INTRODUCTION

Labour is the application of human energy to produce things. This application converts, maintains, or adds value to workers, the things worked on, and the system in which the work is performed.

However, work is not just a mechanical function of energy expenditure. It is energy directed to explicit goals. An important characteristic of work is that it is a necessary aspect of socialization. In its holistic approach work be taken as a human activity applying human energy and directed to some goal. Work is not always in terms of wage employment or some kind of remuneration. Work may be physiological or physical and or a combination of both, however it is application of energy in any case.\(^1\)

In many countries, child labour is predominant in agricultural sector. As per the worldwide statistics, 60 per cent of the child labourers in the age group of 5 - 17 years are working in agriculture, inclusive of farming, fishing, aquaculture, forestry, and livestock.\(^2\) In total over 129 million girls and boys work as child labourers. The majority (67.5 per cent) of child labourers are unpaid. In agriculture, the percentage of unpaid child labourers is on the increase. These child labourers enter into work, at an early age of 5-7 years (ILO,

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1 Siddiqui M.I “Child labour (How to Investigate)” Deep & Deep Publication Pvt Ltd. Rojour Garden, New Delhi. 2003, pp. 9-11

2 www.ilo.org
The child labourers in the field of agriculture are susceptible to work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases.

The concept of child labour stands for the participation of children (below 14 years age) in labour force for paid or unpaid work. The practice of child labour is widespread in most of the developing (third world) countries of the world. One among them is India where the concentration of child labour is the highest. Child labour assumes the character of a social problem in as much as it hinders assets or distorts the natural growth processes of a child and prevents the child from attaining his full-blown manhood. But the irony of the fact is that the supply of child labour in the labour market is a socio-economic reality in India and so the abuse of child labour in different industrial activities and occupations prevail.

Defining Child Labour and Child Work

Child labour conventionally denotes all ‘economically active’ children in the age group of 5-14 years. A person is treated as economically active or gainfully employed if she/he does work on a regular basis and receives remuneration for it. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines ‘child labour’ as a work that deprives children of their childhood and their dignity. This deprivation of child labour and dignity hampers the children’s access to education and acquisition of inter – personal, intra – personal skills and social skills. The work done under deplorable conditions is harmful to the children’s health and dwarfs their biological development. On the contrary, child work includes all paid and unpaid work done by a
child for the household or market either on full-time or part-time basis. Child work also connotes participation in household activities on a regular basis and for a longer duration. ILO contends that the children’s help in family farms or in household chores does not come under the purview of child labour.

While international and national attention has been focused on child labour in hazardous conditions where the number of children involved are fairly substantial, it is clear from the available data that the largest number of children are in fact found working in agriculture and allied activities.

“Child labour is work which impairs the health and development of children”. Child labour detracts them from the other essential activities meant for children, such as education, play and leisure and hence involves an element of exploitation. It essentially entails deprivation of their rights to health or education or just to happy childhood. Child labour has the following characteristics.

1. Working when too young
2. Working for long hours
3. Working under strain-physical, social or psychological
4. Working in unhealthy conditions
5. Working for little pay
6. Working with little stimulation
7. Subject to intimidation
Child labour is a source of income for poor families in India. Children’s work is considered essential for improving the economic level of households either in the form of work for wages or to help in household enterprises for economic gain.

Scheduled caste children are forced to work at a younger age for their families. Lower caste child labour is high because of the household poverty and indebtedness. The exorbitant interest rates levied by the local moneylenders force the households to be bonded and the bonded children work to repay the loans as agricultural labourers.

**Child Labour at Global Level**

“The problem of child labour is a global phenomenon. Countries with a high percentage of child labour include Nigeria, Malawi, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Almost 60 per cent child labourers engaged in agriculture belong to developing countries. Other occupations that involve child labour are domestic service, factory production and backstreet workshops.”

**Child Labour in India**

India has the second largest number of child workers in the world. The recent International Labour Organisation (ILO) report states that about 80 per cent of child labourers in India are employed

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3 [www. Child Labour.in](http://www. Child Labour.in)
in the agricultural sector. Household financial debt renders the children to be sold to rich money lenders\(^4\).

Child labour hampers the future development of our nation and distorts existing wage structure. From the social point of view, it breeds poverty. It is ironical that families permit, induce or force child labour to supplement income and to get rid of poverty. But major income of children neither contributes substantially to the family income nor reduce poverty. A child worker remains uneducated and unqualified for a better job in the industry. Hence he earns only lower wages even when he attains adulthood. Therefore child labour in general perpetuates poverty in the society.

Since there is a large force of child labour, in millions and is growing, especially in every developing country including India it is in itself an economic problem and is to be studied.

**Child Labour in Tamil Nadu**

In Tamil Nadu about 64 per cent of children work in agriculture and allied activities. Though agriculture is the predominant occupation where children are involved, the employment of children in manufacturing and service sectors is equally significant in Tamil Nadu with over 36 per cent of the working children.

\(^4\) ibid
**Objectives**

The broad objectives of this study are to examine the socio economic characteristics of child labourers in Thiruvarur District. The specific objectives are the followers.

1. To find out the extent and the nature of child labour employed in agricultural sector.
2. To examine the major causes for the prevalence of child labour in agricultural sector in Thiruvarur District.
3. To examine the problems faced by the child workers employed in the agricultural sector.
4. To know about the exploitation of child labour in the agricultural sector.
5. To suggest some policy measures to solve the problems of child labour in agriculture.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the above objectives the following research hypotheses are formulated.

1. There is a positive relation between poverty and child labour.
2. The existence of child labour in agriculture sector leads to exploitation of the children.
3. Child employed in agricultural sector are highly prone to occupational diseases.
Methodology

The present study is basically a descriptive and an analytical one. Both primary and secondary data are used in this study. The primary data have been collected after conducting pilot survey in the study area. The primary data have been collected by a combination of quantitative (sample survey) and qualitative (interview) methods. The data have been collected with a predesigned schedule. The secondary data have been collected from varied published sources.

Large number of child labourers are found in the taluks of Nannilam, Kodavasal and Mannargudi. One village is selected in each taluk. But the child labourers are less in the taluks of Thiruvarur, Valangaiman, Needamangalam and Thiruthuraipoondi. Hence three villages are selected in these taluks.

The following villages have been selected for the study through lottery method in each taluk.

4. Plampeetai Village Thulasendirapuram Panchayat in Mannarkudi Taluk.
7. Uppur, Alangadu, Kilalladu village in Thiurthurai Poondi Taluk.

Period of study
The data for the present study have been collected during the period 2008 - 2010. So all the information in this study relates only to this period.

Study Area and Sample Design
Thiruvarur District is selected for the study as the main occupation of the people in this district is agriculture and many children work in agriculture for various reasons. This district has seven taluks and the all taluks have been taken up for the present study.

One village is selected from each taluk by using random sampling method. Then from these villages, 300 samples have been selected through purposive sampling method as it is difficult to meet all the children working in agricultural sector. Hence for convenience 300 samples were interviewed for the study.
Application of Statistical Tools

To analyse the objectives of the study, an attempt is made to comprehend and evaluate the opinions of the children and their parents on various subjects. The collected data have been processed, presented in tables and discussed. Further rank matrix and chi-square test have been used in the study.

Limitations of the Study

The information given by the respondents may not be 100 per cent accurate. The respondents do not maintain any account of income they get from the wages and their expenditures. So whatever they have said about income and expenditure are considered here. There may be a chance for over or under estimation of amounts on income and expenditure of the respondents. However the statistical treatment of the data may give a clear idea on the economics of agro based child labour in Thiruvarur District.
CHAPTER DESIGN

Chapter I  - Introduction

Chapter II  - Concepts, Theoretical Perspectives and Legal Provisions on Child Labour

Chapter III - Review of Literature

Chapter IV  - Profile of the Thiruvarur District

Chapter V   - Data Analysis and Interpretation.

Chapter VI  - Findings and Conclusions

Chapter VII - Discussion of Policy suggestions