the exploitation of Lakshmi in *Sold*, where she is told by traffickers that made her understand 'police' as 'goondas' and she happens to believe traffickers rather than to police.

Critiquing the policy, Oshin Pandey, in an article titled "The Hidden Costs of Nepal's 'Free Visa, Free Ticket' Policy" published in *The Diplomat*, writes:

Nepal's "Free Visa, Free Ticket" policy, introduced in 2015, was hailed as a landmark effort to minimize migration costs for aspiring workers heading to Gulf countries and Malaysia. It was designed to limit migration costs to around \$75 per worker. However, interviews with migrant workers reveal a starkly different reality. Many report paying between \$1,500 and \$2,200 for recruitment services, amounts that far exceed Nepal's annual GDP per capita, which was \$1,324 at the end of 2023. This discrepancy arises from a mix of weak enforcement and deeply entrenched corruption within the labor recruitment system. (Pandey).

It clearly states that enforcement mechanisms have severely undermined its effectiveness. As a result, despite the policy's promises, many workers still face the same harsh realities, high recruitment costs, debt, and vulnerability to abuse. The

policy's failure lies not in its design, but in the absence of accountability, monitoring, and implementation, leaving the very people it aimed to protect still trapped in exploitative systems.

Moreover, this policy has become misleading to many people as it only covers two topics: visa and airfare as free, but there are so many other topics related to employment cost such as transportation, passport fees, medical screenings, food, and accommodation that require money. In this regard, it is government's problem not to overview it. This gap may allow recruitment agencies to exploit workers by charging for these uncovered expenses. Thus, the government's failure to effectively enforce the policy and regulate recruitment agencies has rendered it ineffective, which helps leave migrant workers still vulnerable to exploitation.

In such scenario, the biggest challenge now appears breaking slavery cycle. Recently, efforts by global initiatives such as RBA, IRIS , OTL etc have proven beneficial for countries like Nepal as they focus on promoting ethical recruitment practices aiming to improve the conditions for migrant workers. Even if these programs may differ in names, their underlying goal remains the same that is to break the cycle of slavery, bondage, and harassment. They emphasize a zero-tolerance approach to every form of exploitation of labor. Also, they aim to create sustainable, ethical labor migration systems that protect workers' rights and dignity. These efforts mark a positive step towards dismantling the systemic abuse that has long been prevalent in migration processes.

Unlike the deceptive Free Visa, Free Ticket policy, which leaves rooms for exploitation, these initiatives promote the 'Zero Cost Recruitment Policy' that means all recruitment-related fees are to be covered by the hiring companies themselves. This approach is not about offering something 'free,' but rather ensuring that the

employer bears the full cost of recruitment. In addition to this, these policies emphasize equal, fair, and humane treatment of migrant workers. Agencies that meet the established standards are certified, and even after certification, they are continuously monitored to ensure ongoing compliance. These initiatives aim to eliminate exploitation, promote transparency, and create a more sustainable and ethical labor migration system. As of March 2025, the OTL website lists some of Nepal-based recruitment agencies as certified: "Titanic Manpower Supplier, 2025, Nepal-Malaysia, Trust Nepal Overseas, 2025, Nepal-Malaysia, Aakarshan International, 2024, Nepal-Malaysia, International Manpower Recruitment, 2024, Nepal-Malaysia" (OTL Certified Agencies).

As motioned in the list , one of the OTL certified agency in Nepal is Trust Nepal Overseas P. Limited located in Maharajgunj, Kathmandu established in 2002. Rabindra Kumar Neupane, the Executive Director of the agency states:

We promote ethical business practices. Since 2012, the alliance called the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA), which works globally to strengthen policies, introduced us to ethical recruitment system. That was our first step, and we have continued ever since. Under this policy, we deploy workers to Malaysia by ensuring their welfare not only during the hiring process but throughout their contracts till they return to Nepal after the contract completion. (Neupane)

His statement here demonstrates the agency's commitment to implementing ethical recruitment practices effectively that aligns with the aim of the aforementioned initiatives.

According to Managing Director, Rabin Gurung, the owner of Trust Nepal Overseas P. Limited, this agency has achieved the prestigious OTL certification.

Sharing his pride of the agency's accomplishment, MD Gurung states:

We are committed to implementing ethical policies with full effort. After a decade of hard work and dedication, we have now been officially certified for our adherence to ethical recruitment practices. This includes the Zero Cost Policy, where all recruitment-related expenses are borne by the hiring employers, as well as we are committed to ensuring humane treatment of all workers. My team is deeply dedicated to following these standards without failure, and we will continue to operate in line with both national and international policies to protect migrant workers. (Gurung)

This highlights that ethical practices in recruiting workers overseas from Nepal is in the state of becoming, which requires to be promoted to the level of being so that slavery cycle can be minimized and ultimately it dismantles the situation.

The certification obtained by the agency as MD Gurung says is :



(Trust Nepal Overseas P. Limited) These efforts indicate that modern-day slavery is

being actively challenged through responsible recruitment policies. Ethical recruitment initiatives offer significant benefits for Nepal and its migrant workforce.

However, it is not enough for only a few agencies to adopt ethical principles. Instead, the urgency lies in making this shift widespread across all manpower agencies in Nepal. By doing this, it helps dismantle the cycles of exploitation and trafficking, there results a systemic change—one that incorporates deontological ethics, and it ensures human dignity and autonomy at present economy. Additionally, ethical recruitment improves Nepal's reputation in the global labor market. International companies and governments are increasingly prioritizing fair labor practices. This can attract more job opportunities for Nepali workers while ensuring their safety and well-being abroad. After all, ethical recruitment reduces financial hardships for migrant workers and their families that help them maintain their quality life in future, unlike the fate that Lakshmi has to endure in *Sold*.

Furthermore, ethical recruitment aligns with Nepal's commitment to international human rights standards. By implementing policies such as the "Zero Cost" model, Nepal contributes to global efforts to eradicate modern-day slavery, setting an example for other labor-exporting countries. Strengthening ethical recruitment practices can lead to long-term economic growth by fostering a responsible labor migration system that benefits workers, employers, and the country as a whole. In short, the implementation of ethical recruitment policies in Nepal represents a significant step toward safeguarding the rights and dignity of migrant workers. With continued efforts from government agencies, NGOs, and certified recruitment firms, Nepal can further solidify its position as a leader in ethical labor migration that contributes to the global fight against modern-day slavery.

Uncovering the Origins of Modern-day Slavery

Historically speaking, modern-day slavery can be traced back to the aftermath of Lincoln's Executive Order. While the order freed enslaved individuals from plantations, it failed to provide them with a clear path for survival and economic independence. The newly freed people were thrilled by the announcement, yet uncertain about their future. Booker T. Washington recalls the moment:

I now recall in connection with the scene that some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After reading, we were told that we were all free and could go when and where we pleased. (12)

This was undoubtedly a milestone in history. However, despite subsequent laws and directives aimed at eradicating slavery, systemic failures have allowed exploitative conditions to persist in different forms.

However, with freedom came a great challenge that kept many formerly enslaved individuals in a position of vulnerability and exploitation. Booker T. Washington describes this harsh reality: "The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated colored people lasted but for a brief period... the great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children"(12). Lacking stable jobs and economic opportunities, many were forced into exploitative labor under their former enslavers.

Washington himself found life in new places even harder than before. His experience in Malden exemplifies this struggle: "At that time, salt-mining was a great industry in that part of West Virginia, and the little town of Malden was right in the midst of the salt-furnaces. My stepfather had already secured a job at the salt-furnace, and he had also secured a little cabin to live in"(15). Despite securing work, wages

were so meager that even basic necessities like food remained a daily struggle. This economic hardship trapped many freed individuals in a cycle of labor conditions that closely resembled their previous enslavement.

Witnessing the struggles of formerly enslaved individuals, Booker T. Washington realized that the key to true freedom was not just legal emancipation but economic independence through education. He saw that without practical skills, Black Americans remained vulnerable to exploitation, often forced into low-paying, labor-intensive jobs that resembled their previous enslavement. Unlike his contemporary W.E.B. Du Bois, who championed higher education and leadership development for the "Talented Tenth," Washington believed that vocational training was a more immediate and practical solution for the majority. He argued that learning skilled trades would provide economic stability, self-reliance, and respect within society, allowing Black individuals to lift themselves out of poverty and dependency.

Determined to put his philosophy into action, Washington pursued his own education at Hampton Institute, where he experienced firsthand the benefits of industrial education. Drawing from his experiences, he later founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, an institution dedicated to equipping Black students with practical, hands-on training. At Tuskegee, students learned trades such as carpentry, brickmaking, and construction—skills that not only provided them with employment opportunities but also helped develop and improve their communities. Washington emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency, teaching students to build their own dormitories, make their own bricks, and farm their own land, fostering a sense of pride and independence.

This approach created a cycle of mutual support between the students and their communities. As students gained valuable skills, they could contribute to the

economic and infrastructural growth of their surroundings. In return, the community recognized the value of Tuskegee graduates and supported the institution.

Washington's model of education was deeply rooted in the belief that economic self-sufficiency was the most effective path to long-term racial uplift. He envisioned a future where Black Americans could gain respect and equality not through direct political agitation but through demonstrating their economic and social contributions to society. Despite criticisms from figures like Du Bois, who argued that Washington's approach accommodated racial segregation rather than directly challenging it, Tuskegee Institute became a cornerstone of Black economic empowerment, influencing generations of educators and leaders.

For this, many remember Washington today as a modern-day Moses who led the Black community into a new era. Robert J. Norrell, a professor of history at the University of Tennessee, highlights this recognition in his book *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*. Quoting Andrew Carnegie and other influential literary figures, Norrell emphasizes Washington's pivotal role in shaping Black progress and economic self-sufficiency as this:

Carnegie alternately declared Washington the new Moses and the second father of the country after Booker's name sake and fellow Virginian. Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and other noted men of letters admired his writing. People all over the world had read Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery* and had taken from it instruction and inspiration about how to improve their lives. (3)

He praises Booker T. Washington by drawing a comparison to Moses, highlighting the similarities between them. Both were influential leaders who dedicated their lives to fighting for the rights and empowerment of oppressed people. Moses led the

Israelites out of slavery in ancient Egypt, while Washington worked tirelessly to uplift formerly enslaved Black Americans through education and economic self-sufficiency.

However, Booker T. Washington's solution of vocational education as a pathway to economic independence was a logical and effective approach for his time. By equipping Black Americans with practical skills, he sought to provide them with opportunities to secure stable employment and build self-sufficient communities. However, in today's world, while skill acquisition remains important, it is no longer a guaranteed safeguard against exploitation. Many individuals, despite being highly skilled, still find themselves trapped in exploitative labor conditions due to the unethical actions of those in power. The persistence of modern-day slavery is not necessarily a result of a lack of skills but rather the presence of systemic corruption and intentional neglect by those responsible for enforcing labor protections.

A prime example of this issue is the plight of migrant workers. With globalization opening up job opportunities across borders, millions of people migrate in search of better economic prospects. However, instead of finding fair employment, many are subjected to exploitative conditions due to the unethical practices of recruiters, employers, and even government officials. Despite laws and directives designed to protect workers, loopholes, lack of enforcement, and intentional misconduct create environments where forced labor, wage theft, and unsafe working conditions thrive. Migrant workers, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, often lack the legal knowledge or resources to defend their rights, making them easy targets for exploitation.

Furthermore, many migrant workers unknowingly enter conditions that resemble modern slavery due to misinformation or deception by recruiters. They may be promised fair wages and decent working conditions, only to find themselves in

bonded labor, with their passports confiscated and wages withheld. Even those who are aware of their rights often face significant challenges in seeking justice, as legal systems may be slow, corrupt, or indifferent to their plight. This situation illustrates that while vocational skills are valuable, they are not sufficient on their own to prevent exploitation. Ethical governance, strict law enforcement, and international accountability measures are equally necessary to dismantle the structures that enable modern-day slavery to persist.

Ultimately, Washington's vision of economic empowerment through skill-building remains relevant but is incomplete in addressing today's complexities. While skills can provide individuals with opportunities, the true challenge lies in ensuring that those opportunities exist within ethical and fair labor systems. Without addressing the intentional failures of those in power—whether through corruption, negligence, or complicity—the cycle of exploitation will continue. Thus, tackling modern slavery requires not only empowering individuals with skills but also holding institutions accountable for upholding human rights and labor protections.

Narrative Comparison of *Sold* and *Up from Slavery*

The comparative analysis of Patricia McCormick's *Sold* and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* offers an exploration of the continuity of slavery across time and the systemic barriers that perpetuate it. While these texts are set in vastly different historical and geographical contexts, they converge in their portrayal of how slavery, in its various forms, remains an enduring problem, driven not only by legal frameworks but by deep-rooted societal and economic structures.

In *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington reflects on his personal journey from the hardships of slavery to the challenges of post-Emancipation America. Washington's narrative is grounded in the historical context of the post-Civil War

South, where African Americans were legally freed but continued to face severe economic and social discrimination. His experience in Malden, as described in his autobiography, underscores the deep psychological and physical toll that economic dependency and a lack of opportunity had on formerly enslaved people. As Raymond W. Smock, an American historian known for his expertise in U.S. congressional history and the life of Booker T. Washington in his book *Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (2009) notes, "Washington was acutely aware of the risks of falling into the same cycle of labor exploitation as his stepfather and others in Malden.(23). " Washington's solution to this challenge was education, particularly vocational training, which he believed was essential for Black Americans to break free from systemic oppression.

Similarly, McCormick's *Sold* focuses on Lakshmi, a young girl trafficked into the sex trade in Nepal, and her experiences reflect the modern-day slavery of human trafficking. The novel illuminates the profound vulnerabilities that victims like Lakshmi endure, as they are manipulated, exploited, and abandoned by authorities. As in Washington's era, those in power fail to protect the oppressed. Holly Johnson, in her review of *Sold*, emphasizes the nuanced portrayal of Lakshmi's suffering and survival, showing how individuals can be forced into slavery despite legal frameworks meant to protect them. In her essay "Violence Against Women: An International Perspective" she writes, "McCormick's focus is on raising awareness about the pervasiveness of sex trafficking, and she deliberately does not name the cities involved, instead highlighting the broader issue of exploitation" (Holly Johnson). These lines explain that the issue that Lakshmi endures is an universal issue, happening in guise in many parts of the world.

A critical point of convergence between *Up from Slavery* and *Sold* lies in their

treatment of systemic failures. Washington's experiences, particularly in Malden, reveal how the formal end of slavery did not equate to true freedom, as economic systems continued to trap African Americans in oppressive labor conditions. Similarly, *Sold* critiques the failure of law enforcement and authorities to intervene in the plight of trafficked individuals. Both texts question the moral responsibility of those in power and challenge readers to reflect on how legal and ethical failures sustain slavery-like conditions.

Moreover, both Washington and McCormick highlight the need for self-improvement and empowerment. Washington's advocacy for vocational training was not just about personal growth but about building a community of self-sufficient individuals who could resist the systemic structures that sought to oppress them. Similarly, Lakshmi's gradual learning and self-discovery in *Sold* point to the importance of reclaiming one's agency, despite the overwhelming odds stacked against her. This theme of self-reliance and empowerment is central to Washington's philosophy, epitomized in his Atlanta Compromise speech, where he calls for Black Americans to "cast down their bucket where they are" and make the most of their current circumstances to build a better future.

Despite their shared emphasis on self-reliance, both Washington and McCormick's texts also invite criticism. Washington's pragmatic approach to segregation, as exemplified in his Atlanta Compromise, was seen by some as overly conciliatory, especially in contrast to the more radical activism of W.E.B. Du Bois. Similarly, McCormick's depiction of the sex trade in *Sold* has been criticized by some scholars, like Dipak Raj Joshi, University Grants Commission (UGC) Nepal financially assisted this research under UGC PhD Fellowship in the fiscal year 2076-, who charges her for "misrepresenting the 'Third World.'" in his article,

"Interdiscursivity in McCormick's *Sold*: A Critical Discourse Analysis". However, McCormick herself clarifies in interviews that her intention was not to generalize but to raise awareness about the ongoing issue of human trafficking in South Asia, a region that has made strides toward addressing the problem, unlike many others where such issues remain hidden.

Chapter V: A Deontological Response to Modern-Day Slavery

Although many people today believe that slavery is a thing of the past, this dissertation has shown that modern-day slavery remains a highly relevant and disturbing issue. The assumption that slavery no longer exists stems from a legal definition that fails to account for its contemporary forms, including forced labor, human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Patricia McCormick's *Sold* presents a vivid and heartbreaking example through the character of Lakshmi, a young girl who is trafficked and enslaved in a brothel. Her story is not an isolated fictional event but rather a reflection of the lives of millions who continue to suffer in silence. Despite legal abolition, slavery-like conditions are widespread, particularly in economically and socially vulnerable communities.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has identified eleven indicators of forced labor, many of which are present in *Sold*. These include restriction of movement, deception, abuse of vulnerability, and retention of identity documents. Through Lakshmi's experience, readers see how traffickers and exploiters manipulate systems and exploit victims using these exact indicators. What becomes clear is that modern-day slavery operates under the radar of legal enforcement by presenting itself as labor or migration, blurring the lines between legality and exploitation. This subtlety is one of the reasons it continues to thrive despite international condemnation.

The root of the problem lies not merely in weak legislation but in the failure to ethically enforce existing laws. Enforcement mechanisms are often corrupt, compromised, or indifferent, leading to systemic failures. In *Sold*, the character of the border guard and the police officer who accept bribes highlight how authority figures can perpetuate exploitation rather than prevent it. These instances show how those

entrusted with protecting the vulnerable instead become complicit in their suffering. When law enforcement turns a blind eye for personal gain, justice becomes inaccessible and the cycle of slavery continues unchallenged.

Corruption in law enforcement is not just a logistical issue but it is a moral failure. When the people responsible for upholding justice look for benefit, they betray not only the victims but also the principles they swore to protect. The intentional neglect of responsibility constitutes a form of structural violence, as shown by the passive complicity of the authorities in *Sold*. This inaction is not due to lack of awareness but to a deliberate prioritization of self-interest over ethical duty. It illustrates how the problem of slavery today is embedded in institutions that fail to act with integrity and humanity.

To better understand this ethical collapse, it is relevant to look back to history. Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* provides a valuable lens through which to examine the legacy of enslavement. While the Emancipation Proclamation legally ended slavery in 1863, Washington makes clear that legal freedom did not immediately translate into genuine liberation. Formerly enslaved individuals were left to navigate a hostile society with few resources and little guidance. They were expected to provide for themselves in a system that still viewed them as inferior and expendable. This historical context reveals the beginnings of what we now call modern-day slavery—a system that continues to control through poverty, dependency and inequality.

Washington's reflections show that while chattel slavery may have ended, economic and psychological bondage persisted in new forms. The newly freed were often forced to work under exploitative conditions reminiscent of their past enslavement, especially when former enslavers became employers. These workers

were legally free, but practically oppressed, much like modern workers trapped by debt or coercion. The false promise of freedom, without institutional support or protection, laid the foundation for the ongoing exploitation we witness today. Thus, the line between historical and modern-day slavery is not as disconnected as it may seem, but it is deeply continuous.

This ethical and historical continuity between past and present, slavery brings us to a critical question: how do we evaluate right and wrong in these contexts? Here, the ethical theory of T. M. Scanlon becomes invaluable. In *What We Owe to Each Other*, Scanlon argues that actions are right or wrong depending on whether they can be justified to others based on principles that no one could reasonably reject. By this logic, any action that causes harm to another for personal gain, particularly when that person is vulnerable, is ethically indefensible. It is not enough to claim legality or custom—an action must be morally justifiable to those affected by it.

In the case of *Sold*, the traffickers' motives—primarily financial gain—are not justifiable to their victims. Lakshmi, who is deceitfully trafficked, sold and abused reasonably rejects the conditions imposed upon her. Her suffering caused by the greed and manipulation of others cannot be justified under any moral or ethical framework. Those who exploit her do so not because they must, but because they can—because systems allow them to act without consequence. Under Scanlon's view, this makes their actions morally reprehensible and socially damaging.

The failure of authorities and institutions to intervene in Lakshmi's case also fails Scanlon's ethical test. When a government agent or police officer ignores a crime in exchange for a bribe, they are not acting from a place of duty or fairness. Their actions, or lack thereof, cause tangible harm and reinforce unjust systems that victimize the powerless. Such inaction cannot be justified to the victims, nor to

society as a whole. Rather it makes it ethically unacceptable. The moral obligations of public servants extend beyond the law—they must act in ways that are transparent, accountable, and defensible to those affected.

To correct these moral and legal failures, a comprehensive and ethical action plan must be developed. Policymakers need to create frameworks that are not only legally sound but also ethically coherent. These frameworks should prioritize transparency, accountability, and mutual benefit, aligning with Scanlon's principle that justice must be justifiable to all. Enforcing anti-trafficking laws must become an act of ethical duty, not political convenience or financial strategy. Without this shift in mindset, modern-day slavery can better be minimized to the way to its eradication.

This dissertation therefore aims to do more than analyze texts; it seeks to raise critical awareness. Its findings are intended to inform various stakeholders—government bodies, recruitment agencies, NGOs, INGOs and especially migrant workers about the moral responsibilities they carry. In Nepal and other migration-prone countries, many individuals fall victim to labor exploitation abroad due to systemic negligence and a lack of proper oversight. Raising awareness is not merely about education, it is about empowering people to recognize and resist unethical practices. An informed public can challenge exploitative systems more effectively than isolated victims.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must also be redefined in light of this ethical reassessment. Businesses and institutions that benefit from cheap or coerced labor cannot absolve themselves by complying with minimal legal standards. They must actively work to eliminate exploitation within their supply chains and employment structures. Guided by the principle of what we owe to each other, CSR

should involve genuine ethical reflection and action. Anything less contributes to the problem rather than the solution.

Also, this study affirms that slavery did not disappear but it evolved. The conditions depicted in *Sold* and *Up from Slavery* are not relics of history but reflections of ongoing injustices. Both texts underscore the persistent failure of systems to protect human dignity and enforce moral duty. They offer insights into how freedom can be limited not just by physical chains but by economic, legal, and institutional constraints. These stories demand that we look beyond the surface of legality and ask deeper questions about justice, ethics, and responsibility.

Abolishing modern-day slavery requires more than legal reform—it demands moral courage. It requires individuals and institutions alike to act out of duty to others, not personal convenience or gain. Until justice is enforced with both legal authority and ethical conviction, millions like Lakshmi will remain unheard and unprotected. This dissertation calls for a collective ethical awakening—one grounded in the understanding that no human being should have to reasonably reject the conditions of their life to be seen as worthy of justice.

In conclusion, the solution lies not only in revising our laws but also in reassessing our ethical commitments. Through Scanlon's framework and the powerful narratives explored in this study, we see that the path forward begins with recognizing our shared responsibility. Freedom, dignity, and justice must be extended to all, not just in word but in action. Only then can we claim to have truly moved beyond the shadows of slavery—past or present.

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