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Child labour as an economic problem in India

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Abstract

Children in Indian society has always been a topic less spoken or discussed. The reasons of the same can be traced back to the socio-cultural background of the country. In the world children are taken as the greatest gift to humanity. Childhood is an important stage of human development as it holds the potential to the future of any society. Children who are brought up in an environment which is helpful to their intellectual, physical and social development will go on to be responsible and productive part of the society. Thus every society links its future to the present status of its children. Today child has been defined differently by different agencies as per their view and there is a very large gap and contradiction in these definitions. This paper attempts to give a brief overview of the magnitude of the issue from an Indian perspective. Some suggestions collected by the author, from academicians and also from the policy and plan documents about the way of eradicating the problems, are summarised in the paper. In the end the outline of the plan and strategies as identified are also given with author's suggestions. The paper identifies that a lot of policy plans have been worked but there is an urgent need for a social movement for this issue to really get addressed and resolved.

Keywords: Child labour, economic problem, effects, child development

1. Introduction

Children in Indian society has always been a topic less spoken or discussed. Children in every society have always been taken as the greatest gift to humanity. Childhood is an important stage of human development as it holds the potential to the future development of 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. If we are to engage the children in to work when they are too young for the task, we are unduly reducing their present welfare or their future income earning capabilities, either by shrinking their future external choices or by reducing their future individual productive capabilities. Generally it is said that due to economic problems children are forced to forego educational and other development opportunities and take up jobs which mostly exploit them as they are usually underpaid and engaged in hazardous conditions. Child Labour is a harsh reality and unavoidable in the present scenario of social and economic realities. Child Labour is not a new problem. It is a age old problem and it is perceived as a social evil in present situation. The Encyclopedia of social sciences (1959) defines child labour as "When the business of wage earning or of participation in work, conflicts directly or indirectly with the business of growth and education of children the result is child labour. The child labour is essentially a development problem. It is prevalent in all the developing countries. The problem of child labour is an universal phenomenon. It is in existence in one form or another since historic times. However it is perverted as a social problem. The child labour problem is significantly acute in the developing countries than in the developed nation with the increasing rate of industrialization and modernization. The incidence of child labour in all the developing countries has been growing at an alarming rate. The child labour concept leads to confusion as it is guided by various individual considerations. So a standard has to be accepted to determine an age range for defining a child labour is one of the oldest profession of the world and has remained as the most neglected part of population for the last few centuries. In mid 20th century social references Jurists began to bring reforms against such neglected and exploited class of human labour consideration their tender age.

Child labour is a ubiquitous and persistent problem of our country and has been a given subject of grave for administrators, policy makers, academicians and jurists for the last couple of years. The problem of child labour has been tackled to certain extent through legislation and countries of the world have enacted certain laws and regulations restricting the employment of children below certain age and specifying the conditions restricting the employment of children below certain age and specifying the conditions allowing minors to work in certain profession. Child labour refers to the employment of children in a cartable occupations or national contribution to the income of the family. It is both an economic and social evil in that it leads to serious health hazards and denies them opportunity for physical and mental development. The term child labour is commonly interpreted in two different ways, first as an economic evil and secondly as a social evil. In the first context it signifies employment of children to earn the livelihood for them or for their family. In the second context it is said to restrict on children obstructing them to develop academically. Definition of child labour in terms of age or which reference to occupation will not be adequate it will be necessary to examine the social situation which makes the children work. The child labour could be defined as an activity of earning of supporting self or family which directly or indirectly comes into conflict with the opportunities for further physical and mental growth of the child. In India the term child labour refers to those engaged in earnable work. Child labour includes working in all forms of non industrial occupations which are injurious to their physical, mental, moral and social development. "Any work by children that interfere with their full physical development, their opportunities for a desirable minimum of education or their needed recreation". Home folks (1979), chairman US National Child Labour Committee. The term child labour basically means the children below the age of fifteen who are employed for hire or reward in occupation that are injurious to their physical, mental, intellectual, moral and social development due to depression and exploitation internet in that employment. Hence the term child labour is not applicable to children working in all for an hour or two to earn their pocket money or assisting their parents in house work. According to child labour prohibition and regulation act of 1986 employment of children up to the age of 14 years and in the case of hazardous employment up to 18 years is define as child labour and is banned.

2. Poverty Relating to Child Labour

Poverty can be characterized as a state of deprivation, dependence and degradation below physically and socio culturally acceptable standards. It associated with a level of living below a set of norms held necessary for human beings. These norms are related to the basic physiological need like caloric intake, clothing, shelter, drinking water, medical aid and education etc it also includes some special needs like participation, human dignity, self-esteem and status etc. The issue of poor/poverty has different dimensions. The poorest of poor are beggars, pavement dwellers, sick people etc. The ducted and politically conscious poor vary from the socially isolated poor in villages. We may find various categories of poor such as bonded labourers, landless labours, and manual labourers with a little land. Scheduled castes, backward castes and upper castes, poor differ among themselves on different

social and psychological dimensions. The concept of poverty from a different angle with the opinion that a family with more dependent children is poor. But when the children become independent and earners the income of the family increases and naturally the family comes out of poverty. The family even with substantial income becomes poor because of its poor financial management. Hence all these factors may have their influence in different contexts whether directly for the incidence of child labour.

3. Myths and Realities of Child Labour

Traditionally poverty is considered as the major cause of child labour contrary to this belief many studies established the fact that child labour also comes from improvised families. In some case exploited child labour perpetuates poverty. Even though child labour is generally considered as a problem of the enveloping world. The reality is children of different ages routinely work in different forms in all industrialized countries. Child Labour is considered as the result of the poor having more number of children. The reality is more than the number of children it is the parental discretions about the child is priorities and lack of faith in the formal education is causing the child labour. Many parents believe that working children will be equipped with skills for the future but practically. The task allotted to child workers is simple and repetitive such as cleaning, serving helping and minor repairing. Skills are a misnomer when related to the toil and drudgery children engage in many things that children prefer to work. In many cases lack of interest in schooling is making the children to prefer for work, because of their inability to conceive of an alternative. Many believe that there is nothing wrong in allowing children to work in non hazardous occupations. Even jobs which are not inherently hazardous become hazardous for children, when they are made to do the job for long periods defying their rights of recreation leisure and play. There is a general believe that child labour is inevitable in certain fields. But the fact is that child workers may be replaced with adults which naturally enhance the cost of a product or service. This consequence is not acceptable to all concerned.

4. About the Problem

To any economy the child can be natural resources. The child can be compared with a bud. It is the responsibility of any society to provide a necessary atmosphere and opportunities to transform the bud into a blossom flower. However it is most unfortunate and heart burning to listen that millions of children in the age of 5 to 14 in many Asian, African and Laten American countries are attending to work. In fact the statistics relating to magnitude of incidence of child labour are not exact, in view of the fact that legislation is not controlling the unorganized sector in various countries. The estimates are only an indication of growing child labour issue. The reasons for child labour are many. In some cases it is the social backwardness, but in many cases more than economic reasons, lack of interest in formal schooling and child development programmes pushing the children to work. For example certain communities in the society treat begging as their profession. In spite of having significant properties they continue begging, which may be called as culture poverty. On the same lines the problem of child labour is wide spread among low income groups who are also educationally backward. Many people from upper castes are in a better position in

social and educational aspects in spite of their economic backwardness. High caste parents show significantly greater interest in the educational progress. A long percentage of working children belong to Hindu religion and the percentage of backward classes and scheduled castes children among them is significant. The main reason for the low proportion of scheduled castes child workers more in agricultural sectors. It is generally observed that there is religious conversion from Hinduism to Christianity among the scheduled castes in rural areas.

5. Conclusion

The child is a natural resource for an economy. It is the responsibility of the society to provide necessary atmosphere and opportunities to transform children into potential human resource. They are the future makers of the nation. Childhood is understood to cover the period of the first 14 years in India (Article 24 of Indian Constitution). The most important cause of widespread child labour is the chronic poverty which forces the parents to send their children to seek employment parents are not only incapable of investing in their children's development due to poverty but also reluctant to support them and went them to starting earning as soon as possible. The tendency of the employers to attract children for economic reasons is also resulting in child labour problem. Limited success in providing compulsory education in all children below the age group of 14 as stipulated in the directive principals of state policy is another important factor. Families migrated from rural areas to urban centre's for livelihood could not bear the cost of living and all the family members have to work and this caused for the child labour illiteracy and ignorance of parents and large size of the family is forcing child to work. Lack of schooling facilities and high rate of school dropouts is also leading to child labour. Various theories of poverty gave explanation to the incidence of the child labour in different sectors caused by cultural of poverty and economic necessities. Social and cultural deprivation in some communities is also forcing the children to go for work. Lack of family harmony and child abuse is making to discontinue schooling and start working for livelihood.

6. Recommendations

In world economies where child labour has been eradicated, multi-pronged strategies were used. Stringent laws were made making child labour illegal. Also the educational system was strengthened so that children removed from work could go to school. * A New Definition of Child Labour: An analysis of the situation of child labour in India shows that children are working in different sectors across the country. Given the varied situations in which children are working, strategies for the elimination of child labour need to be inclusive and non-negotiable. One of the most important change that is needed is removal of the artificial distinction between 'child labour' and 'child work'. * Amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act 1986: Enforcement of the law is a key strategy. But in the case of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, there are a number of loopholes, which makes the law ineffective. The Act must be non-negotiable and to do so it is suggested that the word "Regulation" should be removed so that child labour abolition becomes non-negotiable. Similarly the penal provisions must be enhanced, employment of child labour must be deemed as a

cognisable offence with imprisonment to the offending employer. So that a clear message is given that child labour will not be accepted. * A New Policy for Child Labour: A lot of changes have been done since the child labour policy 1986. But a further relook of all the laws and policies is urgently needed. Consistency in the constitutional and legal provisions pertaining to children's rights is critical and required. * Social Mobilisation: Given that eradication of child labour is not an easy task, preventive strategies are more sustainable in the long run. One of the major preventive strategies, which must feature in any national child labour eradication policy, is the role of social mobilization and community participation. It is vital to ensure that children stay at home and go to formal schools rather than leave home to work full time. * Awareness Programmes: There has to be a national campaign to invoke public interest and large-scale awareness on this issue, there is a need for an extensive awareness generation campaign launched over a period of time at the Centre and State level on a sustained basis. Required budgetary provisions for such a mass campaign must be provided by the government. * Removal of Poverty: The single big generator of child labour is poverty, so efforts should be made to eradicate. The poverty eradication policies both at centre and state level should be adopted and policies framed must be implemented properly

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