

CHILD LABOUR –grave social issue in India

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Child labour is one of the biggest global problems today. As per UNICEF report, about 250 million children aged 2 to 17 are subjected to child labour worldwide. The 2001 national census of India estimated the total number of child labour, aged 5-14, to be at 12.6 million which has showed increasing trend in 2011 census. Child labour is defined by many organizations as "any kind of work for children that harms them or exploits them in some way may it be physically, mentally or by depriving a child of education.

Child labour is a social menace in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries. There is a widespread practice of child labour in sectors like agriculture, factories, mining, hotels and quarrying etc. Thousands of children are made to work as household helps in different parts of the world. Many children have to work for helping their families and some families expect their children to continue the family business from young age only. One can also find children working in hotels, kothies, business establishments, tobacco, fireworks & bangles related factories and polishing shoes. This is a grave issue that needs redressal on an urgent basis.

No matter, how rapidly a country is developing, if the large part of its child population is working as bread earner for their family, it is an indication of sorry state of social equilibrium. No one has got any right to exploit children in any capacity but ironically, we keep facing such situations every now and then. In many countries, children are forced into prostitution. In countries like India, child labour has always been a major social issue. Despite formulating different laws protecting the basic rights of children, situation is far from impressive. The practice of child labour does not just devoid a child of his basic rights to live a life with dignity and study but also affects his future. Leave alone lack of education opportunities to them, most of these children are malnourished and treated like animals Millions of children across the country are indulged into some sort of labour practices in deplorable conditions. They are made to work for 12-16 hours which really demands pressing attention from the society and policy makers. Such inhuman acts seriously affect the personal growth and development of a child.

The root cause this problem in India is poverty coupled with high population. Many a times, children are forced into work by their own family. Lack of earning members pushes poor families to make their children work in appalling conditions. Insecurity and lack of resources worsens the situation. Poor level of education also plays a vital role in deepening the roots

of the menace. Lower strata of the society do not have too many privileges and they are not ever aware of benefits of education. That leaves them with only choice of forcing their children to work.

The laws and regulations in India concerning child labour are far from perfect. There is definitely a pressing need of concrete action from the Govt. to abolish this practice. Factors like caste and gender discrimination, demand of cheap labour and superstition etc are also responsible for widely prevalent practice of child labour in India. States need to wake up to the growing threat of child labour else, despite being one of the fastest growing economies in the world, we run the risk of losing young and innocent souls. Growth and development is meaningless unless all the basic problem eradicated.

Government and child labour in India:

India's policy on child labour has evolved over the years and present regime of laws relating to child labour in India have a pragmatic foundation and are consistent with the international labour conference resolution of 1979

The government has made efforts to prohibit child labour by enacting child labour laws in India including the 1986 Child Labour (prohibition and regulation) Act that stated that children under fourteen years of age could not be employed in hazardous occupations.

This act also attempted to regulate working conditions in the jobs that it permitted, and put greater emphasis on health and safety standards.

Through a notification dated May 26, 1993, the working conditions of children have been regulated in all employment which not prohibited under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. Following up on a preliminary notification issued on October 5, 1993, the government has also prohibited employment of children in occupation processes like abattoirs/slaughter houses, printing, cashew nut processing, and soldering.

However, due to cultural, economic factors and poor implementation, these goals remain difficult to meet. These act nothing to protect children who perform domestic or unreported labour, which is very common in India. In almost all Indian industries girls are unrecognized laborers because they are seen as helpers and not workers. Therefore, girls are therefore not protected by the law. Children are often exploited and deprived of their rights in India, and until further measures are taken, many Indian children will continue to live poverty.

Eradication measures:

Despite of over six decades of independence and efforts for national developments we are still grappling with menace of child labour. According to social study research, the prime

reason behind increasing number of underage children working as contract laborers in organized and unorganized sectors is poverty. Children are seen as bread earners for the family and that pushes poor families to make their children work in unfriendly conditions. No less than 80% child labour cases are because of parental poverty. Children are forced to work so as to get supplemental earning to the family. It's more like a vicious cycle of child labour. It also tells us that economic growth of India is not creating an all round effect. The government must ensure that the market prosperity percolate down the social order. State should focus on building factories in poverty-stricken areas so that it can generate jobs for the parents. This will be the single biggest step in eradicating child labour problem.

Lack of education is another major factor in increasing cases of child labour. Poor people can't afford educational costs so they don't have a choice of investing in the children education. It is the education only through which children can be empowered to take best decisions for their future. Giving proper and quality education to the children of the country should be the top priority of the nation. If children are well educated, their decisions will also bear positive effect on the fortunes of the country along with improving their quality of life.

One more idea is to set up special education society where children from economically backward families could be offered free education. Government should also provide other basic facilities like books, clothes, stationary convenience etc free of cost. Charitable organizations and trusts need to be involved to help child development programs run by government as local support.

The government should formulate stringent laws against child labour. As of now law against child labour is not enough and there are plenty of loopholes in it. Right from provision of stricter imprisonment to cancelling the industrial license of the firms where children are found working, there are several steps that government can take to completely eradicate this problem.

The services of renowned and committed NGOs can be helpful to improve the situation in this field. Many NGOs like Bachpan bachao Andolan, CARE India, Global March against Child Labour, RIDE India etc. Have already been working to eradicate child labour in India.

Steps should be taken to make people aware of the consequences of child labour. Sustainable living for one and all can only be achieved when each one of us contribute our bit for the welfare of society. Only with implementation of these steps, India can claim to be the emerging healthy and prosperous nation in the race of global developments.