CHAPTER 2

WORLD HISTORY ON CHILD LABOUR *

"So long as children are allowed to suffer, there is no true love in this world"
Isadora Dicken

"The first duty to children is to make them happy. If you have not made them so you have wronged them. No other good they may get can make up for that."
Charles Buxton

Child labour is a problem that is occurring throughout the world from long time since even before written history. In fact, Child labour is not necessarily a bad thing if it allows the child to spend adequate time in educating him/herself and when the conditions that the child workers. Subjected or not detrimental to his/her health. However, this is not usually the case. In fact very rarely we find children working under safe conditions nor do they usually have adequate educational time. This is when child becomes to be a problem.

Child labour is a social problem associated with the rise of Industrial Production in Capitalism. It appeared even in early ages in agriculture societies, but during the industrial revolution of 18th century it became conspicuous, alarming, and eventually and it came to emerge as one of the biggest scandal of 19th century in all the industrialised countries. In the history great leaders like Karl Marx and Charles Dickens who championed for the liberation of child labour by arousing the common public opinion, feeling and sentiment were themselves a victim of child labour during their tender age.

Sources : Internet www.google.com.
World book Encyclopedia Part II.
There cannot be much better example for the phenomenon of evil like child labour. The problem gets deeper and deeper and a matter of concern, apathy when children under 10 years were forced to work in factories and mines that too in the dangerous conditions for little pay. Social reformer began to condemn child labour because of its detrimental effects on the health and welfare of children. One of the most effective steps of eradicating child labour came from Charles Dickens who spread awareness through his novel Oliver Twist, a book widely read in Britain and US.

With the progress and also by the advent of the growth of Industrial Revolution though the manual labour performed by the labourers were replaced by machinery the role of labourers only increased, progressed and it was centralised in large factories. Thus the children were put to work in those machineries in ever-increasing number even at the tender age of 5 years itself. Thus they were employed in industries, coal-mining etc. The children were forced to work for long hours in the dark, damp mines because of the alarming increase of child labour and its deleterious effect on both mental and physical growth of children. The British Parliament in the year 1830 constituted a commission to investigate the problem of child labourers the report of the committee came out with much shocking revelations that almost took away the conscious of every one. As per the committees report some workers were employed at the age of 8 years and they were forced to work from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. bearing an hour off at noon. In some cases the parents sold their child itself and they were locked up in the mills day and night. They were employed in a horrible condition in coalmines.

In some cases the apathy conditions of the British children were in a pauper state in which there was actually no parents to support them. In some cases, however thousands of
children were turned over to a distant mill owner, leaving no one to intercede from them. Others were indentured, by the parents who sold them to mill owners for a period of years. Still others lived with their families and supplemented their family income with their hard-earned wages.

The prevalence of child labour is widely prevalent in various countries all over the world. In 1890 it became an issue in US where the child labour prevailed even in large cities like New York and thus the problem of Industrialisation worsened further. Problem also worsened with the increasing immigration at the turn of the century and with the south's late and slow industrial development. Further in US, their parents sent out poor children in large cities at the age of 6 or 7 years to earn in order to contribute the house hold economy. Elder children worked at huckstering, several low paying jobs were reserved for children like, street sweeping for girls, boot blacking and newspaper selling. Those children worked in the streets far away from adult supervision fell into gambling, prostitution or theft. Some children were also forced to work in glass factories in front of fiery furnace, in dark textile mills, in coalfields, breathing in cold dust for 10 hours at a time. In US some steps were taken to prevent and eliminate child labour system. A survey was conducted in 1870, the report revealed that 7,50,000 labourers under 15 years were forced to be employed in family firms and business. Crowded and unsanitary condition prevailed in the factories, the dormitory condition prevailed in the factory gave rise to many disease. The rigors of child labour resulted in a permanently weakened labour force, resulting in premature death. Most of the child labourers do not have any proper education and that was a matter of prime concern. To remove the above anomaly in US numerous organisations worked to eliminate child labour, prominent among them was the National Child Labour Committee, which was
launched in 1904 by social workers. Public support was mobilised by journalists, exposing horrible conditions and social ills everywhere. In the year 1916 a high tide of progressive movement started when the president Woodrow Wilson Passed the Keating Owen Act through Congress. Then finally a far-reaching Fair Labour Standard Act was passed. It also limits the age of child labourers to 16 years and over 18 years if the occupation is hazardous. Children aged 14 and 15 years are permitted to work in certain occupation after school hours. Though the US seems to be a sole super power in the world, in US even today child labour remains a problem in agriculture sector especially among migrant farm families. It is also an issue that comes up in protest of US companies who buys products made by child labourers abroad.

This abnormal phenomenon of child labour has become a contentious; a deep concern issue throughout the entire globe and this can be gauged from the fact of prevalence of child labour in the entire world. The ILO estimates that there are 100 to 200 million child labourers exploited throughout the world. In the developing country the prevalence of child labour is found to be 95% and in Asia it is found to be 50% and in Africa it is seemed to be one in every 3 children. More over in Latin America about 15 to 20% of children involved in child labour. The largest percentage of child labour works in agriculture, service industries (restaurants), prostitution, and in small-scale manufacturing (carpets, garments etc.;) Children work in small-scale industries. Like wise in Asia most of the children work in factories and small-scale agriculture where as comparatively in Africa most of the child labourers are in an informal sector of the economy. In Latin America child labourers mostly work in the small mining operations where they have to dig and work in small tunnels in which an adult cannot fit into.
As indicated and mentioned earlier the problem of child labour became a serious social problem during the industrial revolution in Great Britain, which later spread to other European countries especially because of that scam even USA and England, for instance were made as a scape goat in that scandalous, unfortunate and sordid events when they were forced to depend heavily on children. Statistics reveal that about 40% of factory workers in textile industry particularly in New England were found to be between the age group of 7 to 16 years. Most of the African, Latin American, and Asian countries did not experience most of the Industrial Revolution, so most of the child labourers or workers were seen cultivating farmlands. Simultaneously Japan and China too got the Industrial Revolution fever. Their main business fields were the silk and cotton industry. Children were employed in silk and cotton industries, to spin wheels, to make yarns which are used in the manufacturing of cotton and silk threads. These Japanese and Chinese factories realised declined in the employment of child labour due to quick technological progress. This means that children were no longer needed but in place of them technical expertise were required.

Like wise as examined earlier the position of child labour in countries like Africa and Ghana must be looked into. The data reveals that in those countries 250 million children work for their own families survival. They labour in oppressive and often dangerous factory job, in domestic service and on city streets. With these conditions most of the girls are prone to sexual harassment and might even turn to prostitution. Further in Tanzania children are paid wage below the government-approved minimum wage. In a bid to stop this exploitation, the Government of Tanzania has asked NGOs that could take this issue up and also take care of those children by relocating them and also enrolling the children in vocational training schools. In Ghana shoeshine profession is very popular. The shoeshine
profession normally is found among adults. Those young children mostly found to be even below ten years. In Ghana child petty traders are not a rare sight. Petty trading is another common business found among children. Those children often seem to be carrying their items in pans and trays viz biscuits, walnuts, Roasted groundnuts, dry cells, tomatoes and a whole lot of assorted products. This practice flourishes because the people are saved the burden of going to the market when they buy from these children. Bulk purchases also rejoice when these children retail their goods for them, with only a pittance being paid to them as commission.

Hawking is another way through which child petty traders sell their goods; they are often in traffic jams displaying their items to rich folks in moving vehicles. Some passengers took advantage of this moving vehicles and don’t pay for the collected items. Other moving vehicles some times knock down the children when some dubious customers purchase the goods. The domestic services in the form of house help are another form of child labour. Children normally between the ages of 8 and 16 years are sent for, to serve as house helps. The house helps do all sorts of jobs or chores given to them by their master and mistresses. In fact though employed as child labour these children do not get right treatment from their employers. The girl children are often molested and some times raped by the masters. With these treatment meted out to them they run away from house and become street children, which is another social problem. The stone quarries in some Ghanaian and West African countries are not left out. Because of the danger involved in the work many children face the risk of losing their eyesight. Children here work for long hours breaking huge stones with simple rudimentary tools like hammer and chisel. The employer does not even provide them with security wear like goggles. Majority of children here took the job in order to survive.
The commercial buses popularly known as torto or tempo, employs children as drivers and cleaners. The young children are paid lower than the adult males. They are sometimes not paid when the transport market is low.

Because of the increasing force of child labour and also to halt that practice of child labour laws were passed in Britain and in USA. Those laws have set standards and conditions for employing the present day child. The Canadian, German and French Governments have also passed child labour laws. This was possible only through the assistance of a number of non-governmental organisations. Unfortunately legislative reforms had little effect on the life of child farm workers. The alarming proportion at which the child labour is rising in the recent time has called for action from the United Nation. The United Nation through its socio-economic welfare agencies has enacted certain laws and standards for the employment of the child through the human rights declarations. The United Nations has called for the abolition of child labour.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) had also taken up the fight. This has been clearly stated in its aim and objectives. Aiming at the abolition of child labour the ILO stipulated that the minimum age for work should not be less than 14 years of age of completing compulsory education as prescribed by the legislation of each country.

The United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) also stipulates that children must have access to the minimum level of education, nutrition and health care over long term, to achieve progressive elimination of child labour. Also in the year 1990 the ILO launched major global offensive by establishing the international programme for the elimination of child labour. The programme offers technical advisory services to the children who have suffered the worst abuse like child labour, forced labour, sexual abuse
and intimidation. Moreover UNICEF has come up with assistance to children covering child labour, in the form of organising special projects. These programme help in providing education, counseling and care to the children above all relocating these children. NGOs and individual have also joined the struggle against child labour all over the world. Children’s right club has also formed in some institution. There has also been media coverage on this social problem on the television and newspapers. These are all in the right direction to eliminate the socio economic problem of child labour from the world.

"...Every child is endowed by god with unique gifts, talents and abilities which child needs to be recognised and developed to the fullest potential. It is the right and obligation of every child to develop his particular capacities so that they may lead a happy and productive life.

“Love the child” pamphlet published by the Natural Spiritual Assembly of the Baha in US.