



An Overview Of Child Labour In India

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“Child slavery is a crime against humanity. Humanity itself is at stake here. A lot of work still remains, but I will see the end of child labour in my lifetime – Nobel Prize Winner Kailash Satyarthi

INTRODUCTION

The growing problem of child labour in most of the developing countries is of great concern. The existence of child labour deprives a nation of its potential human capital who could have been more productive and resourceful if not forced to work in their childhood. The issue of child labour entered the public debate with the advent of universal schooling, with the changes in working conditions since the industrial revolution, and with the emergence of the concept of workers’ and children’s rights.

In simple words, child labour refers to that group of children between 5-14 years age who are out of school and are engaged either in hazardous or non-hazardous occupations. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as the work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and harmful to their physical and mental development. The existence of child labour deprives them from the opportunity to attend school. The structural persistence of poverty, lack of educational opportunities, inadequate laws, orphan hood, insufficient protective legislation, among a few things, are the root cause of the prevalence of child labour in India.

WHY CHILDREN PREFER TO WORK?

No children want to work sacrificing their childhood rights. But much to their dislike and distaste, they are compelled to do so. Besides many negative impacts of child labour, children prefer to do work that are unfit to their age in order to economically support their family. Orphan hood is another reason for which child labour has no choice but to work to earn their livelihood and to get rid of hunger and starvation. In some extreme cases, children are taken from or sold by their parents which force the children to become child labourers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

K.Abhohari (2014) viewed that poverty and lack of social security are the main causes of Child Labour in urban areas of India which needs awareness not only among children and their parents but also among the shopkeepers, owners of the small scale industries etc relating to adverse consequences of Child Labour and about the laws of Child Labour in India. Debi S. Saini (1994) analysed various laws and policies implemented by government in order to tackle Child Labour problem in India. He also focused on “Free and Compulsory Primary Education” which has a long way to go in dealing with the problem of Child Labour. The study found that all the acts and policies have less effect on eradication of Child Labour and it suggested that along with government policies and legislative laws, adequate social awareness must be created explaining the importance of compulsory primary education which may help in reducing Child Labour problem. Ravinder Rena (2009) in his study related the problem of Child Labour with some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) such as poverty eradication, education for all, gender equality etc. and suggested for a collective action by the governmental and Nongovernmental Organizations to eliminate the existence of child labour. Ali and Khan (2012) reviewed various constitutional provisions in India and efforts taken at international level to overcome the problem of Child Labour and found that besides all these, much more has to be done for reducing Child Labour.

GLOBAL SCENARIO OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour practice is considered exploitative and inhuman by many international organizations, and it has been declared illegal in many countries. A happy childhood is the right of every child, and providing it must be the concern of every nation-state. In the last few decades, according to the World Bank, the incidence of child labour has decreased globally. However, the total number of child labourers across the globe, especially in underdeveloped countries, remains high. It is clear from table 1 that around 211 million children were economically active in different regions of the world in 2000.

Region	Number of Children (in Millions)
Developed Economies	2.5

Transition Economies	2.4
Asia and the Pacific	127.3
Latin America & Africa	17.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	48
Middle East & North Africa	13.4
Total	211
Source: International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) , International Labour Organisation, 2002.	

However, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimate, around 168 million children between the age group of 5–17 worldwide was involved in child labour in 2013. Many of them never attend school as they have to work to survive themselves or to earn some money to support their family income. Asia and Pacific still continue to have highest incidence of child labour (78 million) whereas Sub-Saharan Africa has almost 59 million child labour. In Arab States it is 13.4 million or about 15 million. It is also found that in Latin America and The Caribbean, there are still 5.7 million working girls and boys.

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

According to the Census (2001 & 2011), the total number of working children in India has declined from 1.26 crores in 2001 to 43.53 lakh in 2011. This indicates that the incidence of child labour has decreased in the country by 65 per cent between 2001 and 2011. This decline in the magnitude of child labour became possible due to the increase in regulations and legal restrictions on child labour employment. However, when we consider state-wise distribution of child labour, Uttar Pradesh ranks at the top followed by Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This shows that efforts made so far by the government to rehabilitate child labourers have remained marginally successful.

Sl. No.	Name of the States	No. of Working Children in the Age Group of 5-14 Years	
		2001	2011
1	Uttar Pradesh	1927997	896301
2	Maharashtra	764075	496916
3	Bihar	1117500	451590
4	Andhra Pradesh	1363339	404851
5	Madhya Pradesh	1065259	286310
6	Rajasthan	1262570	252338
7	Gujarat	485530	250318
8	Karnataka	822615	249432
9	West Bengal	857087	234275
10	Tamil Nadu	418801	151437
11	Odisha	377594	92087
	Total (including all the Indian States)	12666377	4353247
Source: Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.			

The problem of child labour has become a major humanitarian challenge to the progress of developing countries. It is not comforting to notice the unabated child labour in growing India, especially in the metropolis. Child labour in hazardous industries is prohibited by the Constitution of India under Article 24. Various laws such as the Factories Act of 1948, the Mines Act of 1952, the Merchant Shipping Act of 1958, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, and The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2000 have been formulated to identify, to prosecute and stop child labour. Besides this, the government has initiated the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) in 1988 solely to eliminate and rehabilitate the child workers around the country. However, despite all these efforts, the child labour persists.

CONCLUSION

According to the ILO, the stable economic growth, respect for labour standards, decent work, universal education, social protection, recognizing the needs and rights of the children are necessary conditions to tackle the root causes of child labour. Besides this, the government and non-government organizations should take steps to create awareness among the parents of these children about the importance of education and the adverse consequences of child labour. Also, the government should look after the strict implementation of free and compulsory education at primary level, and properly implement poverty alleviation and income-generating programs which may go a long way in solving the problem of child labour.

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