PREFACE

Children are universally recognised as the most important asset of any nation. The future of a society depends directly on how the successive generations are reared, and brought up to fulfill the many requirements which the society is faced with from time to time. Like any other living organisation, a child is basically a product of the environment around him. In societies where the rigours of sheer survival, are beset with numerous difficulties, children also are bound to suffer in their development and growth. They develop early propensities towards fending for themselves. The parental care, too is considerably tampered in the face of actual realities of the situation. The consequential problems are stupendous, and finding solutions to these is a real challenge to both the society and the state.

Child Labour is not a new phenomenon. In all primitive societies, children used to work according to their capacities with adults often making no much distinctions between vocational training and productive activities. It was then considered as a process of socialisation. Industrial revolution has brought about fundamental changes in the mode of production. During this period, for the employers, children were seen as the key to the greater profits because of cheap labour and the exploitation of working children had reached to its zenith. Today, children at work are not for the noble purpose of socialisation. But they are assigned very specific goal of earning and thus help increasing their family incomes.

In India, poverty, unemployment, precarious incomes, low living standards and insufficient opportunities for education and training are considered as the causes for child labour. Children are found working both in rural and urban areas and also in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. In India, today there is no sector in which there is no Child Labour. Child Labour precludes the full unfoldment of child’s potentialities. It deprives him of education, training and skills which are the necessary pre-requisites of earning power and economic development. Children are most vulnerable group in any population because of their vulnerability and dependence, they can be exploited, ill-treated and directed into unconsiderable channels by unscrupulous elements in the community.

Attempts were made both at national and international level from time to time to eradicate Child Labour. ILO and UNO and Unicef have been playing a very important role to eradicate Child Labour. Indian Constitution prohibits the employment of children below 14 years of age in factories, mines and in any hazardous employments. Article 45 of the Constitution of India, provides for
free and compulsory primary education for all children who have not completed the age of 14 years. To effectuate these provisions many legislations relating to the employment of children have been enacted in India from time to time during the last century. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 was passed to consolidate the Child Labour law in India. The Indian Supreme Court in a long line of cases expressed its anguish over the economic exploitation of children.

Inspite of the protective legislations, the socio-economic evil of child labour remains a pressing problem of India. India has the largest number of world's working children. The State with the highest child labour population in the country is Andhra Pradesh. In 1987, the Govt. of India has launched a project to eliminate the Child Labour. The Govt. of India identified ten industries as most hazardous employments for children and launched a project to eliminate the child labour in the identified industries and to rehabilitate the released child labourers.

The prime object of the present study is to identify the incidence of child labour and to examine the implementation of the child labour laws and project in the slate industry of Markapur in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh, which is one of the 10 identified hazardous industries for children, and to reveal the factual background of the phenomenon in which it grows and multiplies itself. It is hoped that the findings of the present study would exert pressure on the administrators to take effective steps to eradicate the child labour from the slate industry of Markapur immediately. As Chile Poet, Gabriala Mistral wrote.

_We are guilty of many errors and many faults,
but our worst crime in abandoning the children,
neglecting the fountain of life,
many of things we need can wait,
but, the child cannot,
Right now is the time,
his bones are being formed
his blood is being made, and
his senses are being developed,
to him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow',
His name is 'Today'._

If child is perceived in the sense in which the poet has perceived, and if entire nation gives child the place it deserved, child labour would no longer exist and future of nation would be the brightest.

AUTHOR.