



Research Article

Precarious Lives of the Proletariat: Exploring the Human-Induced Catastrophe in the web series *The Railway Men: The Untold Story of Bhopal 1984* (2023)

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of 'slow violence,' a term coined by Rob Nixon to describe the insidious, often unnoticed effects of power imbalances over time. It examines how 'state vampirism' and 'industrial capitalism' oppress marginalized populations, with a focus on India's dependency on countries like the USA. The research juxtaposes exploitation and deprivation in human-induced disasters, such as the Bhopal Gas tragedy (1984) and Chernobyl (1986), through the lens of Marxist subalternism. It also analyzes the portrayal of these themes in the 2023 Netflix series "The Railway Men: The Untold Story of Bhopal 1984," highlighting the plight of slum dwellers near Bhopal's carbide factory. Ultimately, this paper questions the victimization process by capitalist multinationals, positioning Bhopal as a prime example of 'corporate violence.'

Keywords: Precarity, slow violence, Marxist subalternism, Bhopal gas tragedy, state vampirism

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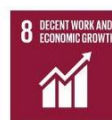
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Introduction

Bhopal isn't only about charred lungs, poisoned kidneys and deformed fetuses. It's also about corporate crime, multinational skullduggery, injustice, dirty deals, medical malpractice, corruption, callousness and contempt... the leak was no 'accident' but a 'massacre'... causing tens of thousands of human and animal deaths and injuring upwards of half a million people in the decades since the explosion. (Carrigan, 2012, p. 2)

The article addresses the shades of poverty, inequality and "toxic uncertainty" (Auyero & Swistun, 2009, pp. 3–6) in the lives of marginalized people, especially the slum dwellers who live near the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. The tragedy is projected meticulously through the Netflix series *The Railway Men- The Untold Story of Bhopal 1984 (2023)*, which deals with the common men's enigma in a capital-driven society. Representation of the man-made disaster through the web series and visual media left a crucial mark in opening up the undiscovered layers of the incident. Through the manipulation of film devices such as the camera, flashback, and flash forward, the series demonstrates the place of the stateless people within a borderline who are placed at the threshold and labelled as other. With the analysis of the Marxist theory of subalternism, the study situates the suffering of the proletariat at the core while dealing with the subjects of capitalist modes of production in neoliberal states. The capitalist force transforms the common people into commodities, and thus, exploitation of human labour reaches the heights. With the onset of capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, specifically after the 1980s, gained a momentous exemplifying with the construction of multinational companies in third-world countries, excluding the interest of the common mass. The Union Carbide Factory, which is one of the USA-based multinational companies responsible for the Bhopal gas tragedy, was marked by disasters in humans and the natural world whose aftermath can be seen even in next-generation children who are born with myriad forms of impairments resulting in disabilities. Though the series is primarily focused on the contributions of railway workers during the Bhopal Gas disaster, it does not stop to foreground the issues of maltreatment, poverty, and marginalization in the lives of slum dwellers who live near the carbide factory. This tragedy has been seen as a process of making people vulnerable in the hands of multinational companies where the industrial lobby of first-world countries like the USA determines the pesticide market economy of third-world countries. It sees information as the real source of power since the capitalist regime has dominated it as in this disaster, "UCC maintained an absolute monopoly over information on MIC toxicity, and the Indian government-controlled information on disaster-related death counts and casualties" (Sharma, 2014, p. 149). It can also be said that "UCC's control over and strategic disclosure of information allowed the corporation to backtrack often on its own statements or to provide misleading information." (Sharma, 2014, p. 149)

The never-ending effects of the MIC on human health probe deeper to unravel the politics of poor distribution of drugs and medicines in the midst of such disasters to earn profits and gain benefits. This inhuman treatment led to the transformation of the working-class people into beggars since their voices were unheard by the authorities and the state officials.

... there are two sides of development in relation to capitalistic expansion in the Global South, which are often intertwined. The first one is that development serves as a stimulus for the advancement of society and fundamental civil rights. In relation to the second aspect, development is merely an excuse for exploitation and political influence. (Lindström, 2020, p. 5)

In the name of development, people in power are always in search of controlling the poor and the vulnerable through coercion or politics. This leads to the authorities interpellating the working-class people. The capitalist mode of life enables city dwellers, from rickshaw drivers to factory workers, to earn daily wages by working in the carbide factory in Bhopal with an American dream that fuels their hearts with many promises and expectations to improve their lives. The gas tragedy in Bhopal marks the exploitation of common people as well as the increase of "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011), which "refers to attritional suffering that develops unspectacularly." It has been summed up as "It is a) dispersed across time and space, b) disproportionately suffered by dispossessed or marginalized people, and c) difficult to apprehend and to represent visually." (Skotnicki, 2019, p. 300)

So, this affects the psyche of the victims to a great extent, from which recovery is hardly possible. The correlation can be seen through the representation of a gas victim survivor in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, where the author "...takes up the challenging task of representing what Rob Nixon (2011) calls 'slow violence,' those forms of violence that are not immediate and spectacular but rather slow and insidious." (Singh, 2015, p. 141)

The cause behind the "slow violence" in the Bhopal gas tragedy is Methyl Isocyanate (MIC), a very hazardous chemical that was used in Bhopal by Union Carbide of India Limited (UCIL) to make the carbamate herbicides Carbaryl (Sevin) and Aldicarb (Temik). Water inadvertently found its way into a MIC storage tank on Sunday, December 2, 1984, triggering an exothermic reaction that increased pressure over the rupture disc limit of the tank. Because of this, gases exploded past this point, through the vent header of the relief valve, beyond the vent gas scrubber, and into the environment. The biggest industrial disaster in history was brought on by the gas that leaked as a result. The Union Carbide of India Limited (UCIL) at Bhopal, India, is a division of the USA-based Union Carbide Corporation held responsible for the man-made catastrophe that resulted in the deaths of many and leaving others to carry forward the lifelong pain of being disabled physically and psychologically. According to a source, though the government claims the deaths of 1754 people in the disaster,

... with an informal consensus among most researchers that at least 5,000 died in the disaster's immediate aftermath. At least 200,000 people were exposed to the toxic gases, more than 60,000 were seriously affected and over 20,000 of these have been permanently injured. (Pearce & Tombs, 1989, p. 117)

Approximately, as shown, the immediate deaths of people would be around 5000; where most of them are from the nearby slum areas and live in mud houses, and some of them are without that. The capitalist modes of production transform and somehow change the lives of people working in the factory, promising a better lifestyle. The condition of the people degrades in terms of health and welfare as they do not get access to a healthcare system and are devoid of safety measures as they have an extra workload imposed in the factory. However, discrimination fuels inequality; as Nixon puts it, "discrimination predates disaster" (p. 59) in the Bhopal gas tragedy case.

The working-class people are always in the hands of the capitalist force used as commodities to be utilized according to the whims of the multinational companies. They only bother in most cases about the duration of work and the kind of labour needed to run the factory, bypassing the safety standards, which are mostly ignored in third-world countries like India. The conflict to control the

working-class labour is also heavily run between the companies, including the rivalry among them. It is always the first-world country motivated by capitalist modes of operation that control the economic status of the third-world country. This is instigated by the choices and decisions that the authorities in third-world countries would take to favour the interests of the first-world countries. The capitalist force is always quick to spread the profit-making agenda no matter what the condition of the people is and how their health and safety measures are being compromised. The following excerpt reflects on the conflict between the myriad forms of capitalism along with the prevalent bourgeoisie and proletariat issues.

There are both conflicts that unify the capitalist class- for example, those with the working class, rival imperialist powers, or rival social system- and conflicts that divide it, for example, competition between corporations for markets and for capital...The unity of the capitalist class is a real but fragile one. (Pearce & Tombs, 1989, p. 126-127)

The Netflix series brilliantly captures this aspect of oppression and subjugation of the downtrodden amid such a manmade catastrophe. It states that a common man's life is a shadow in industrial vampirism. Starting from the life of railway workers to slum dwellers who work in the factory, they are merely products to be utilised by the capitalist forms to gain profits. Their personhood has been reduced to labelling them as labour for maximum use in the factory. The media streaming of *The Railway Men*, as the title suggests, invites us to think on this broader aspect of humanitarian ground where people with marginal backgrounds always get crashed. They are the easy victims in the hands of global forces such as the USA-based UCC. It should be noted that UCC has been established in favour of receiving cheap labour and fewer legal complexities in India so that they can flourish, compromising the safety measures and degrading the life expectancy of the factory workers. This leads to the dehumanization of the proletariat through the industrial hazards.

Theoretical Framework

The unequal distribution of power structure makes the people in the margin more vulnerable, which the study aims to relocate through the words of several thinkers and theorists. Judith Butler's words on the "precarious life" are used in the study where it has been seen as the "differential distribution of precariousness" in which place "certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2004, p. 26).

Considering the myriad shapes in marginalizing the downtrodden people who are living in the slum areas near the Bhopal Carbide factory, the research aims to explore not only the "precarious life" of the slum dwellers but also questions the process of marginalization by capitalist force that is mainly enslaving them. Through the subaltern theory of Marxism, the study tries to see both the living conditions and compromised safety measures enforced by the factory owners from the first world countries. Antonio Gramsci's theory of the subaltern has been incorporated into the study to showcase how working-class people have been reduced to mere victims by the ideological state apparatus and repressive state apparatus. Ranajit Guha's take on the condition of the people at the margin and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subaltern would highlight

how the proletariat is suffering from the “precarious life,” in Butler’s words, and thus exploited. The notions of Lenin, Gramsci, and Lukács regarding ideology and false consciousness have been utilized in the paper to understand the binary formation of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This would enable us to see the lives of the vulnerable in the realm of capitalist structure, which is also shown in the Netflix series.

In this context, the paper attempts to unravel how the downtrodden people are forced to live in a precarious environment by not only working in hazardous conditions for the factory owners but also bypassing health standards. Examples from the movies and web series are taken to resonate with the arguments and to question the mode of marginalization primarily by the first world countries over third world countries.

Media Streaming of the Netflix series *The Railway Men: An Overview*

The Railway Men: The Untold Story of Bhopal 1984 (2023), directed by Shiv Rawail, written by Aayush Gupta and produced by YRF Entertainments, is a Netflix-released web series chronicling the greatest industrial disaster which the world has witnessed took place in the Indian city of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, during 1984-1985. Centring on the roles of the railway workers, the series moves beyond it to engage the readers with the struggles and deteriorating conditions of the working-class people living in the slums or mud houses in the nearby villages due to the man-made disaster. The city of Bhopal becomes a microcosm of the whole nation suffering in the age of indulgence and capitalism. The Union Carbide Corporation stands here for the larger authorial force dominating the regional spaces to engulf its resources such as raw material, cheap labour, accessibility to a growing market economy, etc. The series takes into consideration the aspect of “capital accumulation” (Hornborg, 2019, p. 80), where the resources of developing countries are accumulated and controlled by the global capitalist force, in this case by the USA-based UCIL company over the city of Bhopal in India to maximize the profit-making business as well as to control the means of production. It can be envisaged that this “corresponds with the phenomenon Huggan and Tiffin define as ‘state vampirism,’ meaning that a developed country exploits a developing one at the cost of this nation’s potential to conduct further developmental advancement.” (Lindström, 2020, p. 14)

Common people here served as cheap labour from the developing countries that the developed countries took to exploit such human labour and gain control over their lives. The common man's life is nothing but a commodity in the hands of such an industrial force, which the series tries to delineate throughout the four episodes. The series features actors like Kay Kay Menon as the Station Master of Bhopal Junction, R. Madhavan as the General Manager of the Central Railway, Divyendu, the conman turned saver in the series, and Babli Khan plays the role of the only locomotor pilot living who knows about the happenings in the Union Carbide Factory does not dare to sacrifice his life to direct trains from getting crashed. The worst industrial catastrophe occurred due to the entry of the waters into the MIC storages, releasing toxic gases that filled the skies of Bhopal city and turned into a gas chamber full of life-threatening hazards. The effects were so and large, still claiming lives and making children born with some deformities. As Rashida Bee points out, this would make the curses of man-made catastrophe visible in the future thus,

The situation is getting worse, not even better. We are seeing more and more second and third generation children being born with such disabilities. (Petersen, 2019, p. 3)



Figure 1 & 2

The above shots from the series illustrate the deteriorating situation of the MIC-affected victims that result in myriad forms of impairment and disability. During the time of treatment, the medical practitioners were totally ignorant of the possible ways to antidotes. The visuals highlight the 2nd and 3rd generations of children who may not be the direct victims of the MIC but are still enduring the timeless pain due to the invisible effects of the MIC in the air.

The Cinematic Language of the Disaster: Delineating the Modes of Representation

The Netflix-released web series utilizes the metaphors of flashback and flashforward to go back to the past, return to the present and predict the future of the disaster victims, enabling “photographic realism” (Daly, 2009, p. 2). The narratives unfold through the camera of the journalist, Jagmohan Kumawat (Sunny Hinduja), which captures the cinematic motion of the shots from the series and flashes the reflection of the historical records of the incident, establishing the authenticity, fidelity and realism of the Bhopal gas tragedy. The camera the director utilizes here acts like a pen, and thus, “Bhopal speaks of human misery, suffering and death, and it condemns India’s multinational enterprise liability theory.” (Hosein, 1993, p. 285)

This way, “...the camera can become more of a collaborator than simply a tool” (Daly, 2009, p. 3). Gilles Deleuze refers to a “camera autonomy” where it “appears to look where it wants, unaffected by strict narrative norms” (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 12-13). Even in “...visual narrative multimedia (e.g., movies and TV series), the camerawork is a significant channel of storytelling as much as dialogue and acting” (Lee et al., 2021, p. 19). Camera angles also represent the perspective between the camera and the subjects, reflecting the audience’s viewpoint. Among the various shot types based on camera angles, high and low-angle shots are more strongly associated with conveying conflict. High-angle shots are captured from a higher position than eye level, causing the audience to look down on the characters (or other subjects), which portrays them as weak and vulnerable, providing an overview of the situation. The precarity in the lives of the vulnerable is clearly visible through the below-mentioned figure, which uses high camera angles to mark the volatile and unsteady lives of the poor and the helpless.



Figure 3

History sees a similar tragedy called the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, labelled as the world's worst nuclear disaster whose radiation is still high, leaving that particular place a blank and claiming the lives of many by the "radiation's deadly invisible force" (Marder & Tondeur, 2016, p. 28). The disaster takes place at "...Chernobyl in the north of Ukraine, then part of the USSR, in the early hours of April 26, 1986, an explosion at a state-owned nuclear power plant caused the release of some 6 tonnes (possibly more) of radioactive materials." (Grimston, 1997, p. 1)

Politically, it led to the downfall of the Soviet Union due to the mismanagement of not only the engineers involved but also the authorities who were relying more on nuclear power during the time of the Cold War. It questions, like the Bhopal gas tragedy, the mismanagement of the authorities in controlling and safeguarding its people. Notably, "The foreboding effects of these two disasters are still profoundly felt and experienced not just locally but globally..." (Kümbet, 2020, p. 202).

However, unlike the Chernobyl disaster, the residents of Bhopal have been abandoned by both American corporations and their own government, both of which fail to acknowledge the devastating impact of the disaster, particularly on the poor and disadvantaged living in shanties. It is seen that "Most of those killed were poor. Many lived in slum colonies adjacent to the Carbide plant, in flimsy houses that offered little protection from the weather or from airborne toxics." (Fortun, 2001, pp. 14-15)

Capitalist Enigma and Industrial Vampirism: A Quest for Marxist Subalternism

While Marx and Engels used the concepts of ideology and false consciousness synonymously and limited them to studying history, intellectuals, and capitalism, Lenin took them steadily in the working-class direction. He deployed "...ideology to refer to the competing arguments and explanations produced by writers and speech-makers offered to the working class as explanation for their situation vis-i-vis capitalism" (Eyerman, 1981, p. 45).

George Lukács and Antonio Gramsci produced the relation between ideology and false consciousness: "Working class false consciousness is never delusion in a total sense, being part of the oppressed means feeling oppression and being forced to deal with it" (Eyerman, 1981, p. 48).

The inherent culture or perspective of oppressed social groups comprised a blend of genuine understanding of their oppression, sporadic acts of defiance, misconceptions regarding its origins and effective methods for change. Meanwhile, ideology encompassed socially constructed systems of explanation that justified the oppression or aimed to foster revolutionary awareness and action. George Lukács pertinently brings out the crux of this "ideology" for which "the irrational structure of capitalist society produces the need for theories to explain and justify the confusion and madness that appears on its surface" as well as "false consciousness" which is nothing but "a form of consciousness produced in the very life practices of capitalist society" (Eyerman, 1981, p. 49). In this context, the bourgeoisie profit from this mystification, while the working class bears the brunt of its consequences.



Figure 4 & 5

These scenes discuss the exploitation of power over a third-world country through the failed tests of the MIC, which are accumulated through manipulation and are owned by the UCC. Compromising the safety measures and placing the lives of thousands at stake, the multinational companies, in a way, have neo-colonised a country like India through various means. In terms of providing quality materials to third-world countries, people of the first world draw raw materials and human resources from third-world countries to enslave the psyche of these people. Consequently, first-world countries are given liberal and compromised pathways to enter these countries to run a business as the policies are less troubled and more suited for first-world countries.

On another account,

Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class...Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action. (Spivak, 2005, p. 476)

Ideology plays a central role in deciding the lives of the proletariat, which, in Engels' words, is a "false consciousness" spread by the capitalist agenda. It sees the people to bring them into interpellation to take control of their consciousness. The marginal communities who work in the

factory are being dislocated from their thoughts by the enforcement of the ideological beliefs of the capitalist corporate power structure. Therefore, the working-class people procrastinated about their existence, and they started believing in the ideology of the state, which Althusser contends that

The reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class "in and by words." (Althusser, 1971, pp. 132-133)

Here, Althusser offers the scopes of resistance, as also put by Spivak, that the

...link to the workers' struggle is located in the desire to blow up power at any point of its application. This site is apparently based on a simple valorisation of any desire destructive of any power. (Spivak, 1994, p. 67)

For the working-class people against the manipulation and exploitation of the ruling class, the people in the margin in the context of the Bhopal gas tragedy hardly respond to the injustices and exploitations of the corporate crime of the first-world country. Indra Sinha, who wrote about the Bhopal gas tragedy in his acclaimed piece *Animal's People*, seemed to be aware of the politics of this disappointment and hopelessness. His protagonist, Animal, is a victim of Western corporate power, and as a result, he has been perpetuated by the dehumanizing patterns of global capitalism. It shows how Animal has been alienated due to the force of cultural capitalism and the power structure of Western corporate power. This also includes the "...conflict in the novel between nature's limited capability of absorbing lethal chemical contamination and the capitalistic expansion of production..." (Lindström, 2020, p. 1).

Animal, the central character in Indra Sinha's *Animal People* (2007), is a victim of the Bhopal gas tragedy and a survivor of the Western corporate agency who delinks the myth behind the other side of development by a capitalist regime.

Animal is immediately set apart from other characters in the novel who never question their own status as human; he also signals the dehumanizing effects of global capitalism on those who, like the victims of the Bhopal disaster, have not been afforded basic human rights or recompense from the Western corporate power that has disabled them and poisoned their environments. (Singh, 2015, p. 137)

In this case, development is only a disguised form of exploitation and subjugation. The timeless effects of the industrial hazards are still a long way to get away for the people in the margin living near the carbide factory in Bhopal. They have been denied fundamental human rights along with the compromise of their safety measures and health conditions. Through the cheap human labour available in India, developed countries can make the best use of it through global capitalism. The corporate power and the politics of labelling people, as marginalized, are being questioned in the narrative of the web series *The Railways Men*, where it is seen that the poor and vulnerable who were present during the disaster assist each other. The Western corporate power not only thus enslaves the people in the margin but also poisons the environment of Bhopal city, where people, along with other species, cannot breathe freely since the air has been polluted with life-

threatening MIC hazards, culminating in the deaths of thousands. This speaks to the vulnerable situation of the common people who are in every corner of society and become the victim of oppression, be it physical or psychological. As Spivak also envisages in a newsletter, the deaths of the subaltern in made-made disasters and violence are a specimen that speaks of their voices as "the subaltern speaks through dying" (The Nation, 2021, p. 1). This takes us to the increasing number of people who died and are still getting victimized due to the MIC leakage in the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. The minds of these people are heavily affected not only by state vampirism and marginalization but also by the economic tortures of the Western corporate capitalist power.

Gandhian notions of tolerance and non-violence have been mentioned in the series, claiming that the world will go blind if an eye for an eye becomes evident. Nevertheless, the sequence establishes that it is impossible to possess and demand an eye for an eye where equity and equity have yet to reach an actual societal location. The audio-visual medium introduces the audience to a number of social issues stemming from caste, creed, and religion to partition horrors. It does configure the anti-Sikh riots on a train journey in the Gorakhpur Express on the way to Bhopal Junction, where a Sikh lady, played by Mandira Bedi, is helped by a train guard performed by Raghubir Yadav who rescues the lady and her son from the unruly mob at the cost of his life. The multiple voices that coincide with one another are made available in the series. Warren Anderson, played by British actor Philip Rosch, was the main accused as the chairman of Union Carbide Corporation. This USA-based company did not care about safety measures while dealing with MIC storage. The Netflix series tries to convey a bitter statement where the truth is that the country offers cheaper rates for the lives of the common man than sea salt and homespun cloth.

The 'giant force field' is a metaphor for capital, that ubiquitous, all-powerful and greatly misunderstood dynamo that drives our society. The established view sees capital as a rational force of investment, a way of using money to fruitfully bring together the various features of economic activity. For Karl Marx, capital was a 'werewolf' and a 'vampire', ravenously consuming labour and mutilating the labourer. (Olivier, 2005, p. 128)

Capitalism has been seen in this context as a giant force enslaving the economic means, in this case of the third world countries, through the consumption of labour and market economy as these countries do provide human labour at a cheap rate where the labourers mainly belong to the marginal strata of the society. After centuries of British Raj and the mismanaged governmental policies and administration, 75% of the population of India has been reduced to below the poverty level, and India faced two successive draughts in the northern part, culminating in the famines (Nair, 2005). When the people at the margins are becoming the constant witnesses to such pernicious effects, this media text elaborates on the condition of the working-class people and the sacrifices made by the staff in the railway for the betterment of the affected. This series concentrates on the deprived heroic figures of the Indian railways and their efforts to save people's lives and send the emergency relief train; otherwise, the number of deaths could have been higher. The common people, mainly the slum dwellers, were the most vulnerable in this world's worst industrial disaster since they were the ones who stayed near the Carbide Factory in Bhopal. The most detrimental system is the caste system, where most individuals are members of the untouchable and lower classes. The most oppressed of all are the untouchables (Nair, 2005). The local journalist, whose role is played by Sunny Hinduja in the Netflix series, has parallels with

the journalist in the 2014 film *Bhopal-A Prayer for the Rain*, where the people are aided by the journalists as one such journalist took a pregnant woman to the hospital. The contribution makes them unsung heroes with an escape from the print media due to the hegemonic culture prevalent where the authority snatches the god of little things from the people below the margin.

The involvement of the Indian people in vast numbers, sometimes in hundreds of thousands or even millions, in nationalist activities and ideas is thus represented as a diversion from a supposedly 'real' political process, that is, the grinding away of the wheels of the state apparatus and of elite institutions geared to it, or it is simply credited, as an act of ideological appropriation, to the influence and initiative of the elite themselves. (Guha, 1988, p. 39)

On the one hand, this visual media marks a crucial social issue as it highlights the contribution of Indian railway workers in saving thousands of lives with a bet of their fates and on the other hand, the series continuously traces back to the past and comes again to the present to embark the effects of the carbide gas in the lives of the people since it took thousands of lives, damages the human bodies and shuts down the human minds for the futuristic world. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1984 may have taken lives more than 15000 as per the estimates shown in the series. However, the consequences are timeless in the larger world with the living victims who are still fighting to step out from the internal derangement that the industrial disaster has brought along. For instance, in the series, it is shown that Sajda Bano, a woman who lost her husband due to a gas leakage in the same Union Carbide factory in 1981, snatches one of her children in the lap of death and turns another as crippled to bear the lifelong pain on her way back to Bhopal in Gorakhpur Express on December 02, 1984. The potential life-threatening hazards, i.e. MIC, not only took lives due to pulmonary complications that resulted in deaths but also made the children born with neurological disorders. Historical shreds of evidence showcase the lack of will and seriousness on the part of the government to see the gravity of the situation carefully. Max Daunderer's instance would settle best here. He is a German toxicologist who came to Bhopal with 50000 Sodium Thiosulphate vials as antidotes for the MIC (methyl isocyanate). However, he was forced to leave because of the pressure of the ministries from India, which is evidenced by the scene from the web series below.

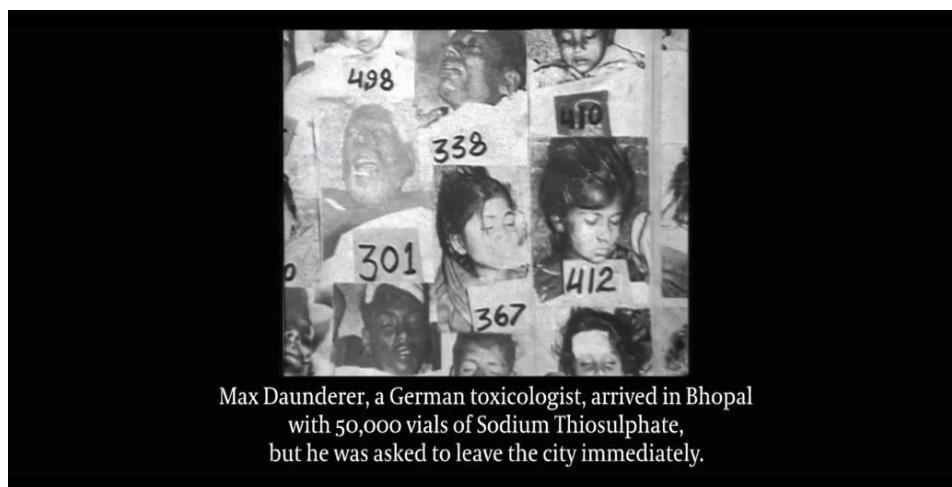


Figure 6

Exploitation of Human Labour: Seeing the Marginalized

Dipesh Chakraborty draws on the conflict between real and abstract labour while critiquing the capitalistic mode of life and the subjugation of the proletariat through an unequal workforce. He underlines the aspect of commodities that the working-class people are subjected to by the bourgeoisie that makes human labour measurable. Marx also opines that this global practice of commodifying human labour leads to the exploitation of human bodies. Chakraborty highlights the politics of labelling labour as general, which subscribes to the idea of abstract labour that seeks to normalize the disequilibrium in human labour by proclaiming that

It is what gathers itself under 'real' labour in Marx's critique of capital, the figure of difference that governmentality-in Foucault's sense of the term-all over the world has to subjugate and civilize. (Chakraborty, 1993, p. 1096)

'Real labour' refers to the essential heterogeneity of individual capacities. 'Abstract' or general labour, on the other hand, refers to the idea of uniform, homogeneous labour that capitalism imposes on this heterogeneity, the notion of a general labour that underlies 'exchange value'... It is what makes labour measurable and makes possible the generalised exchange of commodities. (Chakraborty, 1993, p. 1095)

The workers in the UCIL are prone to witnessing and getting imposed on this so-called abstract or general labour in spite of their natural capacities, leading to deteriorating health conditions. Being influenced by the global capitalist mode of production, UCIL sees human bodies only as commodities rather than personhood. This resulted in the Bhopal gas tragedy, which is now caused by several disasters in the internal and external worlds of the Bhopal inhibitors. The situation of Bhopal, as put forward by Sharma,

It now comprises difficult and overlapping histories of multiple ongoing disasters: the second-generation effects, shoddy rehabilitation, a contaminated factory site, groundwater contamination... (Sharma, 2014, p. 146)

Althusser also contends that sustaining labour power involves reproducing both its skills and submission to the dominant ideology for workers while ensuring the ability of exploiters and enforcers to adeptly wield the ruling ideology to maintain the dominance of the ruling class.

The tragedy shook the people physically as well as psychologically, irrespective of class, caste, and creed. In this case, human labour has been exploited to the full extent to earn profits, neglecting the warnings reported by the several workers that culminated in the tragedy. However, the effects are visible in the faces of downtrodden people on the frontlines of any disaster. Banerji et al. [1985] observed through the population analysis that most disaster victims are from working-class backgrounds along with their so-called low caste status, where Muslims comprise 30%, lower castes 20%, and backward castes 18%, 10% people are from the income group of 150 per head that is considered well off during the then time. Patel et al. [1985] also demonstrated that most of the industrial disaster victims are from the lower socio-economic stratum of society, mainly construction labourers, daily wage earners, cobblers, rollers, factory workers, drivers, and potters. This shows the vast amount of official data, but the unofficial and untold are never heard in history records, which the web series endeavours to bring to light from the unseen and unknown. Apart from the dilapidated situation of the marginalized slum dwellers, they have been subjected to

discrimination and subjugation by the UCC along with the state. UCC moulds the narrative of the disaster to target and victimize the common people who do not have access to the legal procedures as "... UCC aggressively promoted the 'sabotage theory,' which was a joint product of its PR firm and legal departments, to shift blame for the disaster to an unidentified disgruntled factory worker" (Sharma, 2014, p. 150).

The web series uses historical references through several newspapers and records covering the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster to provide a realistic appeal. Here, figure 7 is from the web series interpreting the deadly impact of the gas disaster, and the 8th figure is actually a shot from a newspaper casting the world's worst man-made disaster that termed it as horror.



Figure 7 & 8

The fight for the marginalized people living in the slums and villages near the Union Carbide Factory in Bhopal is the worst since they have to bear the burden of industrial disaster by any means, as employment is the only option for survival (Narayan, 1990). The working-class people must sense the effects of the tragedy doubly, starting from malnutrition, infections due to various pollutions and the industrialized diseases of modern-day as well as "unbeatable poverty" because the MIC survivors were subjected to a number of problems in the wake of the tragedy, including worsening of pre-existing mental conditions, emotional reactions to physical problems, pathological grieving reactions, and posttraumatic stress disorders (Dhara & Dhara, 2010). *Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain* (2014) is an Indian English film based on the Bhopal gas catastrophe where the central character is Dilip, a rickshaw driver who loses his income in an accident and begins to work in the factory and receives a promotion to increase the production without the knowledge of the machinery since UCIL is making the people work in the factory without proper training and safety measures. Anderson, the manager, was responsible for the disaster where Dilip had to take a loan for his sister's wedding, but it turned into a funeral when he realized the leakage in the MIC. Returning to his residence, Dilip finds out about the deaths of his wife and relatives due to the acute sense of the toxic gas, and he decides to leave the slum along with his son. On his deathbed, he accepts his fate to die in the clouds of toxic gas. Thus, this movie traces the journey of an ordinary man from a rickshaw driver to a factory worker, where, in the end, death took him due to the negligence of the authority in the Union Carbide Corporation. This situation asks a pertinent question about human dignity and labour: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). This is how the effects of MIC

on the people of Bhopal are still claiming lives and degrading the quality of life for the future generation, which Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011) by corporate vampirism.

The approach is demonstrated via the example of "slow violence"—suffering that develops gradually across time and extends across space as well as disproportionately afflicts disempowered people. (Skotnicki, 2019, p. 299)

Hence, the poor and the subaltern always get knocked at the death knell in catastrophic horologe. The memories of the deaths are still perceptible indisputably in the faces of the 2nd and 3rd generation people where they stand as the continual sufferers and pain-bearers even to the other generations, which leads to the births of children with disabilities. Their hardships and straightness are a mark of industrial damage and depreciation. As shown in the series so brilliantly, this man-made disaster is seen as memory fighting forgetfulness in man's struggle against authority (Kundera, 1929).

Conclusion

As shown above, the study aims to question and critique the production of the binary between the developed and the developing, which ultimately leads to the oppression of the proletariat amid such a man-made disaster. The neoliberal state is being offered the capitalist mode of oppression in the guise of development. Resistance and counteraction occur through representation, as seen in the web series *The Railway Men*, which chronicles the fates of common men amid corporate vampirism. While building a resistive mode, it is observed that with the "...backdrop of neoliberalism, knowledge from elsewhere offers possibilities for reimagining alternative economic rationalities, built upon alternative criteria and alternative objectives." (Dutta & Pal, 2010, p. 381)

This Netflix series helps in a way to reconstruct our ideas of the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984 as well, and it delinks the centrality of the power politics headed by the state as well as the USA-based company UCIL in decision-making regarding the information of the hazard MIC including the casualties caused. The films and media deconstruct this notion by questioning the very process of making the subaltern vulnerable through the capitalist workforce and hegemonic centrality of the West. As the "Neoliberal theories of development and modernization get turned on their head with the dialogic engagement with theories from elsewhere that privilege local autonomy, balance, harmony, and sustainability" (Dutta & Pal, 2010, p. 381), the study showcases the lives of the vulnerable to dismantle the prevalent power dynamics over the dispossessed. This narration of the struggle stories for the people at the margins is feasible largely through such visual medium, which offers myriad scopes of resistance against injustices and exploitations.

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