

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA**

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**Abstract**

Child labour is a global challenge and it is a chronic disease in most of the developing countries. Children throughout the world are engaged in a great number of activities classified as work. These ranges from fairly harmless, even laudable, activities like helping out in the home, to physically dangerous and morally objectionable ones. Child labour is a complex and a controversial issue. Unfortunately, it is a global phenomenon. In almost all societies, children work in some way, though the type of work they do and the forms of their involvement vary. But many millions of children work under abusive and exploitative conditions that are clearly dangerous to them. India is not an exception. As per report, India ranks among top nations where the percentage of labour force constituting 'Child Labour' is very high. Like others, India too, have formulated laws in order to reform and bring an end to all forms of child labour, right from its inception as a free nation, but the ground reality is still very dismal in nature.

**Key Words:** Child Labour, Poverty, Welfare and Socio-legal Reforms, Employment etc.

**I. Introduction**

Child labour is global challenge and it is a chronic disease in most of the developing countries. Child Labour, actually viewed more as a social problem of a greater magnitude than other related problems connected with the development of human beings, is abnormally high in under-developed and developing countries of the world. There is no denying of the fact that children of today are the grown up citizens of tomorrow, of a country on whose shoulders its multifaceted development and growth wholly depends. It is infact, in this context that the growth of the children into matured persons with adequate skills and knowledge, gained through support from the state, society and family, necessitate the all round development and growth of both the personality of the child and that of the nation. The governments of all developed countries and many developing countries have showed considerable attention to the needs and vulnerabilities of all children and young people. The existing relationship between State and Children includes relationship in all spheres like socio-economic and political. Indeed, the provisions of domestic statute along with a range of international treaties, rules and conventions- impose obligation upon the state agencies not only to protect but also to promote their human rights. However, despite such official claims, historically-embedded, children's rights including their claims to care, protection, welfare and justice are often neglected, if not blatantly violated, especially in case of Child Labour. This holds true in India as well. Though the definition and concept of child labour may vary widely depending mainly on social, economic, environmental or physical postulates, the child labour is that segment of the child population of a country which is found to have engaged

themselves in paid or unpaid employment in a given situation. Here, an attempt has been made to analysis the problem of child labour in the context of those working below the age of 14 years in any gainful industrial and non-industrial occupation, which are viewed not only injurious to their physical, mental or moral development but also hamper their social progress in a big way. Some of the areas where one can find them being significant part of the labour force are in—agriculture fields, performing heavy work and exposed to many hazards associated with the introduction of modern machinery and chemicals; in dangerous industries and occupations such as, glass making, construction, mining and carpet weaving; in domestic service, carrying out arduous work under conditions of isolation, over excessively long hours and with physical and sexual abuse; in the streets, working as a rag pickers, vendors and child prostitutes often under the threat of violence from street gangs and the police and with exposure to life-threatening diseases; in small industrial workshops like fireworks and Crackers making small industries; at home, tendering domestic services; as bonded labourers in outcry slavery and in predominant exports industries, such as textiles, clothing, carpets and footwear making smalls units of production.

## II. **Magnitude of the Child Labour**

The estimates on the magnitude of the problem of child labour vary due to multiplicity of definitions, different methods of computation and the collection of data at different points of time. Statistics on child labour are therefore not only elusive because of the special and practical difficulties involved in terms of design and implementations of child survey conducted to estimate the problem of child labour, but also because of differences in perception about what constitute a child, or child work, or child labour. According to a Report of the International Labour Organization, the number of working children in the 5-14 age groups in the developing countries is more than 250 million.

## III. **Child Labour in India**

In India the problem of child labour is quite alarming. It is said that roughly out of 5 children below the age of 14 years, one child is engaged in some kind of labourer work, which means 20 percent children are labourer out of the total populations of the children in the country. In fact, there is not proper source of regular collection of statistics on child labour. The only authentic source of collection of data on child labour is the Census conducted every 10 years by the Government of India in the country. According to the Census 2001 figures there are 1.26 crore working children in the age group of 5-14 as compared to the total child population of 25.2 crore. There are approximately 12 lakhs children working in the hazardous occupations/processes which are covered under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act i.e. 18 occupations and 65 processes. As per survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in 2004-05, the number of working children is estimated at 90.75 lakh. As per Census 2011, the number of working children in the age group of 5-14 years has further reduced to 43.53 lakh. It shows that the efforts of the Government have borne the desired fruits. But despite this, still a major section of child population continuous to work under the banner of child labour. A close analysis of the state-wise data further revealed that Andhra Pradesh, still continuous to hold the top rank in terms of maximum number of child labour

employed in varied section of the formal and informal sectors of economy in the state, followed by other states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Most writings on child labour often lack a theory or theoretical base for understanding the issue. Infact, it is difficult to find any theory that could explain the true dynamics of child labour issue. It is therefore; often assume that the nature and extent of poverty in a country determine the number of its child labour. Therefore the theory of poverty—which often is also reflected in a poverty of theory—is also applicable to child labour. Poverty under a capitalist model of development is a systemic feature involving or requiring cheap labour force.

#### **IV. Girl Child Labour in India**

The girl child requires a special mention in the context of child labour in India. Although the labour of the young children of both sexes is exploited, the plight of the girl child labourers is worse off. She is a child, a girl and a labourer, and she faces worst discrimination on all counts, in almost all areas—rural and urban. There are many reports stating that girl child labour being allotted tasks that are more tedious or arduous, more damaging to education, less well paid and requiring a fairly longer working days than boys. The girl child labour is prevalent in areas like Household works, mostly in form of care takers of baby; Agriculture work; home-based piece-rate work; bonded labour and domestic labour. In all the spheres of works, they face rampant and systematic physical and sexual exploitation. Therefore the significant characteristics of the girl child labour are: Invisible work—not recognized as economic activity; no identifiable employer; long working hours and poor conditions that prevents them from attending any school; no skill formation; low pay and low status; physical abuse and sexual harassment.

#### **V. Concluding Remarks**

The Government of all developed countries and many developing ones have removed children from the labour force and required that they attend school. They believe that employers should not be permitted to employ child labour, and parents, no matter how poor, should not be allowed to keep their children out of school. Though India has definitely made a marked progress in overall social development and implemented measures required necessary for the protection of the working children, there is still a need to expand the network of enforcement machinery required for enforcing various existing laws on child labour in the country. This if done, will certainly pave a long way of both the progress of the nation and saving and nourishing the future of millions of children working in both formal and informal labour force of India.

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