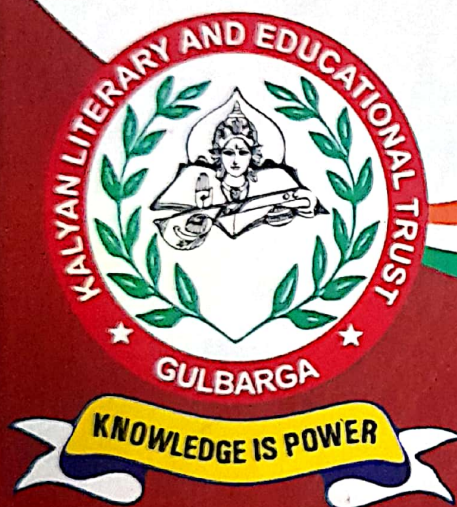


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**Dr. Mallikarjun S. Kharge
Prof. Nanda Merwyn David
Prof. Jagadevappa Chakki
Prof. Gireesh Meeshi**



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Causes and Consequences of Child Labour in India

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Abstract

Children are future citizens of the Nation and their adequate development is utmost priority of the country. Unfortunately, child labour engulfs children across the world. The world is home to 1.2 billion individuals aged 10-19 years. However, despite its menace in various forms, the data shows variation in prevalence of child labour across the globe and the statistical figures about child labour are very alarming. There are an estimated 186 million child labourers worldwide. The 2001 national census of India estimated total number of child labour aged 5-14 to be at 12.6 million. Small-scale and community-based studies have found estimated prevalence of 12.6 million children engaged in hazardous occupations. Many children are "hidden workers" working in homes or in the underground economy. Although the Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the age of 6 to 14 and prohibits employment of children younger than 14 in 18 hazardous occupations, child labour is still prevalent in the informal sectors of the Indian economy. Child labour violates human rights, and is in contravention of the International Labour Organization (Article 32, Convention Rights of the Child). About one-third of children

of the developing world are failing to complete even 4 years of education. Indian population has more than 17.5 million working children in different industries, and incidentally maximum are in agricultural sector, leather industry, mining and match-making industries, etc.

Keywords: Child labour, Human rights, Industry, Labour Organization.

Introduction

The term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical-mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. The statistical figures about child workers in the world have variation because of the differences in defining categories of age group and engagement of children in formal and informal sector.

Child labour continues to be a great concern in many parts of the world. In 2008, some 60% of the 215 million boys and girls were estimated to be child labourers worldwide. Major engagement was in agriculture sector, followed by fisheries, aquaculture, livestock and forestry. In addition to work that interferes with schooling and is harmful to personal development, many of these children work in hazardous occupations or activities that are harmful. Incidentally, 96% of the child workers are in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and South America. With respect to the child workers between the ages of 5 and 14, Asia makes up 61% of child workers in developing countries, while Africa has 32% and Latin America 7%. Further, while Asia has the highest number of child workers, Africa has the highest prevalence of child labour (40%).

TYPES OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

1) Industrial Child Labour

Industrial sector in India is the largest employer of children below the legal age of 18. Approximately, over 10 Million children between the age group of 5 to 14 years are working in informal or small industries, including around 4.5 Million girls. Small enterprises like garment industry, brick kiln, agriculture, fireworks industries, diamond industries etc, constitute some of the largest employer of children. Sometimes such industries operate from homes, making it difficult for the authorities to take appropriate actions. Unorganized sector in India is one of the largest employers of children and the most visible too. Children could be easily spotted, working in road side dhabas and eateries, tea shops or grocery stores. The owners of such small businesses prefer children as they are easy to handle and easy to fire.

2) Domestic Child Labour

Domestic child labours constitute 10% of the total child labours in India. They include both boys and girls domestically employed by wealthy families to look after their everyday chorus. Such children have no option but to serve the needs of other families in an age when they should be attending school and playing with friends. Poverty is the main factor behind children being employed as domestic help. Usually the parents give their consent in hope of money and a stable shelter for their children. The statics reveal a grim picture – nearly 20% of all the domestic workers employed are below the age of 14 years and the figures include mainly girls. These children are employed as live in servants, doing daily chorus of the family like – washing, cooking, looking after pets or younger children and other works.

3) Bonded Child Labours

Bonded child labour means as a child who is employed forcibly to pay off a debt of his parents or a guardian. Though the numbers of bonded child labours have considerably declined in recent past due strict government supervision and laws banning it, it is silently followed in isolated and remote places. Children residing

in villages and employed in agriculture industry are more prone to this type of labour. Poor farmers owing large debts to money lenders, often get into an agreement to engage their siblings as labours to wealthy money lenders. There were thousands of bonded labours engaged in various industries, till the past decade, but today the numbers have reduced drastically, and the government claims that there are no more bonded child labours in India.

This is made possible due to laws banning child labour and a compulsory child education and by the joint efforts of UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Fund), NGOs and other relevant agencies.

CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

*** The curse of poverty**

The main reason for child labour in India is poverty. Most of the country's population suffers from poverty. Due to poverty, parents cannot afford the studies of their children and make them earn their wages from a tender age. In fact, they are well aware of the grief of losing their loved ones to poverty many times. They send their small children to work in factories, homes and shops. They are made to work to increase the income of their poor families at the earliest. These decisions are taken only for the purpose of eking out a living for their family. But such decisions shatter children's physical and mental state as they lose their childhood at an early age.

*** Lack of Educational Resources**

Even after so many years of our country's independence, there are instances where children are deprived of their fundamental right to education. There are thousands of villages in our country where there are no proper facilities of education. And if there is any, it is miles away. Such administrative laxity is also responsible for child labour in India. The worst sufferers are the poor families for whom getting their children educated is a dream.

Sometimes the lack of affordable school for the education of

poor children leaves them illiterate and helpless. Children are forced to live without studying. And sometimes such compulsions push them into the trap of child labour in India.

*** Social and Economic Backwardness**

Social and economic backwardness is also the main reason for child labour in India. Socially backward parents do not send their children to receive education. Consequently, their children are trapped in child labour. Due to illiteracy, many times parents are not aware of various information and schemes for child education. Lack of education, illiteracy and consequently the lack of awareness of their rights among them have encouraged child labour. Also, uneducated parents do not know about the impact of child labour on their children. The conditions of poverty and unemployment give rural families a compulsive basis for engaging children in various tasks. In fact, feudal, zamindari system and its existing remnants continue to perpetuate the problem of child labour in India.

*** Addiction, Disease or Disability**

In many families, due to addiction, disease or disability, there is no earning, and the child's wages are the sole means of family's sustenance. Population growth is also increasing unemployment, which has adverse impact on child labour prevention. So, parents, instead of sending their children to school, are willing to send them to work to increase family income.

*** Poor Compliance of Laws**

In modern society, laws stipulate that citizens have the right to receive good education, avail good health services and take care of their health. Every citizen has the right to play the game he enjoys, and enjoy all the means of entertainment, and when he grows, to obtain employment where he can earn well and contribute to society and nation. But in the absence of proper compliance of the laws, child labour in India is continuing. It can be prohibited only by strict adherence to the related laws.

*** Lure of cheap labour**

In the greed of cheap labour, some shopkeepers, companies and factory owners employ children so that they have to pay less to them and it amounts to employing cheap labour. Shopkeepers and small businessmen make children work as much as they do to the elder ones, but pay half the wages. In the case of child labour, there is less chance for theft, greed or misappropriation of money too. With the development of globalization, privatization, and consumerist culture, the need for cheap labour and its linkage with economic needs of poor families have encouraged child labour in India.

*** Family tradition**

It is a shocking but a bitter truth that in our society it is very easy to give child labour the name of tradition or custom in many families. The cultural and traditional family values play their role in increasing the problem of child labour in India at the voluntary level. Many families believe that a good life is not their destiny, and the age-old tradition of labour is the only source of their earning and livelihood. Small businessmen also waste the lives of their children in the greediness of perpetuating their family trade with lower production costs. Some families also believe that working from childhood onwards will make their children more diligent and worldly-wise in terms of future life. They believe that early employment will give rise to their children's personal development, which will make it easier for them to plan their life ahead.

*** Discrimination between boys and girls**

We have been conditioned into believing that girls are weaker and there is no equal comparison between boys and girls. Even today, in our society, we will find many examples where girls are deprived of studies. Considering girls weaker than boys deprives them of school and education. In labourer families, girls are found to be engaged in labour along with their parents.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

- * Child labour is a serious hindrance to social and

economical development of the nation. Children employed in various sectors fail to get necessary education, virtually forced to leading a life of hardship and poverty. It also affects the overall health of a child, as children get exhausted easily and are not physically fit to work for longer durations under difficult conditions.

- * Children employed in glass and fire cracker industries work not only for longer hours but also under hazardous conditions, seriously compromising their health. They are continuously exposed to toxic gases and substances leading to various skin and respiratory ailments.
- * Children who are forced into the labour industry are unable to fend for themselves and grow up as an individual who cannot productively contribute to the society. Moreover, for a nation's economy to be progressive, it is imperative that its workforce is educated and skilled, to cater to different sectors; which is a distant reality as long as child labour exists.
- * As long as the children are employed as labours, India cannot successfully eradicate poverty and illiteracy. Sending children to schools instead of work could have large economical and social benefits in long run. Educated children acquire necessary skills and higher paying jobs, lifting them and the nation out of the clutches of poverty.

HOW TO ELIMINATE AND STOP CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

- * To prevent child labour, incidence of poverty needs to be reduced first, so that poor people do not have to send their children to earn their bread and butter.
- * Spreading literacy and education is a potent weapon against the practice of child labour in India, because illiterate persons do not understand the implications of child labour.
- * Another way to stop child labour in India is to eliminate or rein in unemployment. Because of inadequate employment, many families cannot afford to meet all

their expenses. If employment opportunities are increased, they will be able to let their children read and write and become worthy citizens.

- * To stop child labour in India, we will have to first change our own thinking. We have to ensure that first of all, we do not keep any child at work in our own home or office. We have to remember that we are not doing any favour to children of tender age by paying them money in exchange of their labour, but we are rather playing with their future.
- * We also need to spread awareness about child labour in India, so that people can understand that child labour is messing with the future of the country. They will have to understand that there is no future for India if its children are weakened mentally and physically through the practice of child labour.
- * The common man should take up a resolve that he will not buy any items from the shops where a child is employed as labour. Also, if we come across such instances, we should complain to the police or other agencies, about it. The common citizen should prevent child labour from taking place in society. In this way, the general public can help in the prevention of child labour in India.
- * There are laws prohibiting child labour in our country. If we notice any case of child labour, then we should immediately go to the nearest police station and register our complaint. We must raise our voice against the stonehearted who employ child labour in India.
- * We can also dial 100 to register a complaint against child labour. We can also dial the telephone service number 1098 started by the government to register complaints against child labour.
- * We will have to play the role of a conscious customer. Many times we go to the market and shop for our necessities, without knowing that there may be child labour practice behind the texture of that stuff. Why not form a habit from today that whenever we purchase

any goods, we ask the shopkeeper about the technique used in their manufacture. Most shopkeepers may not know the answer to this question, but we can take one step from our side. We can create a sensible environment in the society by these inquiries. And say No to the use of something made of child labour. It may seem a little odd, but this can bring a big change in our society.

- * Let the parents of the children know the consequences of child labour. If we find any child labour somewhere near us, first we should talk to the family of that child. Empathizing with their conditions, we should tell them about the bleak future of their child in case of continuance of this practice.
- * Owners of factories and shops should take a vow that they will not force any child to do labour and stop other people from doing the same.
- * To prevent child labour in India, we need proper implementation of laws that prescribe strict punishment to vendors, shopkeepers and mill owners in case they engage children on cheap wages.
- * There should also be more robust and stricter laws for child labour in India, so that the people fear from employing any child labour.
- * Poor parents should pay full attention to the education of their children because today the government is providing free education, food, and even medicines in certain schools.
- * They should not make any difference between boys and girls. By this practice, the number of girl child labour in India can be reduced to a great extent.

Conclusion

Poverty is one of the important factors for this problem. Hence, enforcement alone cannot help solve it. The Government has been laying a lot of emphasis on the rehabilitation of these children and on improving the economic conditions of their families.

Many NGOs like CARE India, Child Rights and You, Global March Against Child Labour, etc., have been working to eradicate child labour in India. The child labour can be stopped when knowledge is translated into legislation and action, moving good intention and ideas into protecting the health of the children. The endurance of young children is higher and they cannot protest against discrimination. Focusing on grassroots strategies to mobilize communities against child labour and reintegration of child workers into their homes and schools has proven crucial to breaking the cycle of child labour. A multidisciplinary approach involving specialists with medical, psychological and socio-anthropological level is needed to curb this evil.

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