

CHILD LABOUR

Synopsis: About 70-90 million children are employed in various industries in very trying conditions. Children are being exploited as labourers both by organised and unorganized sectors of industry. The rights of the children are being abused specially in developing countries. Child labour cannot be eliminated unless there is free, universal and compulsory primary education. Poor parents cannot afford to send their children to school. The problem is multidimensional and needs matching approach and solutions. Employment of child should be made a cognizable offence and there should be more deterrent and stringent penalties.

There is no social security for children belonging to the poor and weaker sections of the society. They are subject to various types of abuse and exploitation. Their parents cannot afford to send them to schools or allow them to play. They are forced to work in mills, factories, houses, fields and farms, in establishments and for long hours in trying and unhealthy conditions. They work as labourers in match, knitwear, silk, carpet, sports-goods, constructions, fireworks, in industries, etc. They are engaged as brick rollers, brick kiln workers and other domestic helps against their wishes and abilities. Between 70-90 million children in India are employed in various sectors of industry and labour. The present Child Labour Act covers only the 15 per cent of the employed children and the rest comprising 85 per cent working in unorganized sector have been ignored. There is no social awareness, no social accountability. And in spite of the promulgation of Child Labour Act ten years back, no case has been ever registered. Labour is being exploited openly and bluntly in India and other Asian countries in industries and other sectors. There is no effective forum to protect their rights and expose their exploitation.

Obviously, the international code of conduct on minimum labour standards is not being implemented in the developing countries. In Pakistan Iqbal Masih, a very young person, was shot dead because he championed the cause of the children and campaigned against child labour. Every human being under 18 years of age unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier, is a child. According to the convention of the Rights of the child of 1990, every child has the right to an adequate standard of living and social security. He or she has the right to education, with states making primary education compulsory and free. Children have the right to protection from economic exploitation, with a minimum age for admission to employment. They are entitled to protection from involvement in the illicit production, trafficking and use of

narcotic drugs, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. But these rights are only on paper and the reality is very shocking. They have no opportunity for going to school and develop their potentials. It is estimated that half of the population of children in India is outside schools. Without provisions of universal, free and compulsory education, elimination of child labour is almost impossible. The emancipator value of education, specially primary education, is very significant as can be seen in the case of Kerala. Movements campaigning against child labour should direct their attention to the urgent need of free, compulsory and universal education for children. They should pressurize the Centre and State Governments to implement the scheme of universal, free and compulsory primary education at the earliest.

Social groups, voluntary organisations and reform societies should create a public awareness against child labour and making the masses demand free primary education. The [problem of child labour is directly linked with the problem of poverty. Unless there is significant improvement in the quality of life and living standards, the elimination of child labour will remain a pipe-dream. Poor families cannot afford to let their children not to work. It is a very disturbing situation. Children are the agents of transformation. Play, education and good health are children are denied these facilities and they are made to work instead Social boycott of goods produced with child labour can be one of the effective weapons to fights against this social evil.

Promotion of child-rights presupposes economic well-being of the people. Removal of children from employment means loss of jobs which may drive vulnerable children into more dangerous and degrading jobs. Thus, the problem is not so simple as it sometimes appears to be. Therefore, all its dimensions and implications should be taken into thorough consideration and only then remedial measures taken. Children should be rescued, their rights promoted and their voice heard. But this cannot be done effectively unless there is economic freedom and industrial growth. Child labour was a common thing a few decades ago in the nations that today are developed and advanced. During the Industrial Revolution of 18-19th centuries child labour was a common thing in Europe. Small children were often stolen and abducted and forced to become chimney sweeps. They eradicated the evils as soon as they grew rich and industrially powerful. For India also elimination of child labour is ultimately linked with economic development and growth in industrial and agricultural sectors. In India over 36 per cent people suffer from the poverty. In human development India ranks 138 among 175 developing countries. In human poverty index (HPI) based on the percentage of people dying before the age of 40, adult illiteracy and percentage of people without access to potable water, health services and

underweight children under five, India stands 47th among 78 developing nations. The percentage of people living below poverty line has increased from 36 per cent in 1990-91 to 43 per cent in 1992 in rural areas.

To Eradicate poverty and the resultant child labour, India needs to invest on a massive scale in education adult employment and industrialization. It is imperative that there is free, compulsory and universal primary education in the country by the turn of the century. Till appalling poverty persists and social insecurity prevails, child labour cannot be checked, let alone its eradication. In May 1997, to mark the 50th year of Indian Independence, the Union Government decided to make elementary education to children in the 6-14 age group a fundamental right. The Constitution is proposed to be amended for the purpose. This is a step in right direction in respect of elimination of child labour. But it is to be seen when and how this scheme is implemented. The government's ad hocism and tokenism sometimes make people sceptic about its policies and programmes and their timely implementation. The scheme of Universal Education in the country has still miles to go. The problem is compounded by the high incidence of dropouts from school system. And one of the main reasons is Child labour. Children are required to work in fields and farms, on shops and in factories to eke out a living.

The liberalisation of Indian economy will also go a long way in alleviating poverty by creating more job opportunities for the adults and thus the child labour will automatically get reduced. If poverty is reduced significantly, the problem of child labour may take care of itself. Liberalization creates opportunities at the bottom as well as near the top levels of the society. The recent World Bank report has said that since the process of liberalisation in India began a few years ago, the wages of landless rural workers have improved remarkably. The reforms in India started in 1991 and hold the promise of considerable improvements in the living standards of the country's 300 million poor, the report avers.

International organisations want to help India to solve the problem but their attempt to connect it to trade is undesirable. The problem cannot be solved overnight but concrete steps should be taken immediately. The provision of the present Child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act should also be suitably amended to bring about a cognizable offence. The penalty in such cases should be made more stringent and deterrent; burden of proof of age of the child should be on the employer and the names of the defaulting establishments should be furnished to law-courts and law-enforcement authorities. The Common Minimum Programme of the UF Government announced in June 1996 has referred to step to be taken to total elimination of child labour in all industries, in all occupations

and in all forms. But there is often found a big gap between good intentions and their timely implementation. Even the survival of the UF Government is often in doubt.

Essay No. 2

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We have been talking about the evils of child labour for the last 10 years in this country. But Instead of building up round public opinion against child labour and for compulsory primary educator, we are still talking about child labour as being necessary for the survival of the family. The debate has not changed radically in the last 10 years. The result is that children compulsory education is still a dream.

The presence of child labour in hazardous industries is a gross violation of human rights. If children are not dying in explosions, they are dying a slow but sure death in the glass, brass –ware, lock, slate, balloon, brick – kiln and other industries.

Not only are children working in hazardous industries, they are also engaged in the most hazardous processes in industries which adults do not want to touch. In the glass industry, children are primarily engaged in removing molten glass from the furnaces. Since the furnaces are designed for adults, the child's face is almost touching the wall of the furnance. It is not all.

Accidents happen all the time and most of them go unreported. Doctors refuse to treat injured or severely ill patients. A common complaint is that doctors refuse to treat severely injured patients as they have to necessarily report medico – legal cases.

Child labour in hazardous industry at least needs to be banned by a presidential order. The message needs to get home continue. Parents also cannot be allowed to justify sending their children to work in such industries on the grounds of poverty. A massive countrywide campaign is needed to be launched – like the campaign on the grill child- stating clearly the punitive action which would be taken if children were found to be employed.

Children from 6 per cent of India's total organized work force and contribute to an average 23 percent of a household's domestic savings. Yet, exploitation of children as social problem has only recently begun to agitate the international conscience. Germany and USA have now refused to allow import of items- such as Indian carpets, which are made by below – age work force.

In India, the children's cause has been taken up by, among others, the Delhi – based Centre of Concern For Child Labour (CCFCL), which also has field units in Bhopal, Aligarh and Sonabhadra. CCFCL, provides relief and rehabilitation to child workers, networks with non- governmental organizations and the governmental organizations and the government to improve child welfare programme, generates public awareness and holds education programmes for child workers.

The Bangalore – based Concern for Working Children (CWC) runs Gramashrama, a unique project to curb migration of child labourers form villages to cities. The project covers 52 villages in Karnataka. CWC also runs a shelter for homeless working children in Bangalore.