CHAPTER VI
Findings and Recommendations

This chapter attempts to summarise the findings drawn from the analysis of the study and puts forth certain recommendations to reduce and/or eliminate the evil practice of child labour.

6.1 Findings

The important findings of the study of working children in Mumbai are:

A. Personal Aspects

1. Personal Characteristics

1. Of the 250 children interviewed, 200 (80%) were boys and 50 (20%) were girls.

2. The concentration of working children was greatest (138 i.e.55.20%) in the 13-14 years age group. 76 (30.40%) children were in 11-12 years age group while the remaining 36 (14.40%) were under 10 years of age. The average age at which these children began working was 10.22 years. However, one child was five years old when he entered the work force.

2. Education

1. Of the 250 children interviewed, 133 (53.20%) children were literate of which 110 (55% of the boys surveyed) were boys and 23 (46% of the girls surveyed) were girls while as many as 117 (46.8%) were illiterate. Of these 117, 90 (45% of the boys surveyed) were boys and 27 (54% of
the girls surveyed) were girls indicating that illiteracy in the case of girls is higher than in boys.

2. Of the 133 literate children, 95 (82 boys and 13 girls) could manage to continue their schooling by combining work and school while 38 (28.57%) had to drop out of schools. Of these 38 children, 28 (25.45%) were boys and 10 (43.47%) were girls indicating that dropout rate is higher in case of girls than boys.

3. Of the 95 children presently attending schools, 41 children (30 boys and 11 girls) were in standard I to IV, 38 children (36 boys and only two girls) were in V to VII standard while 16 boys were able to reach VIII and IX standard. None of the girls had studied beyond standard VII.

4. Poverty was the most important reason for not going to or leaving school. Of the 155 children (117 illiterates and 38 dropouts), 96 (61.94%) reported that they were not able to go to school because of their poor economic conditions.

5. On being questioned about how they felt about not going or dropping out of school, 91 children (58.71%) were sad and disappointed, 43 (27.74%) were indifferent and 21 (13.55%) felt happy, as they were not interested in studies.

3. Family's details

1. The fathers of 151 (60.4%) children were illiterate while the fathers of the rest of the children had not acquired education higher than grade seven.

2. Parents of 59 (23.60%) children were working in the agricultural sector in their native place, 80 (32.00%) were in manufacturing/service sector,
69 (27.60%) were self-employed while 42 (16.80%) were either unemployed or had retired.

3. 46 (18.4%) children had a total family income of less than Rs. 2,000/- per month, 145 (58%) children had family income of Rs. 2,000/- to Rs. 4,000/- and 34 (13.6%) had income of more than Rs. 4,000/-. In the case of six (2.4%) children, the family generated no income while 19 (7.6%) children were not aware of their total family income.

B. Economic Aspects

1. Occupation/ Job children were engaged in

1. The sample children were found to be working in a variety of occupations. 154 (61.6%) were wage earners, 90 (36.0%) were self-employed and six (2.4%) were working as apprentices. A gender bias could be observed in the selection of the jobs. There was concentration of girl child labourers working as domestic servants. None of them were working in hotels, garages, carrying loads, polishing shoes and as sweepers which seems to be the exclusive domain of the male child labourers.

2. 92 (36.8%) children were not willing to work because of long working hours, incredibly low wages and unhygienic and hazardous working conditions. 46 (50%) children wanted to study.

3. 174 (69.6%) children were working before taking up their present jobs but for 76 (30.40%) children this was their first job. 220 (88%) children undertook unskilled and manual work that required little or no technical knowledge. 30 children working in garages were provided some training by their employers. The training period varied from one month to one year.
4. Younger girls were more visible on the streets as compared to older girls. This is because as girls grow older they no longer remain on the streets but take up domestic jobs or work in home-based industries.

2. Income and Expenditure

1. The wages of children were found to be inadequate keeping in mind the long working hours. On an average, they worked for 9.59 hours. Their average monthly income was Rs. 506.60. Further, the average monthly income for girls was Rs. 416.50 and for boys it was Rs. 529.13. 87.2% of the children earned incomes ranging from Rs. 250/- to Rs. 750/- per month. Being young, submissive and often not able to get any other job, they silently accepted the low remuneration. The wages were generally fixed based on the type of establishment, hours and nature of work and the capacity of the employer to pay. 139 (55.6%) children complained about the irregular payment of wages. 83 (33.2%) children were paid on piece-rate basis.

2. Children made significant contribution to the income of the households. 168 (67.2%) children gave a substantial amount of their income every month to their parents. Of these 168 children, 35 (14%) did not keep any amount for themselves but remitted their total income to their parents. The average monthly contribution to their family was Rs. 237.8. On an average, they contributed 46.94% of their income. On the other hand, 82 (32.80%) children did not give any amount to their parents.

3. It was found that 31 (12.4%) children did not spend any amount on themselves. 54 (21.6%) children's monthly expenditure did not exceed Rs. 100/-. In case of 106 (42.4%) children, it ranged between Rs. 100/- and Rs. 200/-. In the remaining 59 (23.6%) cases, their monthly expenditure exceeded Rs.200/-. The average monthly expenditure was Rs. 156.6 per child. Illiterate children spent their income on clothing and
entertainment, while those children going to school retained some money to meet their educational expenses.

4. 162 (64.8%) children could not save any amount because of their meagre income. 88 (35.2%) children could manage to save amounts upto Rs. 200/- per month for specific purposes like to buy clothes, pay fees or go to their native place.

5. 23 (9.2%) children reported that their parents had taken advances ranging from Rs. 250/- to Rs. 2,000/- when they took up the job indicating an element of bondage labour in their employment.

3. Reasons for working

1. Poverty was the main reason that compelled children to take up work during the formative period of their lives. 151 (60.4%) children were working because of poverty, 29 (11.6%) children needed money to fulfil their economic aspirations and 14 children started working because they needed to raise money for studying.

2. Other reasons cited by children for working were death/sickness of earning member of the family (22), deserted home due to abusive and exploitative family relations (13), to pay off the debt of the family (8), pressure from parents who were not employed or not prepared to work (7) and to pay for their or their siblings’ dowry (6).

4. Working Conditions

1. Of the 250 children under study, 64 (25.6%) were part time workers working for less than six hours while 186 (74.4%) were working for six hours or more. Their hours of work varied between one to eighteen hours per day. On an average, they worked for 9.59 hours. In 88
(35.2%) cases, children were found working without intermediate rest intervals.

2. Many of them started their work as early as 6 a.m. Instances of children working as late as 1 a.m. were also observed. 63 (25.2%) children worked during night shifts. 148 (59.2%) children were made to work overtime. Not a single child was paid extra remuneration for working extra hours.

3. Of the 131 wage earners, 52 (39.69%) children were working for all the seven days of the week for months together. 91 (69.47%) did not get any leave during festivals, 86 (65.65%) children did not get medical leave while only five (3.82%) were given annual leave.

4. Of the 131 wage earners, food was made available to 74 children working in hotels (58) and as domestic workers (16). None of the children were provided educational facilities. 28 children got medical help from their employers not because of any consideration but because employers wanted the children to recover faster and resume their duties. Only 11 children ever got any bonus. Of these, seven worked in hotels, three in garages and one as domestic help.

5. 84 children complained of harsh behaviour by their employers. They were physically abused and beaten severely at regular intervals. About two third (66.8%) of the children complained of harassment by their parents. They were frequently confronted with verbal or physical abuse. More than half of the children complained that society considers them as abandoned, thieves, immoral, juvenile delinquents and as a social nuisance.
5. Consequences of work

1. The sample of working children shows that they were engaged in activities that occupied them for long hours and thus they were deprived of education. Of the 250 children interviewed, as many as 117 (46.8%) were illiterates. They were also deprived of training, leisure and recreation facilities.

2. Physical labour coupled with poor nutrition affected the children’s growth and made them highly susceptible to various diseases, infections and physical deformities. They were exposed to all sorts of occupational and health hazards without any consideration for their tender age. About half the number of children in the sample were found to be exposed to various types of occupational and health hazards. 120 (48.0%) children reported that they do suffer from some ailments regularly. 35 (14.0%) children had met with accidents while at work.

3. Young girl child labourers were victims of sexual abuse that caused severe psychological disorder. Of the 50 girls surveyed, 10 (20%) were sexually abused at some point of time, while some were subjected to the abuse multiple times.

4. On observation, it was found that most of the working children were denied a happy, carefree and imaginative childhood. They were deprived of love, warmth, trust, protection and emotional support, which gave them a feeling of insecurity and frustration. Lack of any character building influence proved to be a handicap, which in majority of cases, was never overcome.
6. Living Conditions

1. 68 (27.20%) children were found to be living in huts, 54 (21.6%) in small rented places, 47 (18.80%) on the road or pavement while 13 (5.20%) had no fixed abode. 23 (9.2%) children were provided accommodation by various NGOs. 122 (48.8%) children were staying with their parents, guardians or relatives, 83 (33.2%) were staying alone and 45 (18%) children working in hotels and as domestic servants were provided accommodation by their employers.

2. The living conditions of these children and their families were far from satisfactory. 72 (28.8%) households did not have access to basic amenities like electricity, water, and bathroom in their homes and had to depend on public amenities for the same.

3. The unhygienic living conditions, lack of sanitation facilities and clean water predisposed these children to a variety of illnesses and skin diseases such as scabies and boils.

7. Developmental aspects

As mentioned earlier in section 1.3, every third household in India has a working child, every 18th child in the country is a labourer and over 20% of India’s gross national product is contributed by child labour yet nothing much has been done to provide facilities to these children so that they can grow and develop into an educated and skilled labour force. The well-being of a child is also an end in itself and, in this sense, it is necessary to create conditions in which they can enjoy all their rights, develop their full potential and look forward to a full and satisfying adult life.

Education, nutrition and gender equality is considered vital for child development. However, there has been very slow progress in primary
education, which hold the key to child development. Almost one half of the children and two thirds of the girls in the age group 5-14 are not attending schools. India has the dubious distinction of having the world’s third largest population of malnourished children after Bangladesh and Nepal. Gender discrimination is reflected in the unequal treatment meted out to girls in the form of higher malnutrition, infant mortality, lower school enrollment and higher dropout rates among them.

The enormously complex problem of child labour should not be viewed simply from a labour perspective, which requires the immediate withdrawal of young children from work but it should be viewed from a development point of view that incorporates the need of working children for suitable education and vocational training and health care facilities. The problem incorporates various socio-economic elements and should be viewed in proper perspective; which is wide enough to see the impact of work on the development of the society and the nation and focussed enough to see the plight of the individual children.

When children start working at a young age, they are deprived of education that is essential for the development of a well-rounded personality. Uneducated, the only work they are capable of doing, both during their childhood as well as when they become adults, is unskilled labour. Working children grow up as illiterate and unskilled adults condemned to a life of deprivation. They continue to perform stultifying, precarious and insignificant work, which prevents them from sending their children to school in turn, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle.

The loss of education and training of such children deprives the society of an educated and skilled professional workforce which would have emerged had not these children been neglected. The small financial gain got by the child’s work for the family is at the cost of an incalculable long-term loss to them and to the society.
An ideal situation would be the withdrawal of all children from the work force, as this is the only way to break a perpetual cycle of poverty. However, this is not a very pragmatic solution. For the simple reason that our law-enforcement agencies are not equipped to effectively implement such drastic and far-reaching reforms. Our social structures are not ready to implement such strong measures. Lack of education, non-awareness about their rights and paucity of support from parents and employers all come together to resist this change. It is, therefore, necessary to address developmental issues of the community from where the children enter the labour market. What is needed is a combination of developmental strategies: short as well as long term, that would lead to the progressive elimination of this menace.

In the short term, the government should encourage children to take up vocational training courses that would make them self-dependent and more acceptable to the service oriented markets of today, facilities for health checkups should be made more accessible and child-friendly, media campaigns should be launched which would educate the common public to this menace and sensitise them to the problems and issues faced by these children and corporate-government-NGO partnerships need to be chalked out to make the entire campaign more synergistic. It is only a concerted effort from everyone that could make the difference between brutal survival and fulfilled living for the children. In the long term, all government efforts should move in the direction of providing free and compulsory education to all children as it helps them live a better and more productive life. Another important strategy for the government would be to create an economic environment, where there would be no need for the child to earn income to maintain himself and/or his family. It is imperative to find suitable jobs for the parents to prevent them from pushing their children into gainful activities.
These suggestions may have been thought of earlier by others also but what is required is a firm expression of political will at the highest level to implement these measures.

C. Other Aspects

1. Laws

1. 152 (60.8%) children were not even aware that there were any laws that prohibited child labour and that they had a fundamental right to free primary education.

2. 65 (26%) children wished to have laws totally prohibiting child labour. 109 (43.6%) were not in favour of abolition of child labour while 76 (30.4%) favoured abolishing child labour in only hazardous industries.

3. The analysis of data and observation of sample children clearly bring out the fact that implementation of labour laws for children seemed to be inadequate and ineffective.

2. Girl child labour

1. Out of the 50 girls surveyed, 25 (50%) girls said that they were not discriminated against, while there was an equal number who felt that they were the victims of bias. They complained that they were made to work for longer hours and with lower remuneration than the boys. They were preferred as workers because they were more docile and obedient than boys.

2. Girl child labourers were more vulnerable to sexual exploitation compared to their male counterparts. Of the 50 girls surveyed, 10 (20%) were sexually abused; four by their neighbours, three by their co-
workers and two by their employers while one was abused by an unknown person.

3. Parents had a greater inclination towards sending their sons to schools rather than their daughters. Some of them were unwilling to send their girl children to school even if scholarships and other help were available. They did not feel the need for sending the girl child to school preferring the alternative of sending them to work and earning for their dowry right from their childhood.

Thus, there was a significant sex discrimination, sexual abuse and male preference - all indicating exploitation of girl child labourers.

3. General

1. Of the 250 children interviewed, 55 (22%) were born in Mumbai, 51 were from Maharashtra while 140 children came from other states of India. Three children came from Bangladesh and one was from Nepal. The primary cause of migration to Mumbai was to seek employment.

2. 59 (46.46%) children had never visited their homes since they left them. They were totally uprooted from their families and native places and had no contact whatsoever with their families.

3. Only 33 (13.2%) children had received benefits from welfare programmes of NGOs while none of them got any help from government sponsored programmes aimed at bettering their lot.

4. None of the 250 children were members of any trade union.

5. 146 (58.4%) children were found to be exposed to one or other delinquents acts like smoking, gambling and drinking.
6. Almost all the children were found to have low aspirations. Many had not even thought about their future. They neither had any hope nor any desire to achieve any goals in life.

4. Views of the parents

1. Through discussions with the parents, it was found that the majority of them did not perceive child labour as a problem but thought of it as an inevitable reality. Very few of them were aware of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986. According to them, laws prohibiting or regulating child labour were Utopian and far from the harsh reality of everyday life. However, they were willing to take any positive initiatives they could for the betterment of their children’s lives.

2. When parents were asked the reasons for sending their children to work, almost all of them replied that their household income was too low and they needed the additional income provided by the child. They also admitted that even if their income increased by an amount equal to the child’s earnings, they would still send the child to work, since even this amount would not alleviate their abject poverty.

3. The failure of the education system had led many parents to view work as the preferred option for their children. However, a majority of them opined that if they had enough money they would send their children to school and not to work. They wanted their children to be educated, to better themselves and escape from the poverty stranglehold that they were trapped in. More than half the parents wanted their children to undergo some vocational training. A few parents wanted their children to attend school and at the same time undertake work to augment the family’s income.
4. When parents were questioned about their dependency on their children’s income, almost 75% said that they depended on their child’s income for survival while the remaining felt that they would be able to survive even without their children’s income.

5. Many parents knew that their children were abused and exploited, economically, physically and sexually in varying degrees by different people yet they had no alternative but to turn a blind eye to this, since they felt they needed the income of the child and could not afford to keep the child sitting at home.

5. Views of the employers

1. When employers were questioned regarding their preference for child labour because they can be paid lower wages as compared to adults most of them denied the fact. However, a few conceded that they paid lower wages to children as compared to adults. The reasons were that they assigned simple tasks to the children and that the children worked only as helpers and hence need not be paid salaries equivalent to adults. None of them were willing to employ the parents of child labourers in place of their children.

2. Employers did not feel guilty about employing children. Rather they felt that they were doing a favour to the parents by employing their children and saving them from starvation and deprivation.

3. Almost all the employers insisted that they do provide welfare measures to their workers. These measures mainly included provision of food and tea, periodic medical check-ups and provision of money for school fees, buying books and other educational purposes. A few also provided clothes to children and money to watch movies. When they were questioned regarding provision of training to the workers, very few of
them admitted to the importance of vocational training. However, all this was not consistent with what the children had to say.

4. None of the employers could mention any Acts that prohibited or regulated the employment of children. Very few of them were in favour of total abolition of child labour. They believed that immediate abolition would be unrealistic and in many cases contrary to the interest of the children themselves. According to them, children needed the money; otherwise they would not be working. They also held the view that the government would not be effective in implementing the child labour laws.

5. None of the employers were able to suggest any measures to improve the working and living conditions of child labourers.

6. Views of the social workers

1. All the social workers felt that the employer's excuse of doing favour to the children by giving them work was a myth. They felt that the only reason children were hired was the economic advantage employers got by paying lower wages to the children. They also refuted the argument that children are preferred as workers for certain work due to their nimble fingers.

2. All of them wanted total abolition of child labour. They felt that child labour was a vicious circle, which ultimately lead to more poverty and more children working.

3. According to them provision of education and vocational training was very important to improve the lives of working children. Their organisations were working towards providing non-formal education
and vocational training to these unfortunate children to help them live a better and more productive life.

7. Views of the labour officials

1. According to labour officials, usually dismal poverty at home pushed children into the labour market. They could do nothing when parents themselves wanted their children to work. They were considered as enemies when they tried to stop children from working. They were of the opinion that the main hurdle in the enforcement of the existing legislation was the attitude of the parents and society and if action has to be taken social attitude should be changed. If child labour were to be abolished, thousands of households would be driven to destitution. In addition, the children may get pushed into even more unwanted activities.

2. Discussions with labour officials revealed that the Child Labour Acts covered only a small proportion of child labourers, around 10%, working in the organised sector while the remaining 90% of the children working in small unregistered units, the agricultural sector, cottage industries and family undertakings were entirely excluded from the coverage of the relevant legislations.

8. Views of the trade union leaders

1. During the course of discussions, trade unions leaders admitted that they have played a scanty role in compelling the government to enforce child labour laws to prevent the exploitation of child labourers. This is mainly because the influence of trade unions is largely in the organised sector where children are rarely found to be working. The children are mostly employed in the unorganized sector and due to the informal nature of such employment, it is not possible for the trade unions to organise
them. The other reason was the harsh socio-economic conditions that drive a large number of children into the labour market. They thought that if the trade unions were to insist on the strict implementation of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986, many children would lose their jobs and it will have serious repercussions on the children and their families.

2. They all were aware of the fact that child labour was detrimental to adult employment. When children are employed, potential jobs for adults are lost. Moreover, the adult workers and the trade unions lose much of their bargaining power vis-à-vis the employers once children are available for work.

It is hoped that the findings of the study will lead to creating greater understanding and awareness about the problem of child labour. The research would only prove beneficial, if it helps in reducing the menace of child labour.

6.2 Recommendations

We had earlier referred to the need for short-term and long-term measures for dealing with the problem of child labour. This part of the chapter attempts to put forth certain recommendations to reduce and/or eliminate the evil practice of child labour.

6.2.1 Child Labour Legislation and its Strict Enforcement

1. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 bans child labour only in hazardous occupations. This approach to the problem of child labour has not made much difference in terms of the number of working children and the menace is still widely prevalent. The problem of child labour should, therefore, be tackled both in hazardous and non-
hazardous occupations giving priority, of course, to hazardous occupations.

2. The labour department plays an important role in implementation of the Child Labour Acts, detection of child labour cases and prosecution of the defaulting employers. During discussions with officials from the labour department, it was found that the department is heavily understaffed and they are given large areas to inspect. This hampers the regularity of the inspections. Therefore, the strength of the labour department needs to be increased in order to strictly implement the child labour laws. Similarly, there should be performance evaluation of officers at regular intervals and incentives and awards should be announced for prosecutions.

3. The inspectors should make surprise visits to industries and areas where child labour is prevalent and strictly enforce statutory provision regarding age, working hours, rest intervals and weekly off. Severe punishment should be imposed for the violation of the labour laws. In 1987, Union Labour Minister Mr. P. A. Sangma visited the glass and bangle making industries concentrated in Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh. He discovered that 50 children were locked and hidden in one of the units to keep them away from the visitor. He issued a time-bound ultimatum to the employers to end child labour within two months or face punitive action. Almost 4,000 children were subsequently released from the work and four units were closed down. There should be more such surprise visits.

4. Sensitising and conducting training and orientation programmes for inspectors/labour enforcement officers on the issue of child labour is necessary, as this will help them to effectively enforce child labour legislation. The Maharashtra Institute of Labour Studies (MILS) has started sensitising, training and orientation programmes for inspectors
and labour enforcement officers. Under this programme, the labour and factory inspectors of the Government of India, State Governments and Union Territories are put through training programmes that are designed to inculcate a sensitivity to the issues of child labour - their negative impact on the mental, physical and psychological growth of the children as well as on the health of the society and economy as a whole. Various workshops were conducted in collaboration with international agencies like the ILO and UNICEF in different phases at different times starting from 26th July 1993 to 13th January 1999. The orientation programmes achieved the desired results as they had a significant impact in making the enforcement machinery more effective in the enforcement of laws against child labour. The trained officers have been able to initiate within the enforcement machinery a new thinking towards child labour. The training programme helped raise the awareness of not only the inspectors who underwent training but of their peers in the departments as well. Other benefits of the training include improvement in the understanding of the law and in conducting inspections and follow up through prosecutions and convictions. More such programmes should be conducted.

5. From the analysis of the study, it was found that about 37% of the children were not willing to work but were forced by their parents to take up jobs. About 67% of the children complained that they were treated merely as beasts of burden by their parents. About 75% of the parents said that they depended on their child's income for survival. All the child labour laws impose punishment to the defaulting employers. However, parents should not be spared while enforcing these laws, for they are equally responsible for the existence of child labour.
1. The most effective way to reduce the evil of child labour is to provide universal primary education to all children under the age of 14 years. Free and compulsory education would bring about a marked decline in child labour and in its eventual abolition. Our goal should be very clear, a 100% literate India, an India that cherishes childhood, and a society that has developed enough, both economically and socially, not to trade the lives of its young to prop its economy. No country in the world has successfully eliminated child labour without making primary education compulsory. Wherever access to such education has been provided child labour has been contained, for example, Kerala has been able to introduce universal primary education and in the process almost eradicated the evil practice of child labour. Primary education should be made compulsory by law and the law should be fully enforced. In India, the number of children estimated to be in the labour market is around 60 million. This number is equal to the estimated number of children not going to school. It is, therefore, necessary to send all the children currently out of school, to schools and thereby keep them away from the labour market.

2. It was found from the study that many children were not send to school because parents saw no merit in educating them. Education was looked upon as waste of time and money. Besides, there was no guarantee that the child would get a job after acquiring education. It is therefore necessary to make changes in the existing curriculum to make it more meaningful, interesting and job-oriented. This will attract children to school and reduce dropout rates and will have a positive impact on child labour.

3. It was ascertained from the study that many parents want their children to study yet do not send their children to school because they are unable
to meet the cost of schooling. To increase the school enrolment and retention rate, the family’s school bill should be reduced and incentives like free uniforms and books should be provided to needy children. Schemes like the mid-day meal, which has been tremendously successful in the state of Tamil Nadu, should be extended to the rest of the country. This will ensure that children from poor families do not depend on their parents for school expenses and also get one full meal a day. This will motivate parents to allow their children to go to schools.

4. Those children who do not possess the potential to study can be given vocational training courses that would make them self-dependent. There are various NGOs in this city working towards this aspect but their reach and services are limited. These should be enhanced and complemented.

6.2.3 Community Development Programmes

1. Poverty is the root cause of child labour and as long as it persists, one cannot think of abolishing child labour. One effective strategy to contain child labour would be to ensure that children do not enter the labour market by empowering poor families. Efforts should be made to increase the income of the family and remove adult unemployment. When the economic status of the family improves and when parents have suitable jobs then they would not send their children to work, since the child’s income would then not mean the difference between starving and surviving. This can be achieved through a number of anti-poverty programmes and income and employment generating schemes but they have to be implemented more effectively.

2. Parents should be paid according to the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Wages of child labourers should be brought at par with those of adult workers and thereby child labour should be made
more expensive, so that the employers are discouraged from employing children.

6.2.4 Improving Working Conditions

1. Child labour in India has been accepted as a harsh reality as it exists because of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy and its total abolition is thought to be not possible at the present stage, therefore, attention should be focussed on making the working conditions of these children better and socially more acceptable. Top priority should be given to eliminating the participation of children in economic activities conducted under hazardous and abusive conditions. Children should be given simple jobs and time to study.

2. Labour inspectors should see that children are not made to work beyond the working hours and are provided necessary rest intervals and weekly holidays.

6.2.5 Awareness Generation

1. Through discussions with the children, it was found that about 61% of the children were not aware that there was any Act that prohibited child labour or regulated their conditions of work. Children should be made aware of their rights, the causes of their present state of exploitation and the consequences of starting work at a tender age. Meetings, seminars, workshops, street plays and debates should be held to bring child labourers together so that they can exchange their ideas and experiences.

2. Parents should be made aware of the ill effects of child labour in the long run. Employers should be made aware of the economic advantages in employing adult workers in place of child labour in the form of higher productivity and a better quality product.
3. A National campaign needs to be launched, which would educate the common public to this menace and project child labour as a ‘national stigma’.

6.2.6 Involvement of NGOs

1. Many NGOs in the city provide non-formal education and vocational training to children. The main objective of these NGOs is the abolition of child labour by getting children into schools. They have been successful in attracting and retaining children in their schools because of the informal atmosphere that prevails there. Their experiment shows that if properly motivated children are willing to go and stay in schools. Provision of vocational training by these NGOs and flexible school timings have helped children get out of work and into schools.

2. The example of Door-Step school, a voluntary organisation in Mumbai, can be followed to make education easily accessible to a large number of children. The Door-Step school has introduced ‘School-on-Wheels’ with the sole objective to reach out to ‘out-of-school’ children on the streets, at construction sites or working on the streets where a place for conducting classes is not available. This example of a mobile school can solve one of the major problems, that of a place for a classroom to a great extent. The mobile van can provide a classroom at any place wherever out-of-school children are found, at a time convenient to them. The main reason for the children for not going to school is that there is no one to drop and fetch them. ‘School-on-Wheels’ will encourage young children who are left alone at home when parents and older siblings go for work to learn at their doorstep.
6.2.7 Role of employers

1. Employers should see that the minimum facilities of life essential for the proper growth and development of the child labourers are ensured to them. They should encourage children to study by regulating their working hours and provide them with health facilities in the form of regular medical check-up, treatment of diseases, safe drinking water and protection against occupational hazards.

2. The Government should give economic incentives to those industries that switch to new methods of production using new machinery and new technology so that children need not be employed and the work could be done by adults which in the long run would help to minimise adult unemployment. The incentives could be non-monetary as well, like recognition of employers who discontinue the use of child labour. They should be looked as role models for other employers. Conversely, the Government should levy higher taxes on those industries that continue to employ children.

6.2.8 Networking

1. There should be effective co-ordination between the Government and various departments such as the Labour Department, Women and Child Welfare Department and NGOs in terms of funding and action for the common cause of eradication of child labour.

2. Linkages should be created amongst existing groups that are working on children’s issues to share information to build greater commitment and increased capacities for child labour eradication.
6.2.9 Finding Out About Child Labour

1. In India, there is not much info about the conditions of working children. This makes it difficult to formulate concrete programmes for them. Any systematic programme for the abolition of child labour requires an abundance of information. The lack of detailed and reliable data considerably hinders the setting of realistic targets and the designing of effective action against child labour. Government, NGOs and International agencies must come together and create a system of data collection that will quantify the numbers of working children and the areas and sectors where child labour is predominant. Such child labour profiles would help the decision-makers to evolve suitable policies for eradicating child labour. Special attention should be given to ‘hidden’ child labour working with their families at home, on the family farm or in domestic services.

Conclusion

In spite of all the measures taken, the problem of child labour continues to exist. The suffering and plight of working children constitute a social stigma for which the Indian society is responsible. Any society that wishes to call itself civilised should be appalled by the way these children are made to work. If the society cannot fulfill one of its most basic tenets, taking care of its children, then it has failed miserably. We cannot shrug off this failure by blaming someone else, the employers, the parents of these children, the government and the society. We need to realise that society is but made of people, like us. Unless we all come together and decide to eradicate this evil and not shelter behind terms like "inevitable evil", "harsh reality" these measures would just remain meaningless words on paper.
It is high time we stop treating child labour as a number game for political mileage and as a sympathy factor for organising fundraisers, but start treating this problem as something detrimental to the society. To remove this menace from the society there should be coordinated and combined efforts of all including politicians, bureaucrats, parents, employers, voluntary organisations, trade unions and public. Initiatives for child labour eradication must be combined with community development and social mobilisation. The necessary political will also needs to be mobilised. Only then can there be success in the elimination of this evil. Once the problem of child labour is eradicated, then children can be developed into valuable human resource for the development of the society.