1.1 Background of the study

In the midst of fast growing population and incidence of poverty, many of the third world countries face the problem of child labour. The evil of child labour could not be removed, though the government and other agencies have taken several efforts all over the world. It does exist irrespective of the levels of economic development of the country. This only indicates that economic inequality persists in every country whether it is developing or developed country. According to Bhatt (1996), “child labour perpetuates poverty, it does not reduce it as it condemns one generation after another to its vicious circle”.

A child is not merely an asset or liability of the parents but also of the whole society and the whole nation. A child of today is an adult of tomorrow and this adult is expected to play an effective role in the nation building activities. But all these depend upon the way a child is allowed to blossom into youth and adulthood. Therefore, the development of a nation depends on the attention and care bestowed upon the development of its children (Sushila Srivastava, 1993). In the Medieval period, children were placed as trainees under artisans and craftsmen. With the advent of industrialisation, children migrated from rural areas to urban areas and had to face the problems of long
hours of work, low payment, hazardous work and poor working as well as living conditions. Industrialisation has aggravated the problem of child labourers to an extent where it has resulted in child exploitation.

Child labour came into existence and employers today prefer children because it results in cost reduction and profit maximization. Moreover, children are less problematic, as a cheaper source of labour, more obedient and work for longer hours in a day than adults, and this results in higher productivity and hence they are preferred by the employers. In 1950, the Royal Commission on Labour observed that, “one black spot of labour conditions in India is the illegal employment of children” and it holds true even today. Children are being exploited in organised and unorganised sectors of the Indian economy (Vidyasagar, 1992). Towards the end of the twentieth century, there still seems to be no end to the prevalence of child labour in India. Indeed, there is evidence of children being increasingly employed in the manufacturing and processing activities of different industries (Sekar, 1993).

India is one among the third world countries in which the incidence of child labour is more pronounced. More than 20 million children are working in India in various occupations. Children are employed even at the tender age and exploited in the name of poverty. In rural areas, children are found working in cattle grazing, agriculture, brick making, quarries, gem polishing, match and fire works industries etc., whereas in the urban areas, they are engaged in
hotels, wineshops, workshops, factories, automobile workshops, building
construction etc.

They work for daily wages without any benefits and in some places they
are pledged by their parents and bonded for years. Child labourers may be
broadly classified into three categories as follows: 1. Children working in the
business of parents or relatives’ business, 2. Children working as daily wage
earners and 3. Children working as bonded labourers.

As far as the problem of child labour is concerned, it is not the question
of, in which category the child is working, but it is the question of child
exploitation and violation of rights of the child. Recently the Ministry of
Labour, Government of India has evolved Child Labour Project Societies for
regulation, elimination and rehabilitation of working children and started
implementing the programme in 133 districts of India.

In India, the incidence of child labour is high compared to other
countries. As far as Asia is concerned, South Asia is more concentrated with
child labourers than other region. It may be observed that the poor countries
have higher incidence of child labour than non-poor countries and accordingly
it is often concluded that poverty is the cause for child labour. This may not
hold good in all regions as in India the child labour is in its maximum in
Andhra Pradesh, which is not so poor, when compared to economically
backward states of India, such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan
and Uttar Pradesh.
Studies have found that lack of access to school education has been the major cause for higher incidence of child labour. Hence, a thorough investigation is needed from micro level to probe into the cause of child labour. The dimensions of child labour have been many and interesting. Child labour is concentrated in rural areas (World Bank, 1999). Its incidence has been declining over time (Census, 1991). It is concentrated in the 10 to 14 age group mostly in agriculture (Visaria, 1993). The incidence is high among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the field of agriculture (NSS, 50th round). The incidence of child labour is high in Southern States of India, such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu where access to school is better, and low in poor States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc., where access to school is poor (NSS 1993-94, NCAER 1994) and hence school factor alone may not be the cause for existence of child labour.

The determinants of child labour may include both demand and supply factors. That the child labourers can be availed at lower wages and that they are active and energetic, do not form union, less likely to change job and can be easily laid off etc., are emphasised as the factors on demand side in many studies. Both school and home-related factors including poverty, skills of learning and quality of school education etc., have contributed to the prevalence of child labour on the supply side.
Different groups have dealt with the issue of child labour in different manner, (i) One school of thought holds the view that it must be eliminated compulsorily with state intervention, as it is the foremost responsibility and duty of the state to ensure minimum level of learning. It is also held that the education must be subsidized, as the poor cannot afford to pay the fees. (ii) Another school advocates that it is impossible to tackle the problem of child labour, given the enormous number of children going for work for necessity and other basic needs reasons and hence priority may be given to impart vocational training for the children in hazardous occupations and then to release the children from non-hazardous occupations, making the intervention slow and systematic. (iii) The third group advocates the consensus of the above mentioned groups that as the State has failed to provide necessary infrastructure and other logistic support to make education universal, it is necessary that the children opt for a career to choose a vocation, in which they can expect or demand the government, to create vocational training opportunities which may be suitable for the children without hindering their physical and mental development (Mishra, 2000). Common view which emerges in all the three schools of thought, is that education as a social infrastructure and vocational training as the alternative must be provided by the State.
The issue of child labour has long been identified as an economic problem. The socio-economic compulsions of the poor parents force their children to work more thereby increasing the supply of child labour and consequential decrease in cost reduction and resulting in high profit which induces employers to engage child labourers.


1.2 The statement of the problem

Studies reviewed above emphasize unanimously that there is a need for addressing the issues of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment in order to eliminate child labour. In fact, education is on the reverse side of child labour.
Child labour can be eliminated through universalizing elementary education. Advocacy and action against employment of children are gaining momentum. But still child labour exists strongly in some of the industrial occupations. In Tamil Nadu, it is reported to be concentrated in match and fire works in Virudhunagar district, beedi works in North Arcot, Tiruchirapalli and Tirunelveli districts, gem-cutting in Tiruchirapalli and Pudukkottai districts, quarrying in Pudukkottai district, handloom weaving in Chengalpet, North Arcot and Thanjavur districts, powerlooms in Periyar, Salem and Coimbatore districts, cotton rope manufacturing in North Arcot and Madurai districts and in agriculture all over the State which accounts for more than 50 percent of child labour force.

This study has confined to gem industry in Pudukkottai district, which is one of the backward districts of Tamil Nadu State. Gem cutting, gem polishing and quarrying are a few major hazardous occupations in which children are mostly employed in the study area. These children are very poor, socially neglected and economically fall below the poverty line. It is observed that working children are subjected to various harassment including sexual abuse and are highly vulnerable to diseases and health hazards. Gem cutting, is one of the most hazardous activities. Several dreams of these kids are nullified in their buds. It is in this background, it is felt that a study on the issue of child labour may be the need of the hour to probe into the causes of child labour. Having observed that gem industry is offering employment to children in
different parts of Tamil Nadu, more particularly Pudukkottai and Tiruchirapalli districts, the present study has confined to Pudukkottai district which is concentrated with child labourers in gem industry, in rural parts of the district.

1.3 Objectives

The specific objectives are:

1. To analyse the socio-economic background of the child labourers in Pudukkottai district and to identify the factors responsible for the high incidence of child labour in gem-cutting units of the study area.

2. To examine the productivity and wage differences between child and adult labourers, if any, and the reasons for such differences.

3. To examine the working conditions of child labourers and the problems faced by them and to highlight some case studies of child labourers and

4. To analyse the performance of the child labour in gem-cutting units and understand the need for employing child labour, from the entrepreneurs’ point of view.
1.4 Hypotheses

Based on the above objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. The poverty, family size, parental education, parental occupation, number of earning members, debt, asset ownership and repayment capacity are the key determinants of incidence of child labour.

2. There is no significant difference in wages between child and adult labourers.

3. There is no significant difference in the productivity between the adult labourers and child labourers.

4. Working conditions of child labourers are normal.

5. Child labourers contribute more to the profitability of gem cutting units than adult labourers.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Sample selection and data base

Pudukkottai district has been chosen as the study district as it is concentrated with gem-cutting units predominantly using child labour. From the information furnished by the National Child Labour Project Society, it was found that Kulathur taluk of Pudukkottai district is industrially concentrated and Annavasal Union of Kulathur taluk has been found to be concentrated with more gem-cutting units and high incidence of child labour. Hence the study has chosen the Annavasal Union as its study area. Though National Child Labour
Project Society also furnished the data, it was not fully relied upon and hence a preliminary census of industrial units employing child labourers in Kulathur taluk was conducted. The survey revealed that the child labourers mainly exist in four industrial categories including gem-cutting (84.9%), quarry (12.1%), brick making (0.9%) and match (0.4%). It was also observed from the distribution that Illuppur Town Panchayat has accounted for more than 40 percent of the gem-cutting units in Annavasal Union. Therefore, it was decided to cover Illuppur town panchayat as the study area, where 49 gem units were functioning. Having confined to Illupur town panchayat, it was decided to cover all the units functioning in Illupur and all child labourers working in the existing 49 units as respondents for this study. From the list it was found that 456 child labourers coming from 300 households were working in these units and survey of one child from each household was chosen for the study and information were collected from both parents and children. While selecting a child, in respect of those households with more than one child labour, the child with more years of working experience was selected. Apart from this, a sample of 30 entrepreneurs has also been made in order to identify the demand factors.

Both primary and secondary data were used for the present study. The primary data were collected through a well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule.
1.5.2 Secondary Data Base

The secondary data were collected from various official reports of different agencies of the government including the National Child Labour Project Society and District Statistical Office, Pudukkottai. Additional data have also been collected from the sources such as Decennial Census of India and Tamil Nadu, National Sample Surveys, World Bank Reports, Reports of the Ministry of Labour, International Labour Organisation and other references.

1.5.3 Statistical tools used

For analysing the data, some statistical tools such as Correlation, Logistic Regression, Paired t test and Friedman test were used.

1.5.4 Limitations of the study

The study has covered only one district of Tamil Nadu which is a backward district and the findings may not be generalised to macro level or to other types of industries. Lack of maintenance of records on the part of the parents of the child labourers on the annual income of the households and the actual contribution of the children to the household income is the main limitations of the study. Another limitation is the under-statement of the magnitude of child labourers by the employers though every efforts was made to elicit correct information by careful probing. It is obvious that there could be
some recall bias because lack of memory on the part of the parents regarding various details of child labour.

1.5.5 Chapterisation

The thesis is presented in six chapters:

The first and introductory chapter explains the problem and focuses on the objectives, hypotheses and methodology.

The second chapter defines the concepts used in the study and makes a survey of literature relating to child labour.

The third chapter gives an overview of the historical background of child labourers in India and Tamil Nadu.

General description of gem-cutting industry and the profile of the study area are given in the fourth chapter.

The fifth chapter deals with the socio-economic profile of child labourers of the sample households, and entrepreneurs of the gem-cutting units and

The sixth chapter summaries the findings of the study and also bring out the policy implications and suggestions.