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SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD LABOUR: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

The prevalence of child labour is one of the most important problems confronting the world at large, especially developing countries such as India. Child labour is an illegal act & has been a big social and economic issue in India as well as in the world for years. Millions of children are engaged in hazardous situations, or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and practiced in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. India continues to host the largest number of child laborers in the world today. According to 2011 there were 21.39 million economically active children in the age group of 5-14 years. The child labourer's socio-economic and health conditions are vulnerable. Campaigns to eliminate the exploitation and abuse of children through child labour have been growing in strength in the last decade. The need for more nuanced intervention is now widely accepted, as is the need for more careful definition and prioritization of what is to be eliminated. The existing international economic order perpetuates this harsh reality because powerful multi-national corporations operate and use child labour directly or indirectly, to maximize profits and minimize costs.

KEYWORDS: Society, Economic, Marginal, Prevention

INTRODUCTION:

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. About one third of children of the developing world are failing to complete even 4 years of education¹. In spite of global movement there is growing child labour, superficially it seems that we must support such a movement wholeheartedly. Where there are many children doing much work in a society, this is a symptom that there is something wrong—that the children are not able fully to develop their potential. India's population has more than 17.5 million working children in different industries, and incidentally maximum are in the agricultural sector, leather industry, mining and match-making industries, etc². Seeing children on the streets is a problem for government and urban officials, and for us, the public. Living on the streets creates many problems for the children, but this life usually comprises a solution to the greater problems they faced before. The informal sector of the rural and urban economies of the developing countries is an important source of employment for a major chunk of the labour force, particularly, child and women labour. In the urban areas child labour exists both in the formal as well as in the informal sector enterprises, though its presence in the latter is more frequent. In small manufacturing enterprises which are spread over wide locations and can ignore legal restrictions, the children often work along with their elder relatives and friends. They are possibly not paid directly but indirectly through a supplementary wage paid to the main worker³. The packing, pasting, labeling and wrapping etc are the main activities of the

child-drew working in small industries. Domestic servants, workers in hotels and restaurants, canteens wayside shops and establishments or as hawkers, rag pickers, newspaper seller, peddlers, coolies, shoeshine's, vendors or helpers in repair shops are the main occupations of the working children in the urban areas. In most of the developing counties, the parents depend upon their children to assist them in performing important work at home or out-side.

Economic Roles of Children: The distinction between Economic and Non-economic activities is unsatisfactory for the analysis of child activity patterns. The most important categories of child activities are (i) domestic work (ii) non-domestic and non-monetary work (iii) ties or bonded labour. Children also perform marginal economic activities like selling of newspaper, shoe-polishing, sorting of garbage, etc. which constitute as fifth category. In the domestic work category, cleaning cooking child care and other domestic chores are undertaken by children. In general, these tasks tend to be sex-oriented, girls child taking disproportionate share of the total. This is exactly the case in our country. Non-domestic and non-monetary works is a major form of child activity in subsistence economies, and encompasses farm activities and such tasks as bunting and gathering. In agrarian economy like India children spend a great deal of time in such activities like tending livestock, protecting crops from animals, weeding and other tasks associated with subsistence production. The work under this category may be for auto-consumption or for market.

In India child labour is prevalent on a very large scale because of mass poverty and widespread unemployment. When children are compelled to enter labour force it harms full physical development of teenagers and they are unable to secure a niche in the labour market. The availability of cheap low-cost children labour also leads to unemployment of adults and lowers their earnings. Costing about labour is substituted by cheap and meek child labour. Thus, employment of children puts pressure on wage rates, demand and earnings of adult labour.

While the developed industrialized nations are approximately free from the incidence of child labour, the developing countries like India are having heavy concentration of child labour employment of children is not only a reflection of poverty but also of socio-cultural framework with deep-seated illiteracy and traditional outlook of people in the under developed countries. It is high time to move all of us towards committed action for elimination of child labour system. Strong political will and public consciousness are urgently required. It is reality that children are sent to work due to sheer necessity in the family.

The phenomenon of child labour clearly demonstrates the vicious circle of poverty and unemployment.

Child Labour World Scenario : According to census 2011, there were 255 million economically active children in the age group of 5-14 years in India the extent of child labour is not as large as in Turkey, Thailand, Bangladesh, Brazil, Pakistan, Indonesia, Mexico and Egypt. It is estimated around 5.2% of the total labour force in India as against 27.3% in Turkey, 20.7% in Thailand 19.5% in Bangladesh 18.8% in Brazil 16.6% in Pakistan 12.4% in Indonesia 11.5% in Mexico and 8.2% in Egypt. However in Sri Lanka the child labor accounts for only 4.4% of the total labour force. Even the workforce participation rate of children in the age group 10-14 years in India (10.4%) is less than Bangladesh (33.3%) Nepal (22%) and Pakistan (11.6%) but greater than Indonesia (8%) and Sri Lanka (1.8%)⁵.

The Planning Commission of India has pointed out that the extent of child labour in India is on increase overtime. While child labour is continuously being employed, not much is known about the contribution of child labour to the household income. Moreover, not many empirical studies exist on the subject in the state of Punjab, which is one of the most developed states of India in terms of its per capita income.

Child Labour in India Scenario: Every child is a gift of God. A gift must be nurtured with care and affection, with in the family and society. But unfortunately, due to socio-economic and cultural problem, the code of child centeredness was replaced by neglect, abuse and deprivation, particularly in the poverty afflicted, sections of the society. Child labour is a conspicuous problem in India. Its prevalence is evident in the child work participation rate, which is more than that of other developing countries. Poverty is the reason for child labour in India. The meager income of child laborers is also absorbed by their families. The paucity of organized banking in the rural areas creates a void in taking facilities, forcing poor families to push their children in harsh labour, the harshest being bonded labour. India has always stood for constitutional, statutory and development measures required elimination child labour. The Indian constitution has consciously incorporated provisions to

secure compulsory universal elementary education as well as labour protection for children. Labour commissions in India have gone into the problems of child labor and have made extensive recommendations.

Policy and Programmes for Identifications Release and Rehabilitation of Child Labour in Bihar: All though child labour is spread over all the districts of the state, there are a few districts which are found to have a concentration of child labor. Since is not possible to eliminate or prevent child labour from the entire state one for all, the need is to phase out the work by giving priority to districts with a higher incidence of child labor. The first and foremost task that needs to be undertaken is a survey in all the above identified districts with a view to preparing a child labour profile of the districts. The survey will be done by the districts project society with the help of officers and staff of labour department and block level officers and staff of the districts administration. The department would undertake periodic survey of the children engaged in work and are the data so obtained for the purpose of elimination, release and rehabilitation of the child labor. In doing so, the department would coordinate with the department of HRD and BEP. The department would undertake community mobilization and awareness building activities to create a coalition of willing against child labour. The key elements of the policy package for elimination and prevention of child labour are education, awareness, enforcing, training, rehabilitation any support to the released children at district and village level. The objective of this will be to go beyond the mere rescue and restoration phase, and support the released children after they are brought back to their respective districts/village. For this purpose, cooperation of the Panchayats and NGOs would be sought and a regular tracking and monitoring system would be put in place at the district and village level to ensure that the educational and economic rehabilitation of the child labour is completed and they do not release to the work again.

Inter-Sectoral Linkages with various Government Departments for Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour: for successful implementation of the programmes for prevention and elimination of child labour, there has been integration between various departments of the states. The following departments are concerned with the programmes:-

Rural Development Department- This department is responsible for the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in the rural area, such as schemes under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The department would put in place an effective monitoring mechanic, build the capacity of the executing agencies and work in close cooperation with the labour resources department to achieve synergy on child labour issues in the rural area.

Urban Development Department : This department to ensure that benefit of the SJSRY also reaches to the families of urban child labour, which in any care would be poor and marginalized, so as to ensure the economic rehabilitation of their parents/family.

Health Department : Economists believe that poverty causes poor health, which leads to low productivity, which in turn leads to low income, which leads to low consumption and ultimately the low consumption cause poor health. Children working in hazardous forms of employment are exposed to serious health risks. The parent of such children, essentially children being poor and ignorant of health hazards, cannot afford to take their children to avail the health facilities.

Human resources development department: As we know that free and compulsory education is now a fundamental right of every child, the human resource department would take necessary steps to universalized the elementary education for all out of school children in the age group of 6-14 years. The HRD department would undertake sensitize the stakeholders including educational administration on teacher association and peoples representatives on the issues of right to education and article 21A. open more schools to achieve universal access and ensure that no habitation remain without school.

Social Welfare Department: this department is the nodal department for protection of child rights and implementation of social security schemes, hence a major player in the rehabilitation process of child labour. The department is also responsible for the implementation of juvenile justice (care and protection of children) Act-2015 which concerns, inter alia, care protection and rehabilitation of the children in need of care and protection. This department would provide scholarships to the child labour of entitled categories enrolled in the schools. Provide benefits under extant welfare schemes to the child labour of entitled categories.

Some more reasons for Child Labour:

Culture & Tradition in Demand: Cotton growing is still very labour intensive and so there is a demand for cheap labour. In other types of work like a family business or farming children might be pulled into work because education isn't valued and work is thought to be of more use.

Cheap & Obedient: The relatively low wages paid to children are often a reason why employers prefer them to adult workers. Some children work unpaid, particularly as domestic workers, in conditions that would be learned as "Slavery" if they involved adults. Employers find children more obedient and easier to control.

Nimble Fingers: Children are considered to be suited to certain types of work and those who use children to work argue this work can't be performed better by adults.

The Role of Education: not attending school is a cause and an effect to child labour. In many countries education is not free and parents still pay a fee for their children to attend primary school, as well as buying books and providing a school uniform. For a poor family this can be a lot of money, alongside the lack of income for the household while a child is at school⁶.

The Consequences of Child Labour: The negative impact on the socio-economic and psychological levels of children includes specific concerns of child labour and its consequences on mental health. It is worth noting that one third of children of the developing world are failing to complete even 4 years of education. Poverty is considered as one of the contributory factors in child labour mental well being is less frequently researched in child labour⁷. Mental health problems of children in labour were likely to be associated with socioeconomic determinants as well as factors related to their underage employment. The physical and social consequences are deliberated by researchers; however, mental health area has not been explored so much. Studies are lacking even in Indian scenario regarding impact of child labor on mental health.

Intervention and Child Labour: Education is a very important part of development. Children who are drawn to child labour are basically driven by economic deprivation, lack of schooling and engagement of family for daily needs. Studies have found low enrollment with increased rates of child employment. Schools are the platform for early intervention against child labour, as it restricts their participation in menial jobs. Hurdles in this approach are economic reasons. Unless economic change is brought about, the children will not be able to attend the school. Child labour can be controlled by economic development increasing awareness and making education affordable across all levels, and enforcement of anti child labour laws⁸. The Government of India has taken certain initiatives to control child labour. The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme was launched in 9 districts of high child labour density in the country. Under the scheme, funds are given to the District Collectors for running special schools for child labour. Most of these schools are run by the NGOs in the district. Under the scheme, these children are provided formal/informal education along with vocational training, and a stipend of Rs. 100 per month. Health check-up is also done for them.

Conclusion: It is argued that the term child labour should not be used in analytical academic discourse. Alliance, in its policy document on the exploitation of children has offered similar advice, but with little effect-even the organizations officers frequently fail to follow this advice. This recommendation poses a problem in communication with wider society, where any attempt to challenge the term can easily attract social stigma of tolerating the economic exploitation of children. The Government has been laying a lot of emphasis on the rehabilitation of their 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 have proven crucial to breaking the cycle of child labour. Multidisciplinary approach involving specialists with medical, psychological and socio-anthropological level is needed to curb this evil⁹. Children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that children and youth are protected against exploitations and against moral and material abandon.

Substantial efforts are essential to eliminate disparities and ensure quality with equity. Successful implementation of the Act would certainly go a long way eradicating child labour in India.

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