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Child labour in India: retrospect and prospect

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Abstract

The word 'Child labour' indicates the working children below 14 years who are paid either in cash or kind. Child labours are existing all around the world. Despite a positive enactment, it could not be checked. An estimated 250 million children aged about 14 years are engaged in hazardous works, prostitution and bonded labour. Unskilled employment, exploitation of poors, illiteracy, child marriages are the factor which encourages the child labourhood. The mass education and employment are the sole solution of the problem.

Keywords: child labour, problem, law

Introduction

The expression 'Child labour' means the working child who is below the age of 14 years and who is paid either in cash or kind ^[1]. The child labour denotes the existence of poverty in the country and shows the situation of denial of equality and equals rights in the society also. There can be no denying of the facts that the poverty is the prime reason of labour. The words 'child labour' and 'working children' are the synonymous words. The poverty in the family compels the child to come out of home to kind a petty job to support his family. The 'illiteracy' on one hand increases the child-labourhood and on the other hand it also increases the unemployment as well. Unskilled employment, exploitation of poors and labourers and child marriages etc. are the encouraging factors. These working children are compelled to live in unhygienic and unhealthy conditions and they also face bad health conditions.

Historical perspectives

The employment of child in the form of slavery was noticed and found mention in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* of the 3rd. Century B.C. Where child slaves of less than eight years of age were known to be working in the noble's houses. In the medieval and period, children were working placed as a trainees under artisans and craftsmen ^[2]. Certain crafts were totally dependent on the employment of children. The tradition still continues in carpet, cotton, silk weaving, fire works, match industries etc. which provide large scale employment to children. In an agration society, children work according to their capacities. They started leaning at early stage and enter to function as a productive members of the family and community. India, being an agricultural country, a large number of children are working in the farming since ancient ages. In the quashi-feudal traditions of rural production, almost all the members of a poor and dalit family have to work for the landlords. The situation of bonded labour are often seen in this system also.

The existence of child labour has its roots in two traditions: (a) from children learning their disciplines and skill of works from their parents; and (b) from bonded labour when a young child is given to a landlord in lieu of debt repayment and the landlord uses him as her bonded servant. The young children are often, particularly in metropolitan cities, are often attracted towards criminal activities for earning easy money as these easy earnings make their lives comfortable for a short period. The rapid urbanization, industrialization and growing employment are the encouraging factors.

The existence of working children are found in the developed countries also but they work there in agriculture and a few others in urban areas during holidays or outside the school hours. In urban areas, activities in hotels, restaurants, milk supply etc.

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National Perspective

There are around 6 crores of children working in the various sectors in India, who work for approximately 200 days in a year^[3]. Each child, says a report prepared by a NGO, *Bachpan Bachao 'Andolan'*, earns an average of Rs. 15/- per day and, thus, annually the child labour in India generates about Rs. 18,000/- crores annually.

The total number of house-hold estimates in India all over the country is around 102.3 million, out of which 35.5 million (34.7%) are those with working children. In rural area, the share of household is the most of the hearth, the lowest proportion of working children household is the eastern zone^[4].

About 44% of working children are illiterate, about 22.1% are stated to have received education upto primary level, and others 25% had their education upto the secondary level. Nearly 3% among them are graduate and post graduate while 3.8% are literate with no formal education. Almost half of the urban working children are illiterate while among urban working children, illiterates constitutes hardly 19% whereas every tenth working children is a degree holder,^[5]

So far as average earning is concerned, four out of every five working children fall within low income group i.e. less than Rs. 500/- per month. About 16% are the middle income earners i.e. Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000/-, while about 40% belong to high income group earning about Rs. 1000/-. In rural areas, low income group working children account for 85.7%, the middle income for 12% and the high income 2.4% only. In urban area, the low income group account for 5.9% and 5.1% respectively.

Perspective of Bihar

Bihar has a large population of working children. The population of working children in Bihar upto 14 years of age is about 3.54 crores which constitute 40% of total population^[6]. The average death rate of children below 5 years of age is 22.8 and thus about 23 children out of per thousand children die before arriving at the age of 5 years^[7]. Out of total population of children upto 6 to 11 years (i.e. 1.76 crores), about 1.11 crores are getting somehow the primary education. Nearly 63.3% of children are getting no education at all. Nearly 11 lakhs working children of 6 to 14 years of age are employed in various sectors either for their livelihood or for family support^[8]. Out of population of 11 lakhs of working children, nearly 3.49 lakhs of them (about one third) are the girls. According to the official census, the total population of female working children in 1981 census was found to be 2.18 lakh in the 31 districts of Bihar.

Conclusion

The existence of child labour in India even after above six decades of independence is unfortunate. Govt. has enacted '**Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**' with a positive expectation of eliminating the problem of child labour existing almost everywhere in our country. Poverty and employment are the sole reason. Only mass education and employment can solve the problem of child labour.

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