

# The Sourcer's Apprentice

**TALK ABOUT FAMILY VALUES:** In Bangladesh, every day is "Take-Your-Daughter-To-Work-Day." Same with India, Honduras, Nigeria, Guatemala, Portugal, Philippines, Pakistan, and scores of other source countries that serve as super-cheap labor supplies for many of our favorite American imports.

Mind you, it's not always a fancy office they go to. That would be such a waste, a Honduran factory owner explains, since "the peak of a person's hand-eye coordination is at the age of 16!" So while some of us display our youthful dexterity in the video arcade, it's off to the cotton ginneries and weaving sheds and fireworks fac-

ories for the rest of the little boys and girls. Most Americans don't experience the fulfillment of earning their own way through life until their early 20s, but as many as 200 million children throughout the world know the joys of turning pro in their formative years, according to a recent U.S. Labor Department study.

And this is one terrific growth industry. It is estimated to double to 400 million li'l workers by the year 2000. The tykes help produce billions of dollars' worth of products which are imported into the United States, marked up by shippers, wholesalers, and retailers, and then sold to unsuspecting folks like you and me. It's sort of like those Sally Struthers television appeals to "adopt" a third-world kid, only in reverse: We Americans *save* money and, in return, a foreign kid works harder, eats less, sleeps less, and lives half as long.

That oriental rug in your foyer—maybe Satosh worked on it in India. As reported by the highly credible International Labor Rights Education and Research Fund, five-year-old Satosh was playing one night with his friends in his village when some men—the infamous "carpet agents"—came along in a jeep and offered them candy and a free movie.

Didn't his parents tell him not to take candy from strangers? *Oops.* Satosh took the candy, and the men took him to Allahabad, where, after a few unfathomable days, he was promised that the beatings would stop and the gruel and water would start up again if he'd agree to be a carpet "apprentice" for 19 hours a day.

No health-care hassles with this employer: When Satosh cut himself with a weaving knife, his rug mentor beat him a little to remind him that cuts are bad; then he poured sulfur into his wound and set it afire to cauterize it. Satosh's service lasted for nine years, until he was finally spirited away by the South Asia Coalition on Child Servitude. His rug tormentor, a local school principal, was arrested and released the same day.

Then again, maybe Satosh never touched your rugs or mine. Maybe they came from Punjab, Pakistan, where 80 percent of the weavers are 15 years old or younger. Or from Egypt. Carpet-factory owners often say they are fond of children workers because they have "nimble fingers."

What's a child-labor factory like? Sort of like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, except instead of rivers of chocolate there are cauldrons of acid emitting pretty blue and green vapors



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