

# Role of Society in Elimination of Child Labour

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## Abstract

The world economy is going through difficult times. The global crisis has bequeathed several countries a legacy of high unemployment, unsustainable public firms, and lower potential output. It is therefore time to look ahead and ponder the challenges we will be facing in the years to come.

'Children in India' has always been a topic less spoken and discussed. Childhood is an important stage of human development as it holds the potential of development for any society. Children who are brought up in an environment, which is helpful to their intellectual, physical and social development, go on to be responsible and productive part of the society.

**Keywords:** Elimination, Child Labour

## Introduction

A child labourer is different from other labourers basing on his age. He is not an adult worker i.e., the differentiation is made basing on the worker's age. Children below the age of 14 or 15 years who are earning by doing some productive work outside the family can be grouped as child labourers.

Child labour is used in all types of works in India including the agricultural activities, taking care of the cattle and sheep, taking care of the crop in the fields etc. outside their homes. They are also burdened with some household works like drawing water, collecting fire wood, and participating in household cottage industries for which they are not paid separately. When it comes to urban areas the child labour are engaged in activities like working in factories, tea-stalls, newspaper selling, automobile workshops, selling of fruits, vegetables, and even in beggary.<sup>1</sup>

Participation of children in work is not a new concept particular to this age. It has existed in different forms in every society throughout the human history. According the Mendelievich, "To a greater or lesser extent, children in every type of human society have always taken part, and still do take part, in those economic activities which are necessary, if the group to which they belong is to survive".<sup>2</sup>

It has been pointed out in the Report of the Committee on Child Labour also that child labour is not a new phenomenon related to our age. It has existed in one form or another in all historical times. Employment of children cuts across the geographic, social, national and religious frontiers and has become an established practice in all countries. But, it is also equally important to note that every working child does not constitute to be a part of child labour, as child labour is associated with the presence of certain elements such as deprivation from school, cruelty, etc.

## Defining Child Labour

The term child labour though is used as a synonym for working child or child worker but more commonly it is used in a derisive sense that connotes something which is scornful, insulting and exploitative in nature. Thus the child labour is defined as "any kind of work by children which

interferes with their full physical development, their opportunities for desirable minimum education and their needed recreation".<sup>3</sup> In true sense of the term the child labour indicates the employment of children in gainful occupation in which

they are denied the opportunities of mental, moral development apart from physical growth.

According the UNICEF (2013) "Child labourers constitute a group of child labourers constitute a group of working children who are either too young to work or are engaged in hazardous activities- that is, work



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that is potentially harmful to their physical, social, psychological or educational development.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **Who are Child Labourers?**

To be considered as a child labour the child should have some prominent aspects. These are:

1. The child should be employed in some gainful occupation.
2. The work in which he is engaged should deny him the opportunity of development.
3. It must be either injurious or dangerous for him or his health.
4. His work must affect his physical development.
5. It must forbid him from gaining education.
6. If the child is barred from recreation due to his work then it is also considered as child labour.
7. If it is part-time and carrying remuneration or reward to supplement the family income then it is considered as child labour.

#### **Child Labour Causes**

Existence of child labour is due to many reasons. The prime reason for this is the need of the family. The poor families tend to send their children to work in order to supplement the meagre income they get to supplement the family. Presently according to the Census 2011, the number of child labourers in India is 10.1 million of which 5.6 million are boys and 4.5 million are girls.<sup>5</sup> Globally also this figure is not small as a total of 152 million children – 64 million girls and 88 million boys – are estimated to be in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide. The underlying causes can be traced as below:

#### **Poverty**

The prime cause for child labour in India is poverty. It is a known fact that most of India's population suffers from poverty. In a poor family the parents are not in a position to afford the studies of their children. They make them earn their wages from a tender age. They are compelled to send their small children to work in factories, homes, and shops and made to work to increase the income of their poor families at the earliest. These decisions are taken only to ease out a living for their family. But such decisions are not in favour of the children as their physical and mental state affected by losing their childhood at an early age.

#### **Social and Economic Backwardness**

Another reason for the existence of child labour is the social and economic condition of the poor population of India. Social backwardness leads to ignorance. Due to ignorance the poor do not get their children educated. Another reason for this is the illiteracy of the parents. Many children are deprived of various welfare schemes meant for the development of child education. Lack of education, illiteracy and consequently the lack of awareness of their rights among them have led child labour. Uneducated parents who are unaware of the impact of child labour on their children force them to child labour. The conditions of poverty and unemployment in rural families are responsible for the child labour in India.

#### **Lack of Resources for Education**

It is a hard fact that even today children are deprived of their fundamental right to education. The

remote rural areas of our country still do not have proper facilities for education. Even today there are a number of poor families for whom getting their children educated is a distant dream. Children are forced to live in illiteracy for want of a school nearby. Compulsions like this push them into the trap of child labour in India.

#### **Addiction, Disease or Disability**

In India there are instances where the child's income is the only income in the family. This condition arises due to addiction of alcohol (commonly seen in many poor families), disease or disability.

#### **Attraction of Cheap Labour by the Employer**

In the greed of cheap labour, some shopkeepers, companies and factory owners employ children as it is the cheap kind of labour. Shopkeepers and small businessmen make children work as much as the elders do 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 the economic needs of poor families have encouraged child labour in India. 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.

#### **Family Tradition**

It is a shocking but 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.

#### **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 the 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.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Unemployment**

The growing trend of unemployment is also a cause for child labour. Parents in the poor families often see that there is very little hope of getting a decent job even after receiving formal education for a few years. Hence they prefer to send the children to work so that they would become proficient after a few years of learning the work and would earn more after the initial years of training as a child labourer.

#### **Types of Child Labour**

Broadly speaking the types of child labour can be divided into the following major categories.

**Unpaid/Low-Paid Domestic Workers**

Household activities that include cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, taking care of sibling, fetching water etc., are performed by children in almost all societies. In rural society, the children have to look after livestock, protect and watch the crops, work in kitchen garden, weed and thrash corn and engage in spinning and weaving, knitting and tailoring etc (specially the girls). These activities interfere with the full growth of child worker apart from making them deprived of early education, pleasure, leisure and recreation etc.

**Child Labour on Wage**

Child worker also work on piece rate or time rate both in organised and unorganised sectors including informal sector of the economy for monetary gain. This type of child worker is absorbed in gainful occupation. It is an individual task of work.

**Wage Labour in Home Based Work**

A number of working children are found in home-based work helping their parents.<sup>7</sup> These children exercise meaningful economic practices and provide significant participation on different home based activities along with other members of family collectively. The child labour is usually engaged in farming, household and cottage industries and in any other occupations traditionally practised and pursued.

**Bonded Child Labour**

Notwithstanding the prevalence of the children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933 which declares an agreement, oral or written, to pledge the labour of children, whereby the parent or the guardian of a child in return of any payment or benefit to be received, undertakes to cause or allow the service of a child to be utilized in any employment to be void, the bonded child labour still exists. Bonded child labour, is an inter-generational phenomenon. After slaving for many years, when the man becomes too old to work, his master demands that the young son or sons be sent to replace the father and around the age often, the young child is introduced into the system of bondage.<sup>8</sup> Under bondage systems thus the children have to contribute a specific work as part of a peasant feudal family, hi the second category, the indebted parents pledge their children for the sake of their needs.<sup>9</sup>

**Self Employed Labour**

The children below 15 years very often engage themselves in income generating activities due to abject poverty of their parents or for other compelling circumstances. This type of child labour does not work under any supervision. Wages are also not paid by anybody, they earn through vending, shoe-polishing, rag-picking and serving as porter. This group of self employed labourers working mainly in urban metropolitan centres and return to their families in the evenings.

**Child Worker of Street Children Category**

Street children, not all of course, constitute another category of children who work for survival and are largely found in semi-urban and urban metropolitan centres. These children find themselves on the street because they have either run away from their families, or been abandoned or kidnapped. They

usually live in public places such as railway station, bus stop, footpaths and are without the protection of their families.<sup>10</sup> They are employed as part timers by others temporarily on payment. These child labourers are seen working in construction site and shops as helpers. They also serve in dhabas (small way-side eating place) restaurants and hotels etc. The children who indulge into begging and performing some criminal activities under the aegis of certain middlemen/touts and antisocial elements also fall in this category of child labour.

**Migrant Child Labour**

In India a part of the economy is run with child labours and mostly migrant child labours.<sup>11</sup> Migrant child labour originates from the labour mobility towards districts or states or outside where industry and employment opportunities are expanding. The migrant streams differ in dimensions but the principal current of modern migration all over the world is towards urban areas. The poverty, economic marginality, scanty flow of resources to rural area, crop failure, flood, drought, lawlessness of parents, distressed living conditions, indebtedness and bondage etc. are some of the reasons for the emergence of migrant child labour. A family migrates with children mainly under economic compulsion though other reasons stated above support it. Whereas the adult family members taking shelter in city slum, railway platform, bus stop, under fly-over etc., and work in building-construction, road construction, the migrant children engage in rag picking vending etc.

In semi-urban areas these migrant families also work in brick kiln, stone crushing etc. where children below 15 yrs of age are engaged with the task of helping their parents. This activity of children hampers the physical growth and development.

The legislative measures provide legal protection to children in various occupations. But, never-the-less of these legislative measures child labour prevails in many sectors of Indian economy. The reasons for existence of child labour are due to numerous flaws in the legislative enactment, narrow purview of the legislative acts and improper implementation with a weak an incompetent inspecting agency. Other significant reasons:

**Absence of Schemes for Family Allowance**

One of the significant causes of child labour, which is as causative as poverty is the absence of schemes for family allowances. In our country there is no scheme for family allowance which may debar the people sending their children to the labour market. Such type of family allowances are given in a number of countries like Australia, U.K. France. U.S.S.R., New Zealand etc.<sup>12</sup>

**Magnitude of Child Labour in India**

Census 2011, details show that the total child population in India between the age group 5-14 years is 259.6 million. Of these, 10.1 million i.e., 3.9% of total child population are working, either as 'main worker' or as 'marginal worker'. More than 42.7 million children in India are out of school.

However, a small decreasing trend of child labour is seen in India in the last decade. It is decreased by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011. However, the decline was more visible in rural areas,

while the number of child workers has increased in urban areas, indicating the growing demand for child

workers in menial jobs. Child labour has different ramifications in both rural and urban India.

Year	Percentage of working children (5-14)			Total number of working children (5-14) in millions		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
2001	5.9	2.1	5.0	11.4	1.3	12.7
2011	4.3	2.9	3.9	8.1	2.0	10.1

**Source - Census 2001 and 2011**

**Distribution of working children by type of work in 2011**

Area of work	Percentage	Number (in millions)
Cultivators	26.0	2.63
Agricultural labourers	32.9	3.33
Household industry workers	5.2	0.52
Other workers*	35.8	3.62

**\*Other Workers': Workers other than cultivators, Agricultural labourers or workers in household Industry.**

**Source: Census 2011**

**Legislations for the Control of Child Labour in India**

ILO, one of the UN systems of organizations, has expressed much concern for child labour and made several policies for the well being of working children as also for the elimination of child labour. The programs of ILO focused their attention on prohibiting child labour, protecting children at work; attacking the basic causes of child labour and helping children to adapt to future work life. Till now, 18 conventions and 16 recommendations have been accepted and adopted by the ILO in the interest of working children all over the world.

Another most important organization of United Nations which promotes the elimination of child labour is United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The world conference of human rights in principle, 18, 21, 23 and 29 has stressed the importance of children and child rights including covering gender based violence, discrimination, armed conflicts, and sexual exploitation of children. Convention No 138 of ILO stipulates that the minimum age at which children can start work not below the age of compulsory schooling and in any case not less than 15 years; with a possible exception for developing countries. Convention No. 182 prohibits hazardous work which is likely to jeopardize children's physical, mental or moral health. It aims at immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour for children below 18 years.<sup>13</sup>

After independence, the first step towards helping child labour was the amendment of the Factories Act, 1948, which revised minimum age for entering into employment in factories to 14 years. The Minimum Wages Act, the Mines Act, the Plantation Labour Act, the Merchant Shipping Act, the Shops and Establishment Act, the Motor Transport Workers Act, the Apprentice Act, the Bidi and Cigar workers Act and the Child Labour(Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 are the other legal enactments passed by the government to protect the conditions of child labour.

Apart from the constitutional and legal enactments and various committees, the government tried to protect the children through five year plans. Before the fifth five year plan, the government focused on improving the conditions of child labour. However from the fifth plan, the government changed its policy from child welfare to child development through a variety of programs.

Since child labour cannot be abolished over night it was suggested to strengthen the existing legislation. Another important need is the protection of the health of child labour. The planning committee suggested that certain departments could be effectively converged for elimination of child labour. The schools should be strengthened and made attractive by providing qualified and committed staff.

**Role of Society**

In the countries like India poverty, hunger, appalling socio-economic condition, illiteracy, unemployment all such factors have forced the children to enter into labour force.

Child labourers who are working in various sectors exhibit several characters like frustration, aggression, etc., as per various studies conducted on them. The ILO plays a vital role in removal of child labour, by evolving international policies benefiting children. ILO estimated child labour at 248 million, globally which showed the gravity of problem. India possesses the highest child labour force in the world as per certain studies.

Participation of children in work is not a new concept particular to this age. It has existed in different forms in every society throughout the human history. Employment of children cuts across the geographic, social, national and religious frontiers and has become an established practice in all countries.

During the ancient India the child was rightly protected. The Manu Smriti reveals the fact that education was necessary for the children and the parents were punished, if they did not send their children to the hermitage of Guru or university after their attaining the age of eight years. Even during the British rule, the government has passed various acts to minimize the exploitation of the children, who constitute the most vulnerable group of the society. A number of enactments of child labour laws have concentrated mainly on such aspects as minimizing working hours, increasing the minimum age for child employment etc.,

**Suggestions**

1. Society can play an important role in spreading parental awareness of the evils of child labour. Lack of understanding of the parents is the main cause of child labour. Hence awareness programs in the illiterate communities could curtail child labour to a great extent.
2. The philanthropic organizations along with providing opportunities for the children to come

out of their appalling situation should mould the children to continue their studies in the schools. The awareness built in these societies for the benefits of education could play an important role in curbing child labour.

3. The curriculum should take into consideration of the actual requirements of certain section of people and should be more non-formal and vocational oriented which should come to their use in course of their learning period.
4. Lastly, it must be mentioned that the root cause of child labour is the greed for cheap employment. Hence the children should be paid equally as that of the adults. This would surely decrease the child labour as small children who are not very efficient compared to the adult workers in the same area of work would automatically be discouraged by the employer as there is no greed of getting work done with less money.

#### **Conclusion**

Problems like child labour are blots in the society in every nation. Poor countries like India face this problem with greater magnitude. The solutions should come from both the government as well as the society. If the government and the society work hand in hand the long standing problem of the child labour could be solved with greater efficiency. This could be done only with continued and strategic efforts of the government as well as the society.

Analysis of child labour in India shows that children are working in different sectors across the country. Given the varied situation in which the children are working, strategies for the elimination of child labour need to be inclusive and non-negotiable. One of the most important change needed is removal of distinction between child labour and child work.

Therein lies the importance of study of child labour in India.

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