Child labour is not a problem only in the context of India but it is a worldwide phenomenon. Although many legislations and laws have been framed to put a ban on this but child labour is still widely practiced. Today, in many countries, child labour accounts for 22% of the workforces in Asia, 32% in Africa, 17% in Latin America, 1% in U.S., Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations. The present paper is an attempt to social diagnosis of this problem of child labour. It has been shown that the eradication of child labour is a slow process but it needs to be taken seriously.

[Keywords : Child labour, Social diagnosis, Poverty, Employment, Sustained labour]

1. Introduction

Child labour, a manifestation of poverty in the country is considered a social problem in India. A large number of families, belonging to the poor section of society are forced to depend on their children’s contribution to the family income. In fact, these families are not in a position to spare their children for full time or even part time schooling. Thus children who are expected to be in schools are found working as labour.

Child labour refers to the employment of children as regular and sustained labour. This practice is considered exploitative by many internal and external organizations and is illegal in many countries. According to the Census of India...
“Child labour is one who works for the major part of the day is below the age of 14 years”. International Labour Organization (ILO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, dealing with labour issues, defined the term Child labour “as work that deprives children to their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that is harmful for their physical and mental development”. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (Act No. 61 of 1986) states ‘Child’ means a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age.

The term child labour is often used interchangeable with a working child or an employed child but there is a difference because all work done by children cannot be defined as child labour, such as, helping their parents around the home, assisting in the family business or earning money for their pocket money during school holidays or outside school hours. Such kind of activities contribute to children’s development and to the welfare of their families by enhancing children’s skill, generating experience. It also helps to socialize the child to be a productive member of the society during their adult life. Such type of children can be categorized as working children.

Whereas a “child labour” is a child who below the age of 14 years working for an earning and remains busy for any hour of the day within or outside the family. He may be working on a part-time or full-time basis.

2. Child Labour in a Present Scenario

Child labour is not a problem only in the context of India but it is a worldwide phenomenon. Although many legislations and laws have been framed to put a ban on this but child labour is still widely practiced. Today, in many countries, child labour accounts for 22% of the workforces in Asia, 32% in Africa, 17% in Latin America, 1% in U.S., Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations.¹

It is still common in some parts of the world. It can be in the form of a factory work, mining activity, prostitution, quarrying, agriculture, helping in the parents business, having one’s own small business. Some children work as guides for tourists, as waiters. Other children are forced to do tedious and repetitive jobs such as, polishing shoes, assembling boxes, stocking a store’s products, or cleaning.

According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 158 million children aged 5 to 14 in child labour worldwide excluding child domestic labour.

An analysis of census data by CRY (Child Rights and You) points out to a dangerous trend. According to CRY child labour in urban areas has increased by 53 percent during 2001-2011. This is of utmost concern especially since enforcement machinery is primarily based in urban regions and the implementation of child protection structures is stronger in urban India. This increase in urban child labour could be attributed to increased migration including seasonal migration for employment as well as trafficking of unaccompanied minors, says Komal Ganotra, director, policy & research, CRY.
When we look in India, we find that more than half of working children are concentrated in five states namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. There are more than 55 lakh of child labour in which UP has a growth by 13 percent with one out of five child labours in India belonging to the state according to the above mentioned report. 

3. **Sectors Where Child Labour is Prevalent**

Child labour is the outcome of the industrial revolution. Industrialists or industry owners started to engage cheap labour which include ladies and children to work in their industries to earn more profits. “Number of children in India is estimated to be 259.64 million and of these 4.35 million are child labours.”

There are many work areas where child labour is found in practice. Such as :

1. **Beedi Manufacturing** : It is an important area where child labour is found working. A survey conducted by Bhattacharyya Shama between 1994 and 1995 reveals that child labour comprise of more than 30% of the total hired workers in the beedi making industry.

2. **Diamond Industry** : It is another area where child labour concentrates and work for the glamour and glitter. According to the international labour organization which conducted its survey in 1997 in the Indian diamond industry, found a large number of children working there. It constitute nearly 3% of the total working force and the percentage of child labour is as high as 25% in the diamond industry of Surat.

3. **Fireworks Manufacturing** : It is an area where child labour is in practice form the very beginning. It is difficult to find any account of the number of child labour in this sector as the job is scattered and under the curtain. It is a hidden fact that the child labour does this job and work in a large numbers.

4. **Domestical Labour** : The use of child labour in the domestic activities is very common among the well off and posh sections of the society. High class bureaucrats and businessmen generally look for the boys who can work in their homes for the purpose of cooking, cleaning the house washing the clothes, purchasing goods, baby sitting, pressing the clothes etc. In metro cities like Delhi, Bombay, they are found in groups and develop very good network for the purpose of exchange of jobs. It is in itself a specific area of study. The official estimates for child labour in this section is more than 2,500,000 while some of the NGOs has estimated the figure to be around 20 million.

5. **Construction Works** : One more significant area where child labour exists is the large scale of construction of multi-stories buildings. Children are found in construction of both home and office buildings. Brick kilns is another sector where, each year thousand of children work in awful conditions. Some of the children are actually sold to the brick kiln owners, and are not even paid.
6. Silk Manufacturing: Child labour is also used in the silk manufacturing industry. Human rights watch estimates that at least 3,50,000 bonded children are employed by the silk industry in India.7

Again as per Human Rights watch, children as young as five years old are employed and work for up to 12 hours a day and six to seven days a week.8 In such industries, they are employed by forcing them to dip their hands in scalding water to palplate the cocoons and are often paid less than Rs. 10 per day. Sri Indrani Basu has explained in the article that many children are working in the Zari manufacturing and leather accessories.

North West Delhi is divided into the organized and unorganized sector. In organized sector like Wazirpur, Narela, Bawana, Mangolpuri and Badli, children are engaged to make plastic bags, toys, branded leather shoes and bags. Children are engaged to make duplicate shoes bags, leather purses and export quality leather bags in the unorganized sector of Delhi like Keshavpuram Pampura Trinagar, Kirari, Mubarakpur, Sultanpuri.9

In short, from the above mentioned description, it becomes clear that, child labour refers to work that:

1. is mentally, physically socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children.
2. it interferes with their schooling.
3. it deprives them of the opportunity to attend school or forces to leave school prematurely.

4. Reasons for Continuation of Child Labour

There are many reasons for the continuation of child labour but some main causes are:

1. Poor economic condition of parents.
2. Lack of status of the child in the society.
3. Low level of education of parents & child.
4. Sometimes poverty forces parents to push their children to do some work for the sake of money.
5. Any disease may force children to do job.
6. Anti-constitution policies, inadequate legislative measures and lack of political will may also be taken as important factors responsible for the persistence of this unlawful social evil.10

Discussing factors which forced children to work in hazardous conditions an officer not willing to be named said, child labour is a problem not related to poverty only. Several factors such as caste system unemployment, lack of education, single parents, orphans etc. compel them to work.
5. **Repercussions of Child Labour on Society**

Child labour is a curse for the humanity and now, it has become a universal social problem. It involves children being enslaved, away from their families, exposed to serious diseases and converted into delinquents.

Children are the soft tissues of a society and future of our country. If they are nurtured well, they will grown a healthy and productive youth and thus productive citizens of our country. Children are the future of the family, a society and a country so it becomes our duty to provide them all the facilities and opportunities to grow. We should provide them healthy food, good, education, proper medical facilities, play time and vocational skills in their childhood.

Unfortunately many of the children are not getting these above mentioned facilities and are forced to work at a very early age in a hazardous conditions with low salary.

Numerous reasons are responsible for this but main reasons are poor economic conditions, law level of adult and child literacy. lack of social security, cheap human labour, broken homes migratory population, expensive labour force and unquestionable attitude of children etc.

By working in this way, it deprives a child from all the opportunities of learning, mentally growth and social development. They are not as productive as other sections of the society.

At the individual level, a child is a big support to an industry or the person where he is working but at societal level, the number of such children, generate a gap and a large section seems to be unproductive, engaged only as helping hands and do not possess the norms of a civic society. As a consequence, a group of underdeveloped personalities suffer form cultural lags and find difficult to move hand in hand or shoulder to shoulder with the developed section of the society. By this way, the larger section of the society, suffer from a number of problems as such people cannot fulfil their needs by own means. They can not stand up independently, cannot provide any feedback to their future generation. More than this, they are a blot on the forehead of the nation in the era of modernization and in the days of development. Such child labourers become the youth of the country in future and thus increase the rate of unemployment, food crises by lowering down the per capita income of the country.

When our country is compared with other nations, we lag behind in every aspect because of this underdeveloped section of the society. These children are staying with their masters rather than their parents or other family members. As a result of which, they have no family control over them and thus they easily drift into anti social activities. In this way, they generate disintegration and disorganization in our society. This section of the society also contributes on a large scale to proliferate various forms of domestic and blue collar crime.
The societies, where child labour is in practice, such blue collar crimes are easily prevalent. Even police and other means of social control find it difficult to eradicate crime in such societies.

6. **Initiatives against Child Labour**

Many efforts have been done time to time to eliminate the child labour problem. These efforts are mentioned below:

1. ‘The International Labour Organization's International Programme’ (IPEC), on the elimination of child labour was found in 1992. It operates in 88 countries and it is the largest programme of its kind in the world. I.P.E.C. works with international and governmental agencies, NGOs, the media and children and their families to end child labour and provide children with education and assistance.\(^\text{11}\)

2. A Child Labour Programme of Action, sometimes called a Child Labour Action Programme is a national programme aimed at addressing child labour within a given country. It includes, but is not restricted to, the worst forms of child labour.

The following countries have adopted or plan to adopt, such a programme:

- Botswana.
- Lesotho.
- Namibia.

3. Many NGOs like CARE India, Child Relief and You, Global March Against Child Labour etc. have been working to eradicate child labour in India. In 2005, Pratham, an Indian NGO was involved in one of the biggest rescue operations when around 500 child labourers were rescued from Zari Sweatshops in North East Delhi.

4. The Right against Exploitation, contained in Articles 23-24, lays down certain provisions to prevent exploitation of the weaker sections of the society by individuals or the State. Article 23 provides prohibits human trafficking making it an offence punishable by law and laws prohibits forced labour or any act of compelling a person to work without wages where he was legally entitled not to work or to receive remuneration for it. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines, and other hazardous jobs.

5. Many NGOs in India have taken this problem seriously. They are making an account of such children and such families who provide the child labour and also of those who utilize the same.\(^\text{12}\)

7. **Suggestions for Eradication of Child Labour**

1. We are responsible citizens of our country can make an honest effort to reduce the problem of child labour. We should not employ children of school
going age as domestic help or in offices. Rather, we should provide some facilities to shift them to government or private schools.

2. Various NGOs can also be set up to curb this evil practice. Some strict checks should also be organized so that the officials can work in a clean manner. It should also be ensured that funds of the NGOs be utilized in the right direction.

3. Government can also be very effective in controlling the menace of child labour to a greater extent. Not only enactment of laws but also their effective implementation is necessary to get some respite from this perpetual problem.

4. We can solve this problem by raising the economic status of the poor households particularly in rural areas.

5. Better free and compulsory education can play a big role to solve this problem.

6. The law should be enforced strictly by increasing the fine amount. There should be some effective provision for imprisonment in employing the child in work.

Eradication of child labour is a slow process but it needs to be taken seriously. Children are the future of the society and of any country. If we want to save to progress our country in a right direction we have to solve this problem. Labour dept should conduct survey to detect child labour time to time but the fact is that. Even as the government makes tall claims about emancipation of child labourers, the illegal practice seems to continue unabated in the city. The gravity of the issue can be gauged from the fact that the labour department has not conducted any survey to detect child labourers since 1998.

It is learnt that on the directions of the Supreme Court, a survey was carried out to trace child labourers working in hazardous and non-hazardous conditions in 1998. However, no such initiative has been undertaken by the labour department in Meerut though sources claimed drives have been held in some districts of U.P. Sources said nearly 500 to 1,000 child labourers were currently working in hazardous conditions in the city. Concerned authorities should penalize the defaulters, and that amount should be deposited to use for their rehabilitation.

Footnotes/References

1. Subhas Saeed, Child Labour in India.
2. Komal Ganetra, Director, Policy & Research, CRY, “India needs 100 years to end child labour”, Times of India, June 12, 2015, 9.