Preface

"Mankind owes the child the best it has to give." United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, 1959.

Nobody would disagree with that statement. Yet everyday millions of children around the world struggle to survive the horrors of war, homelessness, physical and psychological abuse, economic exploitation and many other problems which mock the assumption that children deserve special treatment because they are most vulnerable. One such significant problem, which is a phenomenon unique in the economic backward countries, is the problem of child labour.

The concentration of child workers is highest among the unorganised sector. In the unorganised sector large scale industries, like mines, leather, tendu and bidi, match sticks, brick-kilns, tea, hosiery, cosmetics, cotton and textiles have boosted the phenomenal growth of migrant labour cross-cutting the district and state boundaries.

Almost all the migratory flows have a close functional relationship with the process of industrialisation that is identified with the technological advancement and economic modernisation. Under the mounting pressure of population growth on land and a stagnant rural economy, the village folk generally migrate to the industrial-urban centres for employment. In other words,
the surplus labour in the rural sector moves to the urban sector in search of work, as the productivity of agriculture is low and the scope for providing full time employment is limited in the villages.

In the unorganised sector such as in brick-kilns, salt pans, construction sites workers find work on a piece-rate basis payment. In the unorganised sector, most of the work is done on a labour contract system where reward is based on performance of specific work. Since a major aim of migrant labour is to maximise their earnings, therefore working for long hours in a team facilitates more earning. This often leads to the involvement of more and more family member in order to maximise the earnings. Thus the women and the children of the family get involved in the work.

The present study is therefore designed to understand the condition of migrant working children, their working and living conditions, their problems, needs and above all the reasons that have compelled them to join the workforce at such an early age.

At the outset, in chapter I, we present a of the issue of child labour. Here the different theoretical perspectives on child labour and the earlier studies on child labour have been dealt. This chapter also includes the conceptualisation of the problem based on the review of studies and the methodology that evolved which tries to understand the causes which leads to the incidence of child labour and the effect of work on the health and well-being of the workers.
In chapter II, we present an overview of the unorganised sector and migrant labour in this sector. Different theories of migration and a review of literature on the migration of workers have been covered. This chapter also looks into the effects of migration on children in general and working children in particular.

Chapter III looks into the organisational structure of the brick kiln industry. This chapter also looks into nature of the industry and the work force profile of this industry in our study area. Details of the study area and also the area from where the brick kiln industry of the North Twenty Four Pargana district draws its workforce has been discussed in great details here.

In chapter IV the health and dwell being of the workers have been dealt. Since understanding the problem of child labour also necessitates an understanding of the socio-economic condition of their family, therefore in this chapter the socio-economic condition of the brick kiln workers have been covered in great detail. In this chapter we have tried to look into the causes which have compelled the workers in the brick kiln to migrate to the area of work along with their family members and thereby involve the family members which involves even children in the work. This chapter looks into the living condition of the workers both in their native place as well as in the area of the work and also the working condition of the workers in the brick kilns. Details regarding the health facilities of the workers at the work site as well as the health problems of the workers have also been covered in this chapter.
Chapter V deals exclusively with the child workers. In this chapter an analysis of the socio-economic condition of the child workers and its effect on them has been done. In this chapter the effect of work on the health and well being of the workers have been dealt.

The final chapter furnishes a detailed summary of the discussion, which establishes link between the living condition, working conditions and the health of the workers.