

Why is Kailash nominated?

Child Rights Hero Nominee • Pages 72–92

Kailash Satyarthi

Kailash Satyarthi has been nominated for the 2015 World's Children's Prize for his dangerous struggle against child labour and slavery, and for all children's right to education.

As a young man, Kailash began risking his own life to free children being held as slaves at brickworks and factories. He founded Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA, Save Childhood Movement) and began building homes for liberated slave children. At that time, over 30 years ago, hardly anyone else in India was speaking up for these children's rights. Kailash received death threats and was attacked, and two of his colleagues were killed, but he didn't give up. These days, Kailash and BBA have freed over 80,000 children, and his 'Global March Against Child Labour' campaign has grown into a movement involving millions of people. His work has contributed to new laws and regulations being passed to protect children's rights all over the world. Kailash's label for child labour-free rugs, GoodWeave, has reduced the number of children in the carpet industry from one million to 250,000, and thousands of poor villages have received his help to become 'child friendly'. In February 2014, the WCP Child Jury selected Kailash as a candidate for the 2015 World's Children's Prize. In November of the same year, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Malala Yousafzai.



At a brick kiln in Northern India, 27 families are being held as slaves. Young children make thousands of bricks every day, for 16 hours a day, under the burning sun. But today, the sky is dark and the rain is pouring. Kailash drives through the gates and screeches to a halt. He and his activists have come to free the child slaves.

As Kailash jumps out of the car, he is prepared for violent resistance. The kiln is usually protected by armed guards. But nothing happens. The place is deserted. Somebody has told the owner, and the slave workers have been taken away.

Finally, Kailash finds the children, abandoned at the roadside not far from the kiln. They are dressed in rags and covered in dirt, soot and brick dust. They are afraid when Kailash approaches, but too exhausted to run away.

“We are here to help you.

You are free now,” explains Kailash. The children stare at him – they don't understand. They don't know what freedom is. But they agree to get into the cars on the promise of food and water. All except one girl who is lying on the ground. Weak and burning with fever, she weeps and cries out, “Mummy, help me!”

The girl's name is Gulabo and she is 14. She was born at the brick kiln and has worked here all her life. Years of breathing in brick dust have destroyed her lungs, and she dies just a few hours later.

Kailash takes a selfie with his mobile at Bal Ashram in Rajasthan, where his organisation takes in freed child slaves.

No education

When Gulabo's father comes to collect his daughter's body to bury her, he says:

“If only I had been able to learn to read and write, we would never have become slaves and I wouldn't have lost my daughter.” He explains to Kailash that a slave owner tricked him into signing a contract he couldn't read with his thumb print. That's how his family became slaves for 17 years. This father's words help Kailash to realise that education is the key to ending slavery and poverty. But he has always believed that child labour is wrong.

Kailash starts school

Kailash was both happy and nervous when he started school, proud of his new uniform and bag. He saw a boy of about his age sitting on the steps outside the school. Beside him sat a man, perhaps his father, with a shoe polishing box. Both were barefoot and dressed in dusty, dirty clothes.

Later that day, Kailash asked his teacher:

“How come we are sitting in this classroom, but that boy is sitting outside working?”

Surprised, the teacher said:

“They are poor, and it’s normal for boys like that to work.”

For the first time, Kailash discovered that different children could have totally different lives. His own family was neither rich nor poor. They had enough, and lived a good life.

Every day on the way to

school, Kailash saw the boy sitting outside. One day, he summoned the courage to speak to the father.

“Why can’t your son go to school?”

The father looked just as surprised as the teacher.

“Nobody has ever asked me that before. I’ve never thought about it. My father worked when he was a boy, and so did I, and now my son does. We were born to work.”

This seemed unfair, but what could Kailash do about it? He was only six years old.

Friends disappeared

When Kailash was twelve, several of his schoolmates were forced to quit school. They couldn’t afford school fees and school books. So Kailash walked all over town asking for people’s old books. In one day, he gathered 2000 school books. He started a book bank for poor children, and raised money by selling

Gulabo, the girl who died in Kailash’s arms, worked every day at a brickworks, just like this debt slave girl.



JAYED DAR/KINHUA PRESS/CORBIS

tea, polishing shoes and organising events with some friends.

Seeing injustice made Kailash angry. Most of all, he hated India’s ancient ‘caste system’. According to this system, everyone is automatically born into the same ‘caste’ as their family – a group that has a set value in society, either high or low.

People’s lives are governed by rules on what jobs your ‘caste’ is allowed to do, and who you’re allowed to marry. The caste system was banned in India long ago, but it still exists.

There are also people who don’t have a caste. They are ‘casteless’ or ‘outcastes’, and they are usually very poor, have the dirtiest jobs, and are



PHILLIP LISIAC/GODONG/CORBIS



How Kailash combats slavery and child labour

- Kailash and his organisation, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), or ‘Save Childhood’, works to protect children and their right to education. One hundred employees, from social workers and youth workers to teachers and researchers, all work together, along with a network of over 80,000 volunteers in India and throughout the world. They also lobby politicians and fight for fairer laws. Since 1980, over 83,000 children have been set free and supported to build better lives.
- Two homes, Mukti Ashram in Delhi and Bal Ashram in Rajasthan, provide shelter for liberated children, giving them support, love and education.
- Thousands of poor Indian villages have pledged to become ‘child friendly’, meaning that no children have to work and all children can go to school.

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Kailash and his organisation have freed over 80,000 children from hazardous forced labour and slavery.

→ treated worse than everyone else. People with old-fashioned ideas say that the casteless people are ‘untouchable’. Kailash’s own mother only hit him once, when he was five years old and accepted a piece of bread from a ‘casteless’ child. He wasn’t allowed to eat something that an ‘untouchable’ had touched!

Party for Gandhi

When he was 15 years old, Kailash wanted to organise a party to celebrate one hundred years since the birth of freedom champion Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi hated the caste system too, and dreamed of an India where everyone was treated equally. Kailash invited a group of important leaders to a dinner where the food was to be prepared by ‘untouchables’. Everyone was to sit and eat together, as a symbol of friendship and justice. Some said they would come, but on the day nobody turned up. And what’s more, the leaders decided that Kailash’s family

should be excluded because they had eaten food prepared by ‘untouchables’. Kailash was angry.

“You cannot punish my family for something that I did on my own,” he said, and decided to give up his surname. Kailash’s family were sad, but from that day on he has called himself Kailash Satyarthi, which means ‘seeker of truth’.

Quit his job

Kailash’s mother thought it was obvious that since Kailash did well at school, he should become either an engineer or a doctor, and take care of the family. Kailash got a degree in engineering, but quit his well-paid job after just one year. He wanted to put all his time into helping poor children get a better life.

“My mother cried for years,” said Kailash later. “But I had to follow my heart.”

In those days, over 30 years ago, hardly anyone in India cared about the rights of the child. Child labour was

against the law, but everyone ignored that. Some people thought Kailash was wrong and said:

“How will poor families survive if their children can’t work? Is it better that they starve to death?”

But Kailash knew that most child labourers only earned a couple of dollars a week, and that neither they nor their families could survive on that. And millions of adults were unemployed, just

because employers would rather exploit children, who provided cheap labour without complaining.

Starting to free children

When Kailash began to travel around India he got a shock. The situation for children was worse than he had thought. Children were bought and sold like commodities and were held captive as slaves in factories and quarries, often hundreds of miles from their



Former child slaves put on a performance about human trafficking.

families. Some had been sold by their own parents. Others were kidnapped, or tricked into thinking they would get to go to school. One little slave girl asked Kailash:

“What does a dairy cow cost?”

“Between one thousand and fifteen hundred dollars,” replied Kailash.

“I was sold for just one hundred dollars,” said the girl.

Kailash wrote down the children’s stories and published his own magazine. He gave speeches and participated in debates in order to influence ordinary people and those in power. At the same time, he carried out his first rescue missions to set working children free.

Sometimes it seemed hopeless to rescue ten or one hundred children, when millions were still held captive.

“But even if we just save the life of one child, it’s worth it,” said Kailash, who started off by going into factories and quarries without any help from the police or support from ordinary people. It was extremely dangerous, but he quickly gained lots of helpers, who were inspired by his struggle.

Dangerous mission

On one of his first raids, Kailash and his activists were beaten bloody by security guards, but they still man-

Kailash is happiest when he gets to visit Bal Ashram, the centre for freed slave children in Rajasthan.



aged to rescue 153 people.

Kailash and his helpers continued to rescue children while being shot at and attacked. Kailash was beaten about the head and body with fists and wooden sticks. One day, on a raid at a quarry, a security guard beat one of his closest colleagues to death.

Kailash went to court and demanded help from the police and a permit to rescue children. Without this permit, the guards could continue to beat the activists with the law on their side, because Kailash was trespassing on private land. Many police officers and even judges were bribed by the slave owners not to

help Kailash. But finally, he managed to get his demands approved in court. Now he could carry out even more raids, and he received a lot of attention in newspapers and on TV. The mafia and those politicians who earned money from child labour got scared and started to threaten Kailash in letters and on the street. Someone tried to burn his house down, and one morning when the telephone rang his little daughter answered.

“Tell your father that we’re planning to kill him,” said a voice in the receiver.

Kailash was afraid, especially for his family.

“But the fact that the slave owners are attacking us just proves that we’re on the right track. It would be worse if nobody cared,” he said to his wife, Sumeda, who agreed.

March against child labour

After almost 20 years’ work, Kailash and his colleagues had liberated tens of thousands of children and brought about major changes. But still, things were moving too slowly for Kailash.

“Let’s follow in Gandhi’s footsteps,” he said. “Let’s bring about a non-violent

revolution and march all over India demanding justice!”

Kailash led the first march against child labour in 1992, along with activists and former child labourers. They walked 2000 km from the poor state of Bihar, where tens of thousands of children worked in the carpet industry, to the corridors of power in capital city Delhi. Along the way, they stopped in towns and villages to make speeches, sing and play music. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people walked with them some of the way from their home village. At night they slept in poor families’ homes.

After several marches through India, Kailash managed to get the whole world to join him on his journey. Their final destination was Geneva in Switzerland and the headquarters of the International Labour Organisation, ILO. Hundreds of thousands of children, parents and activists joined in this Global March Against Child Labour, each walking in their home countries, but between them covering a total of 80,000 km through 103 countries. Kailash and a group of liberated slave children arrived in



An Indian minister (to the left of Kailash) donated a month’s salary to the fight against child labour.





Geneva just as a major ILO conference was starting. They were invited to speak, and for the first time, hundreds of global leaders listened to the slave children's stories. Just a few years later, a new international agreement was signed to prevent and outlaw the worst forms of child labour.



With the children

After over 30 years, Kailash has freed more than 83,000 children and brought about new laws and regulations in India and all over the world to protect children and give them more of a chance of accessing education. Today, Kailash travels the world speaking to presidents, the UN and heads of major corporations. But his favourite place to go is Bal Ashram, the home for liberated slave children that he built along



BBA

In 1998, Kailash went on a protest march with liberated child labourers and activists from all over the world, against child labour and slavery. This historic march has grown into a global movement that encompasses tens of thousands of volunteers and hundreds of organisations around the world. This movement campaigns through protests, films, music, meetings with global leaders, and social media.

with his wife Sumeda and other activists.

"I feel energised when I meet the children and listen to their thoughts and dreams for the future," he says. "They are honest and open minded and their friendship means a lot to me. Lack of respect for

children and childhood is the worst thing I know, and the main reason why at least 215 million of the world's children are still in work. I won't rest until the world is free of child labour and slavery." 🌐



What is modern-day slavery?

Millions of children work from the age of six under slave-like conditions in the world today. They work up to 18 hours a day, seven days a week. They do not get enough food. They are threatened, beaten, and sometimes burned with cigarettes or hot iron pokers. Some are tied up or chained. Some of these children are what is known as debt slaves. Their families have borrowed a small amount of money, for example, in order to buy medicine. The interest on the loan is extremely high, and it is impossible for poor people to repay it. Instead they have to work to repay the debt. Sometimes the whole family have to work together, but often one of the children is sent away to work. The high interest rate means that the debt keeps growing all the time, however much they work. The debt slave children are never set free again.

Everyone can make a difference!

Fifteen years ago, at least one million children worked in the carpet industry in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Southeast Asian countries. Kailash started a global campaign to raise awareness that the handwoven rugs in people's best rooms were often made by child slaves. He set up the world's first label for child-labour-free rugs, Goodweave, and encouraged everyone only to buy rugs that were guaranteed to have been made without child labour. Kailash got people all over the world to demand guarantees from companies that they would not exploit children – not just rug and carpet makers, but also manufacturers of other things like footballs, sneakers and clothes. Largely thanks to Kailash's campaign and Goodweave, the number of children working in the carpet industry has decreased from one million to 250,000 children.



Dan

Kailash and his colleagues gather at the office early in the morning. They have been planning today's rescue mission for weeks. Kailash has had a tip-off that there are children working in factories and basement workshops in a particular area of Delhi. Today, they are going to set as many as possible free.



▲ The buildings huddle close together and there are narrow alleyways leading in all directions. It's easy to get lost and become trapped. Kailash points to the map.

"This is where the factories are! So we have to get in and out of here as fast as possible, before they attack us."

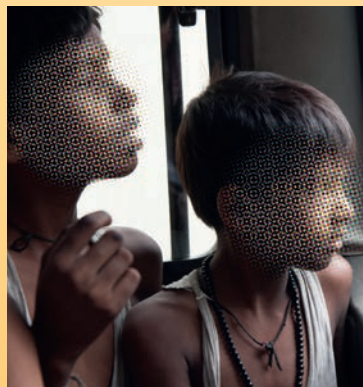
Around 30 police officers are going to help. Everyone gathers outside the municipal building. ▶

Kailash's cars lead the way, and the police follow, but they are not told exactly where they are going. Some police officers accept bribes for warning factory owners so that they have time to hide the child workers.

generous mission



▲ When Kailash comes down the stairs, the children are afraid and begin to cry. Who is he? They find one little boy under a bed. The slave owner has told him to hide, otherwise the police will arrest him.



What happens now?

▶ The freed child slaves look through the car window, en route to safety.



They have to hurry

▶ People are beginning to gather on street corners, staring suspiciously. A fight could break out at any moment. The children's faces are concealed to protect them during the time Kailash and BBA pursue their case against the slave drivers in court.

Slave incense

▶ The children are making and packaging incense which is sold in India and abroad.



▶ The children are taken to a safe house to be questioned. Where are you from? How did you end up here? What was your working day like? Many of the children were sold from poor states like Bihar to factories in Delhi.

Almost 30 children have been rescued today, and will be able to sleep in real beds tonight. Several employers have been arrested and will face prison sentences of 20 years or life.

Imtyaz was sold as

When Imtyaz is nine, his father is forced to travel away from home in search of work. A storm has destroyed almost the whole village. Imtyaz's family is extremely poor and needed all their savings to rebuild their house, from clay, straw and bamboo. Imtyaz and his siblings wear ragged, worn clothing and are always hungry.

One day a neighbour comes to visit. Imtyaz's mother is surprised and a little afraid. The man is from the richest family in the village, and they don't usually talk to poor villagers. But now he is talking in a kind voice and smiling. "Your son is wasting his time here," he says. "Let me take him to the capital city,

New Delhi. I will pay for his education if he works a few hours a week to cover food and accommodation. I know things are hard for you at the moment."

Imtyaz really wants to go to the capital city. It has wide streets and buildings as tall as the sky. All the big movies are shot there. He might even meet one of his movie star idols there!

Imtyaz's mother has never been to school, but she wants her children to get an education. She agrees to the neighbour's proposal.

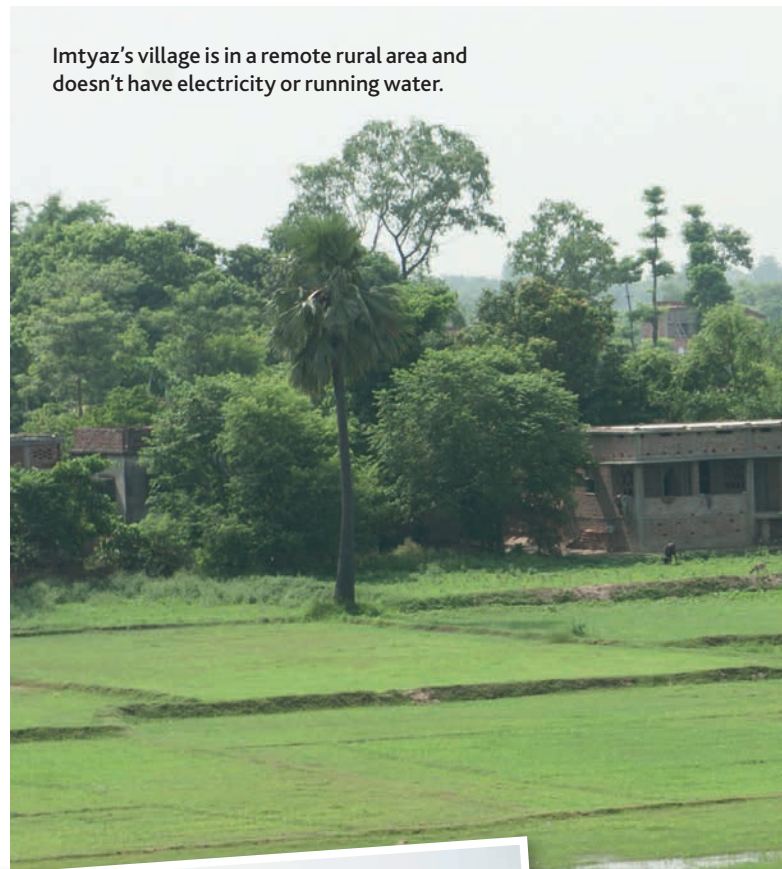
When Imtyaz is nine years old, he stops attending the village school because the teacher is hardly ever there. Instead Imtyaz helps his mother at home and in the fields. In his spare time he plays with his friends. They go on adventures, play cricket, and climb trees.

On the way

The very next morning, Imtyaz and six of his friends meet at the roadside, where their neighbour is waiting with a truck. The boys climb in the back and they head off towards the nearest town along bumpy dirt roads. The boys have to

hold on tight so that they don't fall off, while they talk about the new life that awaits them. But on the train to Delhi, they all get travel sick. None of them have travelled by train before and Imtyaz is sick again and again as the train lurches round the bends.

Imtyaz's village is in a remote rural area and doesn't have electricity or running water.



Imtyaz, 14

Comes from: Bihar

Favourite things: School. Singing. Cricket and swimming.

Wants to be: An engineer.

Idol: Cricket star Sachin 'Master Blaster' Tendulkar.

Favourite foods: Mango, and my mum's cooking.

Favourite school subject: Maths.

Looks up to: My parents and Kailash.

Dreams of: When no children have to work.



a slave

On the way from the train station Imtyaz sees high buildings, statues and beautiful parks full of roses outside the car window. He is amazed by how smooth the car journey is, as he has never travelled on asphalt before. Soon they enter a maze of narrow

alleyways, finally stopping outside a house that has been turned grey by soot and dirt. The neighbour leaves them in a small room where they eat and watch TV before falling asleep.

The nightmare begins

Imtyaz is woken by a kick. A stranger tells him and one of his friends, Amit, to come with him. They go down the stairs and into a dark, windowless room. There are a few men sitting on the floor with their legs crossed, bent over a large length of fabric which they are embroidering. Their bodies are shiny with sweat because it is so hot.

“This is where you’re going to work,” says the man. He gives them a needle each and

shows them how to roll it back and forward between thumb and index finger. They carry on doing this, hour after hour, until three o’clock in the morning.

“Doing that hardens your skin,” explains one of the adult workers. “Tomorrow you will start embroidering.”

Sold as a slave

The man from the village lied. He has sold them as slaves. Imtyaz and Amit work a sixteen-hour day, every day, without breaks. If they open their mouths one of the adults silences them immediately with punches and kicks. They sleep huddled together on the hard stone floor. Sometimes Imtyaz whispers to Amit at night.

“We have to run away!”



During his time at the factory in Delhi, Imtyaz did the same kind of work as these children.





➔ “But where would we go? The city is so big,” says Amit. “We don’t know anyone here. And we have no money.”

After a few days, Imtyaz’s back and shoulders are aching. His eyes smart and his fingers are full of pinpricks. The air in the room is thick with dust and lint, and makes Imtyaz cough. His face breaks out in festering boils. He tries to protest:

“It’s too hot here, we need

fans and more water. My neighbour promised that I would be able to go to school!”

The factory owner flies into a rage. He drags Imtyaz into a small room and starts to beat him all over his body. Imtyaz curls up in a ball and tries to protect his head with his arms. “I’m going to die,” he thinks, before everything goes black.

When he wakes up it is night. He is back in the room and everyone else is fast asleep. “I’m never going to get out of here. I’m never going to see my family again,” he thinks, weeping silently. A few weeks later, Imtyaz wakes in the morning with a fever. He can hardly hold a needle, let alone sew in a straight line. He leans his forehead on his arm for a second, although this is against the rules, and falls asleep. Seconds later he is woken by

This boy was tricked into becoming a slave, just like Imtyaz.

the feeling that his eye is on fire. Blood streams down his face and he can’t see. One of the supervisors has tried to cut off his eyelid with a pair of scissors.

“What are you doing?!” shouts Imtyaz, terrified.

“You must be punished. You fell asleep on the job,” yells the man.

Scared of the police

In the summer the heat reaches almost 50 degrees centigrade, and Imtyaz is allowed a couple of hours off on Sundays. He and Amit get a few rupees to buy water and food, but they don’t dare go far.

“Don’t talk to anyone,” the factory owner warns them. “If people find out that you work, the police will come and put you in jail.”

One day the factory owner rushes in and grabs Imtyaz and Amit, taking them out to the garden where his son is doing homework. He throws them a book each and says: “Pretend to read”. A few

Imtyaz with his mother, father, younger brother and sister, and older sister, who is married and has a child.

“My little sister goes to school, she’s really clever,” says Imtyaz proudly.

moments later two police officers come round the corner and go down into the basement. They are here to check that the factory doesn’t use child labour. As soon as the police have left, Imtyaz and Amit have to get back to work.

After almost a year, Imtyaz hears a sudden commotion outside. The door flies open and several police officers enter. Imtyaz’s friend starts to cry and stands up.

“Run, they’re going to put us in jail,” he says. But Imtyaz calmly sits still.

“I don’t care where they take us or what they do to me. Nothing could be worse than this.”

Back home

The rescue mission was carried out by Kailash’s organisation, BBA, along with the



BBA

police. On that day, they freed almost 90 children. They find Imtyaz's friends from the village in another factory in the same area. All the children are given medical care and help to recover at a special children's home. Then Imtyaz gets to go home. He and his family weep together. First there are tears of joy, then of sadness as he tells them about life at the factory. But they are poor, and the neighbour who sold Imtyaz is rich and powerful. They don't dare argue with him.

There is always a risk that the children who are rescued end up back in the same situation because of poverty. A year later, a BBA activist comes to visit. Imtyaz still isn't attending school.

"Without education, Imtyaz has no future," says the activist. "He can come and live at Bal Ashram, our home for liberated child workers, and go to school there."

What happened next?

It was a tough decision for Imtyaz to move to Bal Ashram, hundreds of miles from his home. But now he has lived here for four years.

"I'm not sad, because I



"I have missed my goat! We are best friends."

know I will return as an educated man and I'll be able to help my family and my village. The teachers and children here are like a second family for me. Now I believe in myself and I have faith in the future."

Along with Kailash and other children, he fights against child labour and child slavery.

"I will never give up this fight, even if I have a good job as an engineer!" he says. "One of my favourite memories is when we visited important politicians at home and told them about our lives. Their houses were like palaces! Some of them got angry and threw us out,

but others offered us tea and listened to us. Kailash had asked us to urge the politicians to vote for improvements to the law on child labour. Later, that law was passed, and I think that was a great credit to us." 🌐

A lungi is a length of fabric that is tied round the waist – easy and comfortable.

Imtyaz's wardrobe

Smartly dressed in a kurta, a long Indian tunic with matching trousers.



His school uniform has to be kept clean and ironed.



When he goes to the village mosque, Imtyaz wears a hat.



"Kailash means so much to me," says Imtyaz. "If I need a friend, Kailash is my friend. When I miss my father, Kailash is a father figure. Whatever I lack, Kailash tries to help me. He is my role model."



Imtyaz is nervous on the way back to the village. What if nobody comes to the meeting to hear his speech?



When Imtyaz gets back to his village, his old friends come out to meet him. They hang garlands of flowers around his neck.



At the beginning of his speech, Imtyaz is nervous, but when he sees that people are listening and some are even crying, he feels calm.



The whole village is waiting for Imtyaz.

Going home to the village

Imtyaz visits his family in Bihar at least once a year, but this time he is travelling there with Kailash for the first time. The whole village has been invited to a big meeting about trafficking and children's right to education. Imtyaz is nervous. What if nobody turns up?

The journey from Delhi takes almost 24 hours, and on the way Imtyaz talks about his village.

“There’s no electricity or running water. The houses are close together and most of them are made of mud. There is a mosque and a temple, because half the village are

Muslims, like me, and the other half are Hindus. The best thing about my village is that everyone gets on well, even though we have different religions.”

For the last leg of the journey, the road is so bad that they have to abandon the car and walk. As they approach

the village they hear a shout.

“He’s here!” Imtyaz’s friends come running towards him with flower garlands that they throw round his neck. Behind them are his family, and just outside the village a crowd has gathered. Everyone is here to see Imtyaz and meet Kailash.



Poverty is a good deal for traffickers

Bihar is one of the poorest states in India. This makes the children here easy targets for traffickers. Every year, thousands of children disappear from their homes and are forced to work just like Imtyaz, all over India. Many girls are also sold as sex slaves. In order to change this situation, Kailash has held several meetings with politicians and religious leaders in Bihar.

“When they become aware of child slavery, they want to help. With their support, we can protect many more children, and give them the education that is their right.”



At the beginning of his speech, Imtyaz is nervous, but when he sees that many of the audience are listening and some are even crying, he feels calm.

Imtyaz loves eating mango from his family's mango trees.



Imtyaz makes a speech

Everyone crowds around a small stage with a thatched roof, which the village elders usually use for meetings. The village elders have taken seats at the front, but Kailash respectfully asks them to swap places with the children.

"After all, we're here to talk about their lives and their future," he says.

The leaders are taken aback. They have never experienced anything like this before. But they give their seats to the children.

When Imtyaz takes the microphone, his heart is in his mouth. He has given

speeches to large groups before, but never in his home village. Suddenly, he spots the man who sold him to the factory, in the middle of the crowd. Imtyaz takes a deep breath and decides, "I am not afraid of you any more." Then he begins:

"I was sold as a slave, and that is wrong. Children should not be made to work. They should go to school, play, and have a future," he says.

The crowd listen in silence as Imtyaz talks about how he was abused and then set free and allowed to start school. Then he raises his fist and shouts:

"Stop child labour. Education for all children!"

The children in the crowd repeat Imtyaz's words, and soon the adults are joining in.

"End slavery!" everyone shouts together, with raised fists.

Afterwards, walking home with his family and Kailash, Imtyaz is happy.

"I felt like a teacher, as though the villagers were my students. Lots of people cried, so I think they understood what I was trying to say." 🌐

Listening to Imtyaz

"I don't have a mother or father and I live with my big brother. But I still go to school. I have heard Imtyaz talk about how important it is."

Nuvshaba, 8



Parents should understand

"You shouldn't just think about getting nice things and lots of cows. It's better to go to school first and learn something. I want to be a doctor and help people in my village. There are so many who need help. If it was up to me I'd make sure there were better laws and structures in India, so that everyone can go to school. If all parents understood the importance of education and the dangers of child labour, the problem would be solved."

Nugarne, 13



Loves school

"Children shouldn't have to be in factories. I love school, it's much better there than at home. I don't want to carry my little brother around all the time, but every day after school that's what I have to do, because my mother says so. I want to play hopscotch instead. When I grow up I'm going to be a teacher and teach the villagers things."

Khatum, 8



Home for liberated children

Kailash has built two homes for children who have been set free from child labour and debt slavery: Mukti Ashram and Bal Ashram. Ashram is Hindi, and it means a calm, secluded place in which to rest. At Mukti Ashram in New Delhi, the children receive medical care and protection as soon as they have been liberated. Then they are reunited with their families as soon as possible. But some children

can't go back home, because of poverty or because their parents can't take care of them. These children get a new home at Bal Ashram, which has space for 100 children. The children who come here have been through terrible experiences. They are helped by teachers, social workers and one another to build their confidence and faith in the future. Some only need to live here for a few months, while others stay until they are adults and able to care for themselves.

04.45 Musical good morning

Imtyaz gets up quarter of an hour before his friends. He wants to practice his favourite thing – singing.



कृपयाजूता/चप्पल यहाँउतारें।
PLEASE LEAVE YOUR SHOES HERE

A day at Bal Ashram



Imtyaz lives at Bal Ashram, Kailash's home for children who have been liberated from slavery. It is built like a village, with dormitories, a school, a library, a dining hall and play areas among beautiful trees and hills in rural Rajasthan. Some of the children attend school in the nearest town, while others get vocational training at Bal Ashram.

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05.00 Enough sun for everyone

After making the beds and a quick tidy, the children gather on the sports pitch. Since they have different religions, they hold a shared morning prayer addressed to the sun instead of different gods. "After all, the sun gives heat and energy to everyone," says Imtyaz.



7.30 Brrrr

The water in the shower is cold, but Imtyaz tells himself that it is refreshing.



09.00 What's going on?

Time to gather in the classroom to read the paper together. What has happened in India and around the world?



07.00 Working together

Everyone shares the responsibility for the school area, and for one another. Imtyaz and his best friend are in the same work group. They help to tidy, pick up litter, and care for the plants and trees. "If anyone is sad, ill, or has a problem, we try to solve it together," explains Imtyaz.



08.00 The mirror doesn't lie

Final touches to the hairstyle before breakfast...



10.00 Music lesson

Imtyaz gets good advice from his teacher, who was also liberated from child labour by Kailash.





13.30 Cooling off

The sun is high and it's dangerously hot outside. Today, a pool has been filled with water, and everyone takes the chance to bathe before the water is used to water plants and vegetable patches.



13.00 Lunchtime

Everyone washes their own plate.



16.00 Life skills

Imtyaz and his friends practice making presentations, conversational skills, and problem solving.

17.30 In or out?

After a snack, cricket is a favourite pastime.



20.00 Party time!

Kailash has organised a party for the children, with performances, dancing and music. Lots of funny stories are told too!



19.00 A quiet moment

Imtyaz has learned to meditate at Bal Ashram. He believes that it helps him to clear his thoughts and concentrate better on his schoolwork.



21.00 Good night!

Imtyaz shares a room with seven friends and quickly falls asleep in his bunk bed.



Akilesh celebrates in freedom



Akilesh, 13

Comes from: Bihar

Misses: His family.

Doesn't like: That children have to work.

Favourite music: Bhojpuri music. The lyrics are all about how life should be fair.

Likes: Going to school. Dancing.

Looks up to: Kailash.



▲ Akilesh's job was polishing gemstones, just like the boy in this picture. The gemstones were then sold to jewellery makers. Perhaps some of the stones ended up in jewellery that you or one of your friends is wearing?

Akilesh and the other birthday boys and girls have been given new clothes, a t-shirt, trousers ▼ and shoes.



Akilesh wakes up full of expectations. Just a week or so ago, he was freed from slavery. He is still sore after having spent many months polishing gemstones 18 hours a day. But now he is free and plans to celebrate his birthday for the first time ever.

Akilesh doesn't know the day or year he was born.

"But my mother thinks I'm about 13 years old," he says.

Hardly any of the children at Bal Ashram know exactly how old they are, or what day they were born. So that each child gets their own day to celebrate, Kailash organises special parties for the new children a few times a year. The date of the party becomes their new birthday.

School was unthinkable

Growing up, Akilesh sometimes saw children on their way to school.

"But for me and my siblings, school wasn't even a dream. We were poor and always hungry. The roof of our house leaked and during the rainy season it always flooded. My father worked at a factory, but he would buy alcohol and drink all his wages away, every month."

When Akilesh was 11 his father signed a contract with a stranger who was visiting the village. Akilesh would be able to go to school in exchange for working a couple of hours a day for nine months. The factory was hundreds of miles from his home. The wages, US\$4 a day, would be sent home to his family.

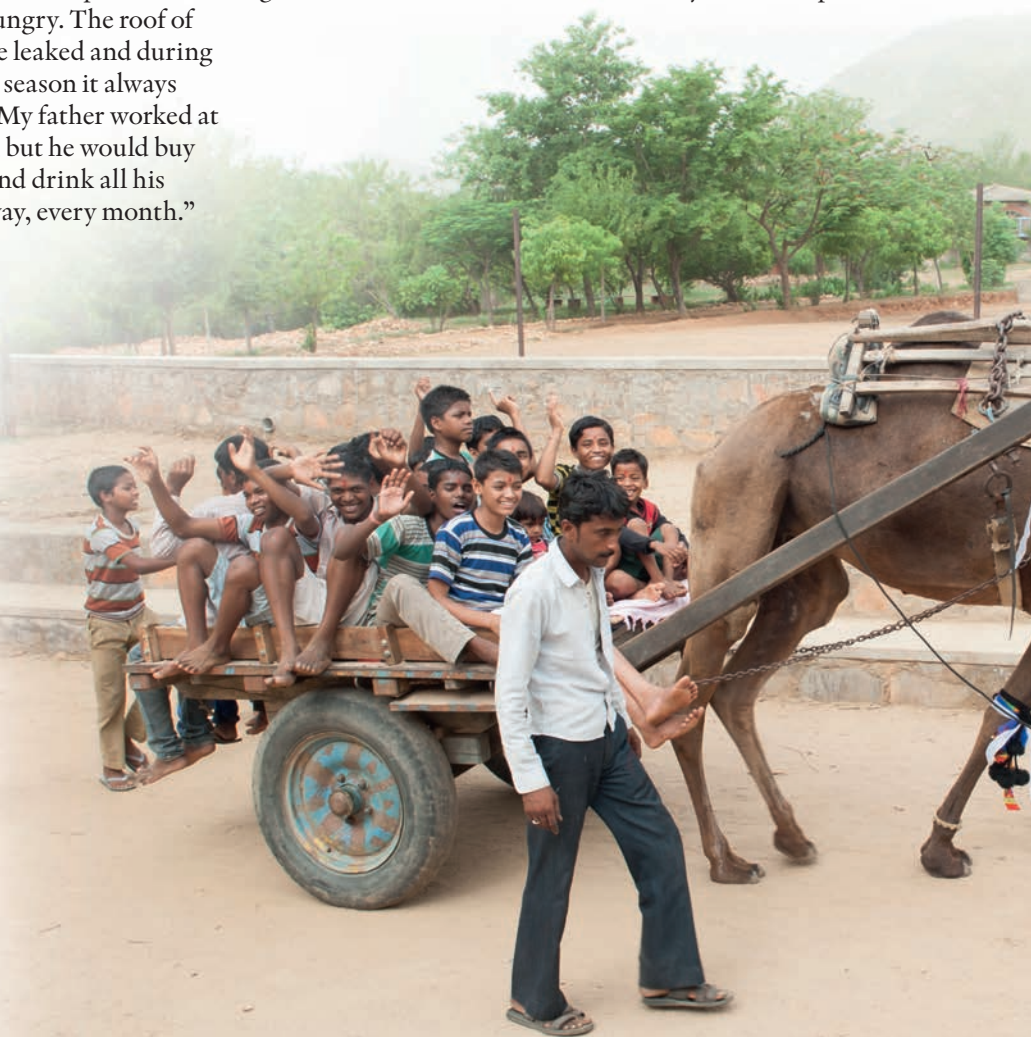
"I was scared, as I had never been out of my home village," Akilesh recalls. "But I really wanted to go to school and help my family."

Tricked into slavery

It soon became clear that everything in the contract was a lie. Akilesh didn't get to go to school. Instead he was

locked into a cramped, dark room with five other children and forced to polish gemstones for jewellery, from seven in the morning until midnight, every day of the week.

"My whole body ached. My fingertips were torn to bits and my eyes were constantly stinging and watering," says Akilesh. "If I made a mistake they would beat me. It made me angry and I wanted to fight back, but I couldn't. I thought about running away, but where would I go? The owner told us that the police would arrest us if we told anyone that we worked in the factory. Now I know that that wasn't true, but at the time I was terrified and didn't dare ask anyone for help."



Finally home

Nine months later, Akilesh was allowed to go home. But his joy at returning home disappeared when his mother told him that his father had drunk all Akilesh's wages as well.

"He did fix the roof," said his mother apologetically. "But the rest went on alcohol."

Akilesh cried as he told his family about the heavy workload, and that the promise of school was a lie. He showed them the wounds on his hands and his mother cried too. But after just a few weeks, Akilesh's father told him that he had to go back to the factory. And soon he was back there, in the dark room.

Akilesh saved

After another eight months in the factory, Akilesh had given up hope completely. But one day, the door was broken down and the police stormed the building with raised batons.

"I was terrified," says Akilesh. "But then one of

Kailash's activists came in and told us they had come to set us free."

The activist helped Akilesh out of the factory and into a waiting car. His eyes smarted in the bright sunlight after months in the dark. Since there was a high risk that his father would force him back to work if he went home to his village, he was taken to live at Bal Ashram instead.

"And this morning I found out that I and the other newcomers are going to have a birthday! Nobody has ever celebrated my birthday before." 🌍

The fire is lit and the smoke rises to the roof. Akilesh sprinkles seeds to the fire to make it crackle.

"The sun gives just as much energy to everyone on earth," says Kailash. "Fire does the same, it warms us all."

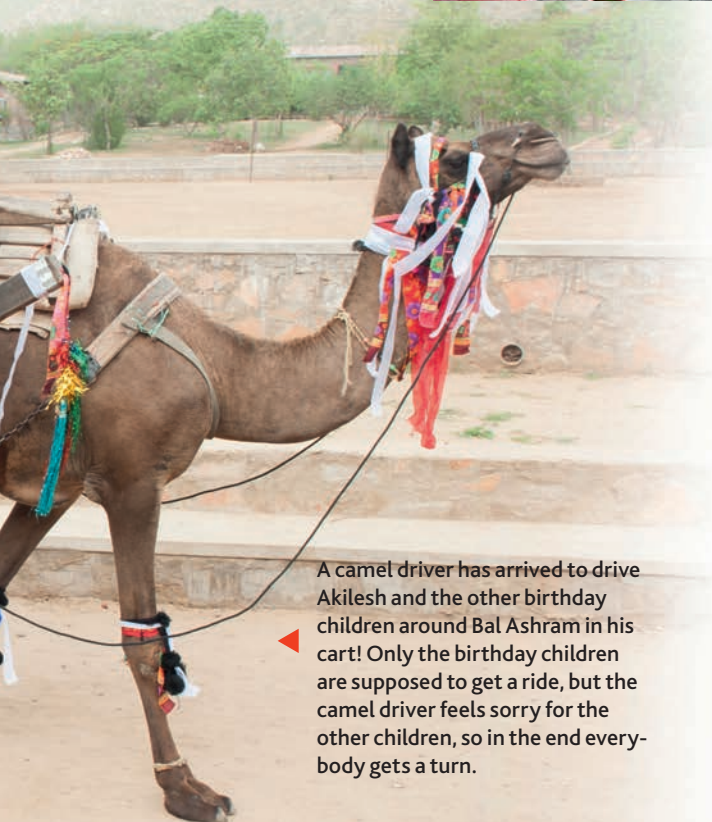


◀ Kailash and his wife Sumeda lead the birthday celebrations, starting with a formal ceremony.

Everyone sings happy birthday and the celebrations continue with music and dancing. "I have never been this happy in all my life," says Akilesh. "This is a totally new feeling. Nobody has ever celebrated me before."

Kailash asks the children to compare their hands. Do they see any differences? They shake their heads.

"Do you think that there is different blood flowing in your veins, just because you are Muslim or Hindu?" asks Kailash. Akilesh replies with a firm 'no'.



◀ A camel driver has arrived to drive Akilesh and the other birthday children around Bal Ashram in his cart! Only the birthday children are supposed to get a ride, but the camel driver feels sorry for the other children, so in the end everybody gets a turn.



◀ In India, adults often disagree because they have different religions. Sometimes they even kill one another. But at Bal Ashram everyone gets on well, even if they believe in different gods.

"Today we are not praying to any God. We pray to society," explains Kailash. "We pray for everyone's equal rights to food, water, play and education." The children chorus:

"I pray for all of society, not just for me but for everyone in the world. Take care of us, bless us, and help us to be brave and set all slave children free."



◀ The children hold water in their cupped hands. Kailash has tied a bracelet around Akilesh's wrist. This is a way of welcoming someone in India.



Meena was a domestic slave:

Meena was just twelve when she was sold as a domestic slave. She was forced to work but she never stopped hoping for a better life.

When Meena is small, her mother's new husband demands that she call him father.

"I have a father, and you are not him," says Meena. Her stepfather flies into a rage and hits her. Sometimes he grabs her arm and hits it with a stick until her arm is dirty and bleeding. Then Meena's mother dies and she moves in with her aunt. But the deep scars on her arms ensure that she will never forget her stepfather.

Sold for US\$300

When Meena is twelve, a man called Steven tells her that he can get her a good job in the capital city, Delhi. The money she earns will help her family. Her aunt is poor, so she lets Steven take Meena. In Delhi, he sells her for US\$300 to a domestic worker agency.



AP/JACQUELYN MARTIN

Meena has to sit in a room with 40 other girls. Nobody knows what's going to happen, and they are all scared. Meena just wants to go home, but an adult comes and starts asking her questions:

"Are you good at cooking? Do you know how to clean?"

"I don't know how to do any of that," says Meena, almost screaming. She asks again to be allowed to go home but nobody listens. Instead, a few days later, she is collected by the family who have bought her.

Tries to escape

Meena runs away and hides in a house in the area, but she



Meena was set free from slave labour by Kailash and his organisation, BBA. She dreams of starting school soon, and she loves to dance!



In order to protect Meena, her face is not shown in the pictures.



MITCHELL KANASHKEVICH/CORBIS



DAVID H. WELLS/ALL OVER PRESS

When Meena was twelve she was sold to a family as a domestic slave and had to cook, clean and do laundry like the girl in this picture. Meena worked up to 19 hours a day, seven days a week.

is soon found and taken back to the agency. The adults there beat her and tell her she has to forget where she came from.

“You’ll never see your home village again. You will work, that is your life now.”

The very next day, Meena is sold again, to a new family. Every morning she gets up at five to clean, water the flowers, do laundry and cook. She is only allowed to eat bread. She sleeps in a small cupboard behind the kitchen, but she rarely goes to bed before two in the morning. She is always tired and hungry. She complains and is given a little rice, but not the same rice as the family. They buy a cheaper kind for her.

Meena is attacked

Every day, a greengrocer comes to deliver food to the kitchen. The family have bought vegetables from him for years. He notices Meena and always tries to talk to her. One day, when nobody else is home, the man follows Meena into a room and closes the door. The man puts his hand over her mouth. He presses so hard that she can’t make a sound. With his other hand he holds Meena’s arms behind her back. She kicks and struggles, but the man is too strong.

When the family come home, Meena tells the lady of the house what happened. She is furious and blames Meena.

“You seduced him,” she says. Meena knows that this is not true, and tells other people. The lady’s sister-in-law listens, and reprimands the greengrocer. She tells him to leave Meena alone. But they let him continue to deliver vegetables, and nobody protects Meena when the man continues to pursue her. She manages to avoid him and gets a padlock so that she can lock herself in when nobody else is home.

A couple of months later, Meena starts bleeding heavily. It turns out she had become pregnant when she was raped, and now she has had a miscarriage. She cries in despair and longs to go home, but no-one can help her.

Set free by Kailash

When Meena is 17, Kailash and BBA find out that she is being held captive. They carry out a rescue mission and they manage to set her free and take her to a safe house. To begin with, Meena is quiet and shy. She is used to being beaten if she tries to talk to adults.

“But after a few months

with Kailash, I realised that people kept asking me what I wanted: what I wanted to eat, whether I wanted a glass of water. They wanted to know what I needed, and I realised that everything had changed. If they hadn’t rescued me I would have died. Kailash is my role model, because just like him I believe that children should be free. This is only possible if I get a good education. Kailash says that I should be brave and fight, and that challenges are part of life. That motivates me.

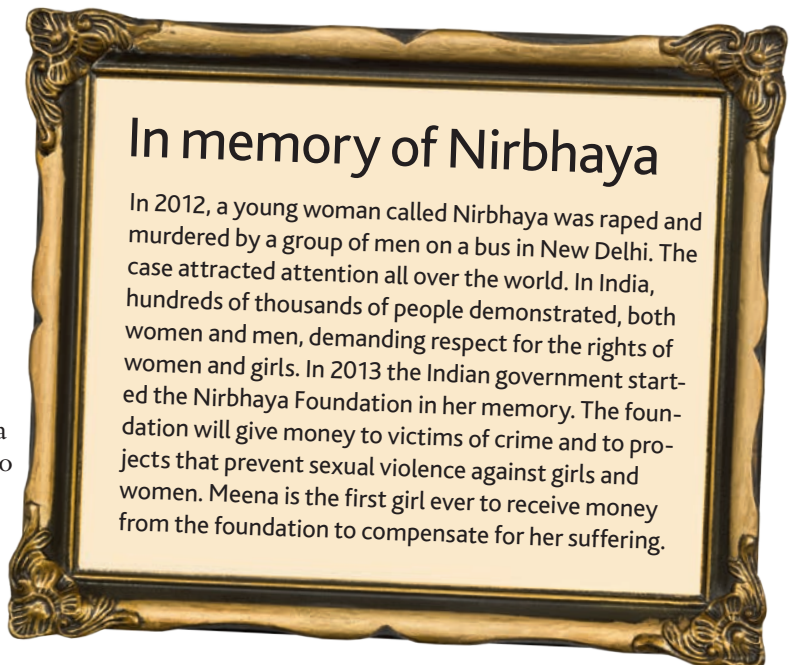
“I feel better now, because I can be with the people I want to be with. I have never experienced that before. My whole life I have been forced to live

with people that I haven’t chosen to be with.”

Get out!

After many years of fighting, Kailash and BBA have managed to get the government of India to change the laws to provide better protection for children, and tougher penalties for traffickers. Now both Steven, who sold Meena, and the rapist have been put in jail for their crimes, thanks to these new laws. The law gives slave workers a right to financial compensation, so Meena has now received a sum equivalent to the wages she should have been paid during the time she worked. She is planning to put the money towards her education.

“Only education can change your life. My advice to other children who are forced to work as slaves is to do everything you can to get out, straight away! Most children don’t know their rights. If you live with your family and someone offers you money to go somewhere, remember that whatever they promise about leaving your family for a better life in a big city is not true! Stay at home and fight for your right to go to school,” says Meena. 🌐



In memory of Nirbhaya

In 2012, a young woman called Nirbhaya was raped and murdered by a group of men on a bus in New Delhi. The case attracted attention all over the world. In India, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated, both women and men, demanding respect for the rights of women and girls. In 2013 the Indian government started the Nirbhaya Foundation in her memory. The foundation will give money to victims of crime and to projects that prevent sexual violence against girls and women. Meena is the first girl ever to receive money from the foundation to compensate for her suffering.

Everyone listens to Payal

When 13-year-old Payal talks, adults and children alike listen. Her village, a child friendly village, have elected her as the leader of their child parliament.

"I was proud when I found out that so many people had voted for me," says Payal. "I want to



"A good leader is honest and solves problems instead of moaning," says Payal. Here she is making a speech to the whole village.

fight for all children, especially girls. Here in Rajasthan, lots of girls are forced to work hard and get married when they are only twelve. I don't like child marriage. We visit children at home and explain to their parents why school is important. I want to be a teacher. We also tell fathers not to hit their children or wives. If they are loving instead, things are better for everyone."



Toilet helps girls

Thanks to Payal and the child parliament, the village school now has a toilet.

"Before, lots of girls weren't allowed to go to school. Their parents were afraid that they would be attacked if they went to relieve themselves outside, the way boys do. But now all the girls can go to school," explains Payal.

Important meeting at the child parliament

The child parliament is discussing how the village school can offer more years of schooling, so that girls can continue their education longer. They also want a new kitchen.

"If we don't get it, we'll march to the politicians in town and stop all the traffic," suggests Payal.





Payal defends herself

Girls in Indian villages who walk alone to the water pump or to school are often harassed by older boys and men, who say rude things and pull at their clothes.

"But if anyone tries that with me I just yell at them to stop it right now," says Payal.



A proud mother

Meena, one of Kailash's activists, visits Payal and her mother, who never went to school. She is proud of her clever daughter.

"Meena and Kailash are my role models," says Payal.



Between the leaders

The leader of the adult parliament in the village often asks Payal and her friends for advice.

"The adults listen to us and help us," she says.

Child friendly villages

Kailash has helped hundreds of villages to become 'child friendly villages', where no children are beaten or have to work or get married. It can take up to three years for a village to become child friendly. This involves everyone being trained, and a child parliament helping to oversee the village.



Only child friendly villages get a sign like this from Kailash!

Play is better than work



Children who don't need to work can go to school and have time to play. Bhawana, 14, knows this. She is a member of the child parliament in a poor area of the capital, Delhi.

"If we see children working, we try to persuade their parents to let them go to school instead. So far we have helped 32 children!"

Bhawana believes that it is hard for the people in power to understand how it feels to be poor.

"It's like when you want something really badly, but you can't have it. If you want to explain to a rich person, it might be like how they feel if they want a really amazing car, but they can't have it," says Bhawana.

Kho Kho

The children split into two teams – one chasing team and one defending team. The chasers sit in a row, facing in different directions. The defenders run onto the pitch three at a time. Anyone who is caught by a chaser is out.



Akash, 13 and Nitin, 12, are playing *Gatta*. They throw stones and try to catch them on the back of their hands. The first to drop a stone is the loser!



Gayatri, 12, and Bhawana, 14, are playing *Gomoku*. "We fight for children to be allowed to play and go to school."



Kit-Kit

Gunun, 11, is playing hopscotch, which is called Kit-Kit in India!



Ramesh escaped to freedom

Ramesh often takes the geese at Bal Ashram for a walk. He really likes caring for the goslings.

"Because when I was little and I was set free from slave labour, there was always someone to take care of me," he explains.

Ramesh was set free by BBA when he was seven years old and had been working at a brickworks for a year. His job was to turn brick after brick in the burning sun, and stack them once they were dry. Every brick weighed 2.5kg.

Forced to work again

After a few months at Bal Ashram, Ramesh returned home. He began to hang out with older boys who were into smoking and fighting. His father grew angry and sent him to Nepal. Ramesh had to work in a restaurant, cleaning and washing dishes for twelve hours a day.

"The owner used to beat me for the slightest mistake," says Ramesh. "The nights were terrible. I used to place two benches side by side to sleep on, but sometimes I fell off. Then the owner would come flying in and beat me."



"I want to be a lawyer and fight against corruption."



Ramesh likes taking care of the goslings at Bal Ashram. He likes to think deep thoughts while walking. "I never want to be rich. It's better to be honest and poor. I don't like rich people's lifestyle and wastage," says Ramesh, who used to be a child slave.

Blood everywhere

One day, Ramesh was painting a wall when a drop of paint landed in the restaurant owner's food.

"I can't remember how many times he punched me before I fell. I landed on my hands and a nail went right into my finger. There was blood and paint everywhere."

There and then, Ramesh, who by then was nine, decided to escape. But Bal Ashram was several days' journey away.

Ramesh told the other boy

at the restaurant about the food, the games and the school there, but his friend was too afraid to join him. Finally Ramesh got desperate and lied: "Do you know what else there is at Bal Ashram? Planes! Sometimes they land there and you can have a look at them!"

Long journey

The very next day, the boys ran away.

"We slipped onto a train and hid from the conductor. If anyone found us we were

going to jump off while the train was in motion."

Once in New Delhi, they finally managed to find the right bus. After travelling for 24 hours, a bumpy bus ride took them the last few miles. Ramesh knew exactly where he was – this was where he had been on a march against child slavery!

"My heart started beating faster. When we arrived at the gates of Bal Ashram, I saw one of my old teachers. I was over the moon, but my friend broke down in tears when he realised there were no planes here!" 🌐

Dreams of justice

Ramesh's big sister was killed by her own husband.

"She was very beautiful. The richest man in our village married her and they had a daughter. When the girl was six years old she asked for some sugar and the man flew into a rage. He beat her to death. One year later, when my sister was cooking she spilled some water on the floor. Her husband's nephew slipped on it, and her husband became so angry that he broke her neck. When nobody had seen her in five days, they went to the house. My sister was lying on the floor with a broken neck. She couldn't move and she hadn't eaten anything. Within two weeks, she was dead. None of us went to the police because the man is rich and we are poor. My dream is for him to be punished."