



CHILD LABOUR A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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ABSTRACT

Today's child is tomorrow's citizen. This is a universally accepted truth. But it is also a universal fact that today's child forms an important section of the labor force in all sectors of employment in all the less developed and developing economies. Child labor has a long history in India, dating back centuries. The exploitation of children for labor can be traced to both traditional and colonial periods. Here's a brief overview of the history of child labor in India. Government has accordingly been taking proactive steps to tackle this problem through strict enforcement of legislative provisions along with simultaneous rehabilitative measures. State Governments, which are the appropriate implementing authorities, have been conducting regular inspections and raids to detect cases of violations. Since poverty is the root cause of this problem, and enforcement alone cannot help solve it, Government has been laying a lot of emphasis on the rehabilitation of these children and on improving the economic conditions of their families.

Keywords: Child, Labour Challenges, Problems, Economic

INTRODUCTION

Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India rightly said the nation walks on the tiny feet of its children. No doubt, children are the future of a nation. The child is an asset for the nation to be nurtured with love and affection so that it grows into a responsible and responsive citizen. But now-a-days, the complex and universal problem of child labor has become a harsh reality attracting worldwide attention. The prevalence of child labor is a blot on the conscience of any society. Child labor harms the progress and prosperity of a nation.

Today's child is tomorrow's citizen. This is a universally accepted truth. But it is also a universal fact that today's child forms an important section of the labor force in all sectors of employment in all the less developed and developing economies. Hence, it is rightly observed by the International Labor Organization that the child labor is essentially a problem of development. It is a phenomenon deeply rooted in economic and social conditions. Industrialization in the developing nations has further aggravated the problem instead of helping to reduce it.

Employment of children in India, in the form of slavery, was mentioned even in Kautilya's Arthashastra of 3rd Century B.C. It describes the existence of domestic slavery in many prosperous households where the slaves were normally from low castes. Child slaves of less than eight years of age were known working in many noble houses.

In Medieval period children were normally placed as trainees under artisans and craftsmen. The tradition still continues in carpet weaving or cotton / silk weaving industries, which provide employment to large number of children even today in our country.

It is important not only to understand the background of this child labor but the effect this child's situation has on the child's perception of life and what it has to offer. Child labor is not a new phenomenon. It has existed in one form or the other throughout man's history. In earlier times child labor existed only as an extension of the home and the child worked as part of the family unit receiving all the protection and care that the family would normally extend to the child. The nature of work was essentially non-hazardous and it was with the basic aim of passing on art and craft to next generation.

GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM

Children in every type of human society have always taken part in economic activity. It was necessary for the survival of the group they belong to. In earlier times the children used to work within their family circle. They received 'on-the-job' training in the traditional occupation of their family. They grew to physical and intellectual maturity which prepared them for adult life. In the family circle, work was practically free from harmful effects. The children grew without ill-treatment and without being exploited.

CHILD LABOR DURING BRITISH TIME IN INDIA (1708-1947 AD)

During East India company regime following industrial revolution certain industrial organizations grew in the 18th and 19th centuries which employed a large number of artisans, especially in weaving, carpentry, and similar sectors. The new establishment/organizations replaced earlier family based economy and opened opportunity for wage-paid employment, Formation of labor unions, labor markets and new socio-economic order. But prolonged scarcity of food and extreme poverty caused by famines, lack of education and absence of compulsion for child education up to certain age-limit, large-scale unemployment of adult workers had resulted in introduction of children into the labor market. In the 19th century, employment of children in jute and cotton mills, mines, factories and underground work grew without age bar, working hours and gender considerations. Lack of state regulation regarding wages, working hours, age limit and child employment resulted in limitless abuse and exploitation of workers by their employers. Child laborers were the worst sufferers. Child labor was an accepted part of the economic and cultural behavior in much of the developing world till the 19th century, and is so to a lesser degree even today.

DIMENSIONS OF CHILD LABOR

In developing countries child labor, in one form or other, is a serious problem. Many children are working in the worst forms of labor like bondage, semi-slavery, and prostitution. They are being need even in armed conflicting I many African countries. According to international labor organization publication "child labor and targeting" (1996), the number of working children in the age group of 5-14 years in all developing countries was 120 million but ILO later estimated in 2000 that there were about 180 million child laborers in the world and if secondary activities are included the number might reach to 250 million. Again the number of child laborers is highest in south Asia and therein India has the highest number of about 20 million (as per estimate of the planning commission of India in 2000). However, if we add the number of marginal child laborers to the number of main child workers, it would be around 25 million. Though poverty is the cause of the child labor, it is not the only cause. For instance, food insecurity, malnutrition, adult illiteracy, big size of the family, natural calamities, under employment in agriculture, lack of awareness, bad habits of elders etc.,

CHILD LABOR: IS IT A NECESSARY EVIL

India is facing this critical problem. A wide variation is seen in the estimation of child labor in India. According to official statistics, there are 12.6 million child workers of which 61,000 are engaged in different unorganized sectors. Estimation is that the number of child workers is closer to 44 million. According to UN, 55% of the work force in India is made up of child workers. It is normally seen that employers do not always provide accurate data on child labor in order to safeguard themselves from legal hassles.

It was pointed out in the World Conference on children that the number of child workers in the world is about 25 crores, out of which maximum i.e. about 10 crores are found in India alone. It is estimated that about 7.5 crore are engaged in rural areas while remaining 2.5 crore are employed in urban areas. Alarmed at this critical problem, ILO has also estimated that India alone accounts for one fourth of total child labor of the world.

CHILD LABOUR HISTORY IN INDIA

Child labor has a long history in India, dating back centuries. The exploitation of children for labor can be traced to both traditional and colonial periods. Here's a brief overview of the history of child labor in India:

Traditional Child Labor: Child labor was prevalent in various forms in pre-colonial India. Children were often engaged in family-based agricultural activities, craftwork, and domestic chores. Child labor was considered a part of the socioeconomic structure, with children helping their parents to contribute to the family's income and sustenance

Colonial Period: The British colonial rule in India significantly influenced child labor practices. The British East India Company and later, the British government, introduced various economic policies that

disrupted traditional occupations and agriculture. This led to the displacement of many families and their reliance on child labor for income

Factory Act of 1881: The British colonial administration introduced the Factory Act of 1881, which was one of the earliest legislative measures aimed at addressing child labor issues. However, it only regulated the working conditions of children in certain industries, and enforcement was weak

Child Labor in Agriculture: While child labor in factories was a significant concern, a substantial portion of child labor occurred in agriculture. This sector remained largely unregulated, and children worked long hours in the fields alongside their parents

Independence and Post-Independence Era: After India gained independence in 1947, there was a renewed focus on social and labor reforms. The government began to introduce legislation to address child labor. The Mines Act of 1952 and the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 were some of the key measures to regulate child labor

The Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986: This law aimed to prohibit the employment of children in hazardous industries while allowing them to work in non-hazardous industries with certain restrictions. However, the enforcement of this law has often been criticized for its inadequacies

International Agreements: India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor in 1999, demonstrating its commitment to eliminating child labor.

Recent Developments: India has taken several measures to combat child labor in recent years, including increased awareness campaigns, stricter labor laws, and improved enforcement mechanisms. Various government programs and initiatives have been launched to rescue and rehabilitate child laborers and provide them with education and other opportunities

Despite these efforts, child labor remains a complex and persistent issue in India, with millions of children still engaged in various forms of labor, often due to poverty, lack of access to education, and inadequate enforcement of child labor laws. The fight against child labor continues to be a critical social and policy challenge for India.

CHILD LABOR IS RAMPANT ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Child labor is rampant across the country. Children can be seen working in agricultural fields, carpet and durri industries, biri, handicraft, match box, glass and bangle industries, in restaurants and as domestic servants. It is estimated that 30 percent of child labor is engaged in agriculture and allied activities, 30 to 35 percent in industries and remaining are engaged in mining, tea gardens and hotels etc., these occupations are hazardous and can cause severe physical damage to them and inhibit their mental, moral and social development.

These child laborers become prey to many diseases, like T.B, Cancer, Asthma, Lungs and skin related diseases. The sad plight of child words, it is really sad to note that children in most of the developing countries are living miserable, cheerless lives, toiling needlessly to ward off starvation, totally deprived of all comforts and opportunities for self-growth and development.

ROLE OF MINISTRY OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Based on the recommendations of Gurupadaswamy Committee, the Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act was enacted in 1986. As per the Act, employment of children was prohibited in certain specified hazardous occupations and processes and regulates the working conditions in others. The list of hazardous occupations and processes is progressively being expanded on the recommendation of Child Labor Technical Advisory Committee constituted under the Act. Subsequently the act was amended in 2016 with the enactment of the Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act 2016 prohibiting the employment of Children below 14 years in all employment and also with the provisions for prohibition on employment of adolescents (14-18 Years) in the scheduled hazardous occupations and processes.

In consonance with the above approach, a National Policy on Child Labor, formulated in 1987, seeks to adopt a gradual & sequential approach with a focus on rehabilitation of Children and Adolescent. The Action Plan outlined in the Policy for tackling this problem is as follows:

- Legislative Action Plan for strict enforcement of The Child & Adolescent Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986.
- Project based action plan in areas of high concentration of Child & Adolescent Labour - National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Schemes.
- Focuses on general developmental programmes for the benefit of the families of children.

CONCLUSION

Government has accordingly been taking proactive steps to tackle this problem through strict enforcement of legislative provisions along with simultaneous rehabilitative measures. State Governments, which are the appropriate implementing authorities, have been conducting regular inspections and raids to detect cases of violations. Since poverty is the root cause of this problem, and enforcement alone cannot help solve it, Government has been laying a lot of emphasis on the rehabilitation of these children and on improving the economic conditions of their families.

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