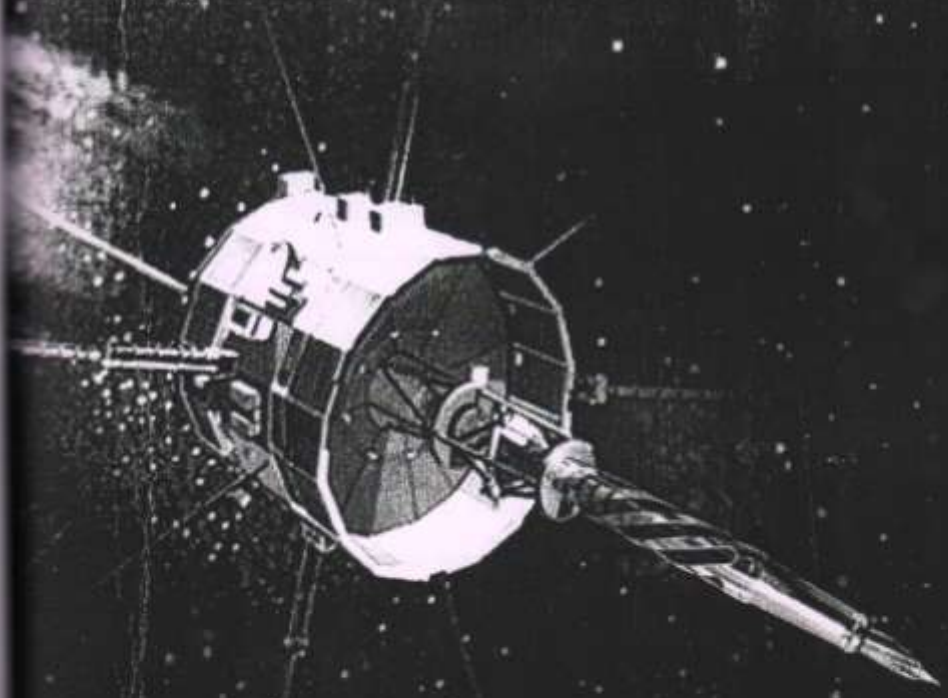


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CHILD LABOUR : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction:

Child Labour is the practice of having children engage in economic activity, on part or full-time basis. The practice deprives children of their childhood, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. Poverty, lack of good schools and growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India. The 1998 national census of India estimated the total number of child labour, aged 4-15, to be at 12.6 million, out of a total child population of 253 million in 5-14 age group. A 2009-2010 nationwide survey found child labour prevalence had reduced to 4.98 million children (or less than 2% of children in 5-14 age group). The 2011 national census of India found the total number of child labour, aged 5-14, to be at 4.35 million, and the total child population to be 259.64 million in that age group. The child labour problem is not unique to India; worldwide, about 217 million children work, many full-time.

Indian law specifically defines 64 industries as hazardous and it is a criminal offence to employ children in such hazardous industries. In 2001, an estimated 1% of all child workers, or about 120,000 children in India were in a hazardous job. Notably, Constitution of India prohibits child labour in hazardous industries (but not in non-hazardous industries) as a Fundamental Right under Article 24. UNICEF estimates that India with its larger population, has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age, while sub-Saharan African countries have the highest percentage of children who are deployed as child labour. International Labour Organisation estimates that agriculture at 60 percent is the larg-

est employer of child labour in the world, while United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates 70% of child labour is deployed in agriculture and related activities. Outside of agriculture, child labour is observed in almost all informal sectors of the Indian economy. In December 2014, the U.S. Department of Labour issued a List of Goods Produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour and India figured among 74 countries where significant incidence of critical working conditions has been observed. Unlike any other country, India was attributed 23 goods the majority of which is produced by child labour in the manufacturing sector.

THE CONCEPT OF CHILD LABOUR:

To begin with it is necessary to understand the concept of child labour. Children do a variety of work in widely divergent conditions. Perceptions of what child labour is can differ very much between countries and societies. Two main approaches to define child labour are:

- * Any work by children - economic or not - below a stipulated minimum age.
- * Any work by children - economic or not - that is injurious to the health, safety and development of children.

There are also various combinations and modifications of these two basic approaches to a definition. According to the first approach any type of work done by children under the stipulated minimum age should be banned. According to the second approach, not all the work children do is naturally bad or harmful, but can contribute in some cases to the development of children. Child labour is then defined according to negative effects of work

on children. Child labour is generally speaking, work for children, which harms them or exploits them in some way (physically, mentally, morally or by blocking access to education). Report of the committee on child labour (1979) admits that a universally accepted definition of child labour is presently not available. A more comprehensive definition, taking into account the consequences of labour on children has been provided by the International Labour Organization according to which: Child Labour includes children prematurely leading adult lives working long hours for low wages under conditions damaging to their health, to their physical and mental development, sometimes separated from their families, frequently deprived of meaningful education and training opportunities that could open up for them a better future." - Report of the Director General of I.L.O. 1983.

Definition:

A definition given by Dr. Neera Burra is very significant in this context. According to Dr. Burra a working child is defined as "a child in the age range of 5 to 15 who is doing labour, either paid or unpaid, and is working within or outside the family, basically a child who is deprived of the right to education and childhood." - (Burra Neera, 2001).

The following categorization of child labour helps in understanding the child labour

CHILD LABOUR : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES -

FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Children are employed in both formal and informal sectors. Among the occupations wherein children are engaged in work are construction work, domestic work and small-scale industries. Incidentally, agriculture is not only the oldest but also the most common child occupation worldwide. Some of the industries that depend on child labor are bangle-making, beedi-making, power looms and manufacturing processes. These industries use toxic met-

als and substances such as lead, mercury, manganese, chromium, cadmium, benzene, pesticides and asbestos. Child labour is very harmful and wholehearted efforts to eliminate this should be done.

LAW AND CHILD LABOR

The policy curbing child labour exists but lack of enforcement of labour restrictions perpetuates child labour. This is manifested in variation in minimum age restriction in different types of employment. The International Labour Office reports that children work the longest hours and are the worst paid of all laborers. In India, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 and Rules state that no child shall be employed or permitted to work in any of the occupations set forth in Part A of the Schedule or in any workshop wherein any of the processes set forth in Part B of the Schedule is carried on. For this purpose, "child" means a person who has not completed his 14th year of age. The Act prohibits employment of children in certain specified hazardous occupations and processes and regulates the working conditions in others. The list of hazardous occupations and processes is progressively being expanded on the recommendation of the Child Labour Technical Advisory Committee constituted under the Act.

INTERVENTION AND CHILD LABOR

Education is a very important part of development. Children who are drawn to child labour are basically driven because of 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 mak-

ing education affordable across all levels, and enforcement of anti child labour laws.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOR

The negative impact on the physiological 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. The analysis of factors leading to engagement of children in hazardous factors elucidated socioeconomic factors as one of the important determinants. Poverty is considered as one of the contributory factors in child labour.

The Government of India has taken certain initiatives to control child labor. The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme was launched in 9 districts of high child labour endemicity 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:

Unfortunately, the children in India are subjected to various forms of abuse. National Study on Child Abuse recorded its findings very exhaustively on various forms of abuse of children. They are child labour, physical abuse, emotional abuse, substantial abuse, Girl child neglect, sexual abuse etc.

Socio-economic conditions prevailing in the society are strongly responsible for the abuse of child in different forms. High literacy and low literacy rate, equally contribute to the problem of child abuse. Among the various forms of abuse of children it would be more pertinent and relevant to focus on child labour.

Child labour is an abuse and exploitation of children and children pre-maturely leading an adult like life. They receive low wages and work for long hours under conditions that are likely to damage their health as well as physical and mental development. According to National Study on Abuse of Children, out of 12,447 children, 19.70% are found to be working. Only 17% of working children are paid for their work. Thus, child labour is being largely underpaid, overworked and exploited.

Poverty is one of the important factors for this problem. Hence, enforcement alone cannot help solve it. The Government has been laying a lot of emphasis on the rehabilitation of these children and on improving the economic conditions of their families.

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