

The problem of child labour

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is a multi-faceted problem. Various writers, journalists economists, sociologists, educationists, psychologists, social workers, constitutionists and lawmakers have contributed to understand it. The problem of child labour is not confined to India only but it is a global phenomenon. Most of the researches have been carried out in industrial sectors and lesser in informal and agricultural sectors. All most all the researchers agree that poverty is the most important reason for child labour. The harshest form of child labour is the bonded labour. The parents want that their children should earn their livelihood rather they should add some income to the family as early as possible as they cannot wait and pay the expenditure involved in their education. The big farm holders, industrialists, and entrepreneurs, hoteliers- all employ them for production. But no independent study on the contribution of child labour to the total production of India has been made so far. Article 24 of Constitution of India debar children from employing in hazardous works whereas article 45 of the Constitution declare free and compulsory education of children as his fundamental right. The child labour grows into weak, unhealthy, illiterate and prematurely adult labour, capable of earning meagre wages. Therefore, it should be a matter of great concern for the policy makers.

KEY WORDS : Child labour, Industry, Agriculture, WTO

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Child labour is a multi-faceted problem. Various writers, journalists, economists, sociologists, educationists, psychologists, social workers, constitutionists and lawmakers have contributed to understand it. The problem of child labour is not confined to India only but it is a global phenomenon.

Studies on child labour have covered a large number of countries, like Philippines (Rialp, 1993), Brazil, Kenya, Italy (Chatterjee, 1992), Portugal (Williams, 1992), Spain (Searight, 1980), Italy (Valcarengi, 1981), India (Gupta and Voll, 1988) and Pakistan (Soudiere, 1990). Studies have been conducted for a large number of cities and states like Sivakasi (Vidyasagar and Babu, 2002), Ferozabad (ILO, 1988), Surat (Desai and Raj, 2001), Jaipur (Mathur and Ghosh, 2002), Rampur (Ghosh and Sekar, 2002), Markapur (Vidyasagar, *et al.*, 2000), Tiruppur (Jayaranjan, 2002), Ahmedabad (Sanon and Gupta, 1998), Baroda (Srinivasan and Gandotra, 1993), Meerut (Raj and Jha, 1999) and some states of India, like Orissa (Tripathi, 1991), Tamil Nadu (Jayaranjan, 2002), Uttar Pradesh (Srivastva and Raj, 2000) and Jammu and Kashmir (Kitchlu, 1987). The studies also cover some metropolitan cities like Delhi, Kolkata (Sinha, 1991) and Bangalore (Patil,

1986).

Child labour in industry:

Most of the researches have been carried out in industrial sectors such as Pencil industry (Rao, 1980), Diamond cutting (Burra, 1998), Power loom (Barse, 1985), Carpet weaving (Juyal *et al.*, 1985; Gupta and Voll, 1999; Whittaker, 1988), Lock industry (Burra, 1987b), Pottery (Burra, 1987 a), Brassware (Burra, 1988), Match stick industry (Vidyasagar and Babu, 2002), Glass industry, Bidi industry (Mishra, 2000), Sports goods, Knife industry (Ghosh and Sekar, 2002), Hotel tourism and Catering industry (Black, 1995) and Knitting industry.

The studies by Mustafa and Sharma (1997), Kulshreshtha (1978), Sexena (1993) have pointed out that in rural sector of the country, boys at a young age are made to handle a plough, reap the harvest, cut and bring fuel from the forest, collect the fodder, catch fish from the village ponds, graze cattle and guard the crops in the fields, while girls do free the mothers or elders for working in the fields by looking after younger siblings and sweeping the house or sometimes accompany parents to work sites. Child workers in agriculture are either employed for wages

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or work in fields as unpaid family workers and perform various activities (Singh and Verma, 1987) like crop watching (75.07 per cent), transplanting (73.93 per cent), harvesting (73.35 per cent), irrigation (61.90 per cent), weeding (58.74 per cent), hoeing (53.30 per cent), threshing (49.86 per cent), preparatory work and sowing (47.28 per cent), ploughing (46.70 per cent), storage (27.51 per cent) and other activities (1.99 per cent).

Child labour in agriculture:

The suitability of agricultural work by sex and age (Singh and Verma, 1987) revealed that transplanting (92.31 per cent) has been considered almost suitable for female child workers and irrigation (63.43 per cent) by their male counterparts. The incidence of preparatory work, ploughing, hoeing, harvesting and threshing have been considered more on child workers those are younger in age as compared to child workers those are elder in age. Studies reveal that children work in agriculture for excessively long hours at low wages in sun or heavy rains without any rest interval or holidays. The range of working hours is found to be from 4 hours to 16 hours. Saxena (1993) reveals that in agriculture, 98 per cent of child labour work for more than 8-9 hours per day, while Mishra (2000) holds that 90 per cent of the children work for 7-12 hours and 10 per cent work for 13 hours or more. Singh and Verma (1987) feel that during busy months of harvesting, ploughing, sowing and transplanting, children are required to work for longer periods, rest intervals are missing and holidays are absent. Assam, West Bengal and Karnataka employ a large number of child labour in the plantations (Kulshreshta, 1978). According to a rough estimate, about 2 lakh child labour is in plantations. In the plantations, children generally are allowed to accompany their parents and are not entered separately in wage books till the age of 12 years and therefore get no separate wages although they work particularly the same hours as the adults. Children are engaged in mainly unskilled jobs like weeding, plucking, manuring, watering and upkeep of the plants. By tradition, the job of a plantation worker goes upon his death to his child.

In study by Tuteja (2000), child labour in rural Haryana contributed between 4.50-6.00 per cent of total labour used in dairy enterprise. They spend around 1.5 hours daily in various dairy and animal husbandry related activities. Average yearly income earned by a child worker in dairy enterprise came out to be Rs.2562 in Ambala and Rs.3009 in Bhiwani.

The study by Jawa (2000) mentions that more than 10 lakh children including boys and girls are employed in fisheries industries, which is spread over whole coastal

area of the country. In fisheries children mostly work at night. In a study on child labour in fisheries in such coastal village of Orissa (Das *et al.*, 2000), it is found that male child workers are engaged in fishing activities where as female child in marketing and net making etc.

A study conducted by Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness, Bangalore, (Maya, 2000) points out that child labour can be seen in sericulture, which is again an allied activity of agriculture. The study mentions that there are about 2.5 lakh children employed in sericulture industry of Karnataka. There have been reports of employment of children in cotton seeds processing industry in Andhra Pradesh. It is concentrated mainly in the districts of Ranga Reddy and Medak. Children between the age group of 9-13 years are separating cotton from the seeds for Rs.10 per 25 kg of cotton and Rs.0.05 per pest or worm they catch. On an average, these children are reported to be working for 9-14 hours a day. The processing of cotton requires frequent use of several toxic chemicals and pesticides that make the children prone to several diseases and in some cases even deaths. In this industry, parents pledge their children to the employer for an advance amount ranging from Rs.200 to Rs.1500 only. The employers who are mostly big farmers take these children to their farms where seeds are procured and processed. The finished goods are sold to medium or big registered companies. The peculiar aspect of employing these children is that it is attached with superstitious social myth that employment of girl children before puberty would augur crops (Raj and Jha, 1999).

The exact magnitude of child labour in agriculture and allied activities is not available in literature produced so far. The first All India Agricultural Labour Enquiry in its report mentioned that child labour constituted 4.9 per cent of total Indian agricultural labour in 1950-51 which rose to 7.7 per cent in 1956-57 but declined to 5.8 per cent in 1964-65 and further increased to 9.7 per cent in 1971 (Kulshreshtha, 1978). According to Saxena (1993) agriculture and allied activities account for more than 72 per cent of total working children in the country. Whereas it is 80 per cent, according to Chandra (1997), nearly half of them are working as agricultural labourers and other half of them are engaged as cultivators in plantations, livestock, forestry, fishing and hunting etc. Kulshreshtha (1978) mentions the employment of 8 per cent of child labour in allied activities like hunting, fish, livestock breeding and plantation labour, while Swamy (2000) gives combined estimate of child labour in agriculture and allied activities by stating that 82.29 per cent of child labour is engaged as farmers, fishermen, hunters, loggers and related workers.

The study on child labour participation in 100 landless rural families of district Faridkot in Punjab (Dhillon, 1987) found that the majority of the children had to work for 10 hours a day. Among the boys, 53.34 per cent were working as agricultural labourers engaged in cattle grazing, planting paddy, cotton picking, sowing, harvesting etc., whereas 31.12 per cent boys were working as agricultural labourers in the peak season i.e. during cotton picking, planting paddy etc., 2.22 per cent of male child workers were livestock carer, 13.32 per cent were engaged in various skilled activities such as shoe shine, cycle repairing, weaving etc. Majority of girls i.e. 88.89 per cent were working as casual agricultural labourers in the peak season and only 2.22 per cent were working as sweepers and 8.89 per cent were engaged in skilled activities such as weaving, embroidery and pot-making. The study revealed that (38.88 per cent) male children were doing the job of casual agricultural labour but majority of female children (61.54 per cent) were working as casual agricultural labour in peak period i.e. during planting paddy, cotton picking and harvesting etc. On an average, the working children of Faridkot district contributed more (28 per cent) to the family's total income as compared to the children of Ludhiana district who contribute on an average 21.75 per cent to the family's total income. It was observed that in contract farming of tomato and potato carried by some multi-national corporations in Punjab, there is a practice of child labour in these crops especially in harvesting. In fact there is a practice of even family child labour under contracting as it is not subjected to any legal or public disapproval (Singh, 2001). Contract farming under company supervision can be termed as 'factories in the fields from the point of view of labour' (Collins, 1993).

Reasons of child labour:

Studies give multiple reasons for child labour for being in labour market. Poverty is the most important reason. All most all the researchers agree to it. Weiner (1991) admitted that child labour is a creation of poverty but it does not reduce it, rather it increases it. Mishra (2000), Burra (1998) and Swamy (2000) also supported it. Kulashreshtha (1978) has mentioned that absence of schemes of family allowance, family size, unemployment or low wages of adult workers, absence of compulsory education, migration to urban areas, illiteracy and ignorance, slow progress of protective labour legislation and inadequate inspecting machinery are some of the causes which create the problem of child labour. Children work not because their parents are wicked or those that employ them are wicked but because their income is essential for survival of the family or themselves.

The other important reasons are death or disease of their parents, apathetic attitude of parents towards education, educational backwardness of parents, need to look after younger siblings, cheap child labour and urge for quick profits etc. However, in Jammu & Kashmir in a study made by Kitchlu (1987), it is not the economic compulsion of families but the need to learn the tricks of the trade, which is the most important reason for the children being in labour market. According to the employers, nimble hands are employed because these are more amenable to discipline, quick, efficient, better suited to some kind of jobs and their plight has greater sentimental appeal also. But these arguments have been refuted by Mishra (2000), Burra (1998), Mustafa and Sharma (1997), Weiner (1991) etc. in their work. Poverty and unemployment at native places make families migrate from rural areas to urban areas and from poor states to rich states. Studies indicate that substantial number of migrant children were engaged in Mumbai, Delhi and Varanasi (Juyal *et al.*, 1985), Barodara (Srinivasan and Gandotara, 1993) and Kolkata (Sinha, 1991). Hence, these studies indicate a correlation between the number of migrants and the proportion of child labour. Sanon and Gupta's study (1998) states that 83.6 per cent of child labour working in Ahmedabad city have come from rural areas of Gujarat or other states of the country. Moreover, almost all the scholars in the industrial sector had brought out incidentally that child labour comes from the rural families of landless labourers. Rural areas are the source of urban child labour. In carpet industry, many of them come from perennially drought prone areas of Bihar. They are the children of landless labourers and socially oppressed classes who are often being deprived of their lands by the landlords. In Glass and Bangle Industry of Firozabad (Burra, 1998), 50 per cent of child workers belonged to adjoining rural areas and were from the families of cultivators while 11 per cent from the families of agricultural and labourers. Sivakasi, one of the districts of Tamil Nadu, is highly drought prone area and thus the entire rural population suffering from vagaries of nature and pangs of poverty are left with no better alternative but to flock the local factories of Sivakasi to earn livelihood (Chandra, 1997). Thus majority of the children working in the match and fire works industry of Sivakasi belong to migrants who are primarily agriculturists, landless labourers (Vidyasagar and Babu, 2002). Similarly, in Surat Diamond industry, child labour is also from cultivator families.

In Khurja potteries, the incidence of child labour is high due to the unemployment of adult members of the family. Burra (1987 b) feels that Bulandshahar district although agriculturally prosperous has little work on its

mechanized farms for the bulk of rural poor who face unemployment on a massive scale. The only work available to the workers is in the potteries of Khurja.

The effects of migration on the psyche of the child workers have been dealt with by many researchers. Migration stands in the way of the child to have smooth opportunities for physical and intellectual growth. They have established a relationship of migration with delinquency and crime (Kulshreshtha, 1978). As the parents have no control over the child and the child worker has adult models before him, it creates problem of delinquency and sometimes he slips into the world of crime (Burra, 1998; Mishra, 2000; Mustafa and Sharma, 1997).

Bonded child labour:

The harshest form of child labour is the bonded labour. Studies reveal that a large segment of child labour is made up of those children whose parents pledge them to employers or their agents in exchange of small consumption loans (Juyal *et al.*, 1985; Goyal, 2005; Randhawa, 2002). The period of bondage may vary from person to person which may be from several years and the bonded child worker is not free to go out anywhere either for work or for personal pleasure. He does not get due compensation for his labour as others in the market get. He becomes virtually a slave till the debt is cleared (Burra, 1998; Mishra, 2000). Indebtedness and child bonded labour has been found by Burra (1998) and Mishra (2000) in Bidi industry, carpet industry, glass industry, watch industry, state pencil industry, pottery industry, brassware industry and handloom industry of Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. In Sivakasi match factories studies conducted by Burra (1998), it was found that the child in the womb is pledged to the factory and the consumption and maternity loans are obtained on the undertakings that the child born girl or boy would work for factory. In some areas like Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar bonded labour is wide spread.

In fact, it is a characteristic of feudal agrarian relations that families of agricultural labourers are bonded to their masters for several generations. Parents of the agricultural child labour are in debt to local village landlord or moneylender. The interest rate charged is very high and they find it difficult to repay it due to landlessness and poverty and hence provide their services and the services of their families to the landlord in order to pay off the debt (Burra, 1998). First the boy has to tend cattle and later on he has to perform the complicated agricultural operations. As long as he is young and strong he becomes a property of the master, a thing of human flesh and blood that can be easily manipulated according to the whims of the landlord's family.

When father dies, the young son steps into the father's shoes and the cycle continues. As per an estimate there are about 7.5 million children below the age of 14 years in bondage. According to another estimate (Raj and Jha, 1999), this figure is exactly double i.e. 15 million. India is primarily an agricultural country. It employs two third of the Indian agricultural workforce. But due to caste system, people have been condemned to poverty and to do unhygienic work. The society looks them down and economically they become unsecured, as the land or the industry is monopolized by the landlord or the rich. The majority of the agricultural labourers come from such families of rural areas. Poor sections from the tribes also swell their ranks. The researchers include in them (i) landless labourers who are attached to the landlords, (ii) landless labourers who are personally independent but who work exclusively for others, (iii) petty farmers with tiny bits of land who work for others and (iv) marginal farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependents working for other prosperous farmers. The group (i) of agricultural labourers is more or less in the position of serfs. They are also known as bonded labour, which is the creation of indebtedness and poverty. The problem of landless labour, therefore, is the most serious problem in the rural sector. Official data indicate that 61 per cent of the rural households either have no land or small fragments of land or marginal economic holding of less than one hectare. These marginal farmers also join the army of landless labourers since they subsist at the border of the poverty line and have been gradually stipulating below poverty line. The analysts have also found that agricultural labourers are compelled to send their children to the labour market because they are landless, have no means to subsistence other than labour. They are illiterate and ignorant and live in backward villages in utter poverty and are unable to organize themselves in some trade union to fight exploitation. It becomes difficult for them to bargain with the landowners to secure good wages. Moreover, it is a seasonal work and there is paucity of non-agricultural jobs in the village, these landless labourers had to take loan from the landlords to meet the social, personal and family needs, which they find difficult to repay, instead they pledge their sons and daughters to serve the lender. So, rural indebtedness is the root cause of bonded labour.

Early literature of India equates an illiterate person with an animal without tail. To provide education to the child has, therefore, been recognised as one of the fundamental rights. The government of India since independence is committed to provide free, compulsory, universal, primary or basic education. It equips the child

labour intellectually and makes him capable of learning some skills. The review of literature not only reveals that it is necessary for the development of personality of child but also beneficial for family, society and the state at large by ensuring numerous economic and social benefits in the times to come.

ILO was the first agency, which equated non-school going children with child labour. It stands for universal education. The researchers feel that the Government has tried to provide basic education and has increased the number of recognized educational institutions at all levels and has made ample arrangements for creating necessary infrastructure to provide education to all (Mishra, 2000). Since it is a gigantic work to make arrangements to enroll all the children in the age group of 5-14 years, yet 110 million children are still out of school of whom 60 per cent are girls. Female literacy is still low in comparison to male children both in rural and urban India. Since girls are not likely to generate any income to the parents family after their marriage, under household budgetary constraints, girls are not educated when parents have to decide as to whom male or female child be sent to school.

Lacking in awareness for the importance of education system, parents feel that education is useless and does not equip a child for his future (Sanon, 1998). Moreover, parents want that their children should earn their livelihood rather they should add some income to the family as early as possible. As they cannot wait and pay the expenditure involved in education, instead of sending children to school, they send them to work as an apprentice to learn skills. Burra (1998) is of the opinion that some job-oriented education should be given at a fairly early stage to the young boy or girl which is necessary to supplement the very meagre income of the family if the programme has to be made acceptable to the landless labourer. A review of educational status of child labour reveals that 66 per cent of the working children did not have any schooling. More than 50 per cent of the working children dropped out at an early primary level in the above mentioned studies. India today has the dubious distinction being the most illiterate country in the world. All the critics are unanimous in holding the view that the enforcement on compulsory and free education in the country would eradicate the problem of child labour.

Prevalence of caste system in the Indian society has made the people of certain classes poor and under privileged. These people are known as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or *Dalits*. The government has granted special facilities and reservations to these downtrodden and economically backward classes to ameliorate their position in the society. The numerical strength of these

classes comes to about one third of the total population. These people who are wedded to poverty and are deprived of assets of any kind, have to sell out their labour in the market or to pledge or condemn their children to work at an early age. That is why among the social groups, scheduled castes is reported to have the highest incidence of child labour followed by scheduled tribes. Researches have found that in Andhra Pradesh 20-25 per cent child workers of scheduled castes belonging to Hindu religion work in Brassware industry in Moradabad come from surrounding villages, whereas 75-80 per cent children employed there are from the minority community of Muslims. Again, a majority of children working in the export oriented garment industry in Tamil Nadu are from the backward classes and scheduled castes communities. The leather units of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan provide employment to children and out of which, 75 per cent belong to economically weaker and unprivileged sections of the society (Mishra, 2000).

No independent study on the contribution of child labour to the total production of India has been made so far. The big farm holders, industrialists and entrepreneurs, hoteliers- all employ them for production. Child labour is cheaper and is employed because of his flexibility, health, and docility. It lowers the cost of production, which brings more profit to the employer (Mishra, 2000; Burra, 1998; Mustafa and Sharma, 1997). But employers may profess, the researchers point out, to employ child labour on compassionate grounds (Gupta and Voll, 1999). There are some fields for which child labour is considered as indispensable such as carpet industry, diamond polishing or glass making. Their nimble fingers and their eyesight help in weaving quality carpets. But this argument has been refuted by Mishra (2000) and they hold that these industries are not the only industries that have a vested interest in child labour. Obviously adults can replace children in these activities. Children are not more productive than adults. They lack skills. Their employment provides a competitive edge because it lowers the cost of production being low paid as compared to adults. Moreover, the child worker can be made to work for longer hours without making any complaint about it (Burra, 1999), in the absence of any trade union fighting for their welfare.

It has been amply brought out by the studies that a child worker takes the place of an adult worker but on half or less wages as compared to that of an adult (Srinivasan and Gandotara, 1993; Mustafa and Sharma, 1997). It causes unemployment among the main workers. Literature shows the presence of too many children in India who are willing to offer themselves in labour market, which reduces the bargaining power of an adult worker

thereby lowering the wage structure. Kulshreshtha (1978) emphasized that the child labour results in temporarily weakening the main labour force. In his study, Chandra (1997) claims that if all the children are withdrawn from the labour market, at least 15 million jobs for adults will be made in India.

The economists have found that the child labour gets half or even less wages than that of an adult worker (Kulshreshtha, 1978; Prasad, 1993; Mishra, 2000). An adult worker gets Rs.500-600 in gem polishing in Jaipur, whereas a child worker will get Rs.200-300 for the same job (Burra, 1998). Child labour is more in demand in labour market because it is cheaper and hence more profitable for the entrepreneur. In return, it also creates unemployment among adult workers who lose their bargaining power.

Studies further reveal that monthly wages paid to the children are as low as Rs.25 and as high as Rs.300 (Sanon and Gupta, 1998). No child earns more than Rs.5 a day in carpet weaving either in Kashmir or in Jammu region. In lock industry wages of child labour are Rs.15 per day if he works for 11-15 hours a day (Burra, 1998). Child apprentices are not paid any wages for first few months. The average earnings of majority of children engaged in rag picking and collection of waste material in Delhi is Rs.10-15 a day (Mustafa and Sharma, 1997). Wages varied from one agricultural operation to another. It was highest in sowing and lowest in weeding and other agricultural operations (Prasad, 1993). Various studies such as by Mishra (2000) showed that Punjab, Assam, West Bengal and Kerala were regions of high wages while Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were regions of comparatively low wages.

Study on child labour in agrarian society reveals that average wage paid to child agricultural workers in villages of Orissa has been reported to Rs.3-4 per day. In some villages wages are even lower than this. The studies show that in rural areas as well as in urban areas children are paid in cash and kind both. Payment of kind includes ration meals and clothes etc. (Kulshreshtha, 1978). In a study on child labour in urban informal sector, it was studied that in construction and manufacturing the payment was in cash. In trade and services, it was partly cash and partly in kind and in repair services, it was mostly in kind.

Article 24 of Constitution of India debar children from employing in hazardous works whereas article 45 of Constitution declare free and compulsory education of children as his fundamental right. Mishra (2000) raises a pertinent question as to how children who are expected to go to school be permitted to work even if the nature of their work is non-hazardous. Despite scores of laws for not employing children in hazardous occupations and processes,

the employers find them the substitute for adult labour.

Effects of child labour:

Burra (1998), Mishra (2000), Vidayasagar and Babu (2002) and Desai and Raj (2001) are of the view that carpet weaving causes asthma, eyestrain, spinal problem, loss of appetite and cuts in fingers. Glass and bangle making results in burns and cuts, asthma, bronchitis and tuberculosis. Match and fire works making also causes burns, breathing problems, dizziness, back and neck pains and stomach cramps to the child workers. Stone and slate quarries, pottery work, powerloom weaving leads to tuberculosis and bronchitis etc. Even the self-employed children or those working in street trades, railway platforms are exposed to extreme weather conditions and traffic hazards and face other hardships. Rag pickers are prone to all type of infections in unhygienic and insanitary conditions of work.

Agriculture, which recently was considered a light work, which the children picked up from their very childhood, has today been accepted as one of the most hazardous sectors. Agricultural workers, especially child workers are faced with great risk of endemic and parasitic diseases of the respiratory tract. Singh and Verma (1987) found seven child workers who have been suffering from anemia and three from tuberculosis. Only one child reported to them that he had a narrow escape from tetanus, which had developed as a result of a minor cut with a rusted agricultural iron tool.

Some agricultural works like harvesting and threshing are strenuous which put strain on the child workers. Contact with pesticides and fertilizers leads to skin problem and poisoning. Dangerous modern machinery like threshers, which are designed to be handled by adults, can cause fatal accidents (Kulshreshtha, 1978; ILO, 1988; Mishra, 2000; Khanna; 1998). A child labour died while cleaning the pesticide bags in the state of Gujarat (Raj and Jha, 1999). A 12 years farm labourer of Arneti village of Patiala district of Punjab lost his right arm while chopping fodder at the *Tokka* machine. This was the fourth such incident in the district. Fifteen thousand children working in agriculture in Costa-Rica later became impotent as consequence of this exposure to toxic chemicals (Mishra, 2000). Children in developing countries are not the only ones affected by the hazards of agricultural work, in some industrialised countries, this sector accounts for the largest number of occupational fatalities of those under 18. Despite many legislative enactments which provide legal protection to children against exploitation and prohibit the employers to employ them in occupations and processes which are detrimental to their physical, social, mental and

moral development.

Child labour and WTO:

Child labour has also a very important bearing on international trade. Recently World Trade Organisation (WTO) has proposed to introduce what is called social clause. Under social clause, there is a proposal to levy a countervailing duty on imports from the developing countries aimed at offsetting the low labour cost, prevailing there. If this proposal is accepted, the US government will ban the import of those products made in the third world countries with the help of child labour.

This clause as they claim to be is motivated by humanitarian concern so that the developing countries adopt proper standards of living for the workers and pay their labour better wages and to eliminate child labour. But the way the powers behind it want to solve the problem of child labour is not proper and social activists like Agnivesh (1999) suspects that the real motive behind the social clause has been protectionism. The critics, economists and the scholars take this social clause only as a clever ploy of the West to oust the third world from global market, on the grounds of child labour. Indian export items of carpets, gems and jewellery textiles and garments etc. will be severely affected.

Conclusion:

Review of literature on child labour clearly reveals that the problem is found not only in industries but also in agricultural sector of the country. Poverty, large family size, caste system, illiteracy, lack of awareness among parents, non-implementation of laws, selfish interest of the employer, lack of will on the part of people and the government are the various root causes of the problem. Children do not contribute much to the family income rather they indirectly bring down the wages of adult labour in the labour market. The child labour grows into weak, unhealthy, illiterate and prematurely adult labour, capable of earning meagre wages. Therefore, it should be a matter of great concern for the policy makers.

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