Firozabad is famous for glass making and bangle manufacturing work, and is infamous for the widespread (ab)use of child labour in the units manufacturing these products. The government has designated the glass Industry as a prohibited Industry for child labour, because of the heavy concentration of child labour and the serious health hazards involved in it. Within the glass Industry, the production of glass bangles is most notorious for the widespread (mis)use of child labour. This study has attempted to analyse the socio-economic determinants of child labour in the glass bangle industry of Firozabad. It also looks into the status of child labour vis-a-vis adult labour.

The bangle factories and bangle cutting units are registered under the Factories Act. There are many unregistered units also. The bangle production is carried out in the formal as well as informal sector. The primary activity is done at the factory level. The semi-finished bangles from the factories are supplied to the units operating at the household sector. The manufacturing of bangles consist
of a number of processes, performed at various places before it finally reaches the market in a finished form. The activities involved are as follows:

Factory (Semi-finished form), Jhalai (Straightening), Judai (Joining), Pakai (Hardening), Katai (Cutting), Hill Chaddhana (Colouring), Pakai (Hardening), Chhatai (Sorting) and finally Marketing.

Children are employed almost at all the levels of production. There is no form of security for the workers in this industry. All the labour in the factories, including the child labour is employed on daily wage basis and the work in the factories is divided into three shifts. At the household level, wage payment is linked to the piece-rate system. Unlike, the male child labour that works both at the household and non-household level, female child labour work only at the household level of production.

Child labour in this study refers to a working child between 5 and 14 years of age. The methodology adopted in this study is quite broad-based as both the primary as well as secondary information has been collected and analysed. Using the secondary data, the relationship between the incidence of child labour and selected social, economic and demographic factors has been analysed through correlation and regression analysis. The important variables influencing the incidence of child labour that emerge from this analysis are literacy rate,
child-woman ratio, school dropout rate, work-participation rate and annual population growth rate.

This study has attempted to highlight the problems of working children within a perspective on the basis of a selected sample of 450. The break-up includes 200 child workers, 150 head of the households, 80 adult workers (skilled as well as non-skilled) and 20 employers. Visits to production units, interviews with child workers, their households and the employers helped to build up a correct picture of the prevailing condition of the child labourers involved in the production of the glass bangles at Firozabad. It describes various facets of their work life and lays bare the factors that compel children to join the labour force. Discussions were also held with the concerned local government officials to ascertain their views about the problem of child labour, steps taken to tackle the problem and difficulties in implementing the child labour laws. The required data for the study was gathered during the months of November and December, 1994. Documentary data was collected by surveying the available material on the subject. Processed data were statistically and logically analysed in relation to various desired correlates and the findings that emerged are presented in different chapters. Besides cross-tabulation of the data, this study has also used correlation and regression techniques to strengthen the arguments. The information has also been depicted graphically.
Most of the children in the bangle industry work under oppressive work environment that is detrimental to their health. The child workers were interviewed mainly to ascertain the extent of exploitation in terms of wages and hours of work. The socio-economic characteristics of working children examined in the analysis were age, schooling, hours of work, age of entry into employment, reasons for joining the workforce, etc.. The child respondents mainly belonged to O.B.C. and Scheduled Castes. Majority of the total child labour in the sample (60 per cent) belonged to the age-group 11-14 years. It has been hypothesised in this analysis that incidence of child labour is proportionately higher in the age group 5-10 years than the age group 11-14 years. This hypothesis is rejected. As compared to male child labour, the female child labour were concentrated mainly in the younger age-groups. The age of entry of the children into employment reveals that majority of the children (65.5 per cent) joined the labour force between the age 7-9 years. Though the children at the age of 6 years are considered to be very young for employment but still 13.0 per cent of the children had started working by this age. The children who started working at an early age of 6 years included 20 per cent of the girls as against 6 per cent of the boys. By the age of 9 years, 86 per cent of the female child labour and 61 per cent of the male child labour reported started working. This is a clear reflection of the inherent biasness against the girl child prevalent in the Indian society. The early age of joining the
employment adversely affects the education of the children. Since the female child labour joined the labour force at an early age than boys, they have lower level of education vis-a-vis boys. The male child workers who joined the labour force at a later stage reported a relatively higher level of educational attainment. This obviously implies that the years spent in the school help to postpone their entry into employment. However, it should be mentioned that in the present study, the overall educational attainment level of the child labour is extremely poor. Majority of the child labour did not have any formal education. The proportion of the girls (68 per cent) in the illiterate category is higher as compared to the boys (58 per cent). This is mainly due to the discriminatory attitude of the society towards the education of the girl child that does not regard education to be significant for the girls as for the boys. One finds that its the parents / family members who were responsible for introducing 97 per cent of the girls to work. This is in sharp contrast to the boys where only 56 per cent of them were introduced by parents / family members. The remaining 44 per cent of the boys reported that they were persuaded by others, which included friends, jaggaiya (person who takes labour to the factory) or they joined on their own. This shows that the parents play a vital role in the prevalence of child labour.
Among the reasons for joining employment, 72.5 per cent of the child labour cited economic compulsions as the major reason for taking up employment. The classification of child labour according to number of hours worked per day reveal that while the majority of female child labour (66 per cent) reported working for 4-6 hours, majority of male child labour (64 per cent) were working for 7-9 hours. Female child labour is engaged only in the household sector and the payment is linked to the piece-rate system, so there are as such no fixed working hours. Male child labour is employed both at the household and non-household level of production. In the factories, they have to work for minimum eight hours on shift basis. There are significant variations in the working hours of male and female child labour. It was shocking to observe that 9.5 per cent of the child labour reported working for 10 or more hours. This is an extreme form of exploitation in complete defiance of the child labour laws. Further, a large majority of the child labour did not report of any rest period. A small section of the child labour did report a rest period between work, but this rest period in none of the cases was more than fifteen minutes. This contravenes the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 that clearly stipulates that at a stretch, the child should not work for more than three hours and after three hours, the child worker should get a rest period of one hour, and the period of work inclusive of interval for rest and time spent in waiting for work, should not exceed more than six hours.
The classification of child labour according to wages reveal that 70.5 per cent of them earn wages less than Rs. 20/- per day. The average daily wage of child labour is Rs. 13.15. There exists a wide variation in the amount earned by male and female child labour. Majority of the female child labour (79 per cent) earn less than Rs. 10/- per day. This is in sharp contrast to the wages earned by the male child labour, 50 per cent of them earn between Rs. 20-29/- per day. The average daily wage earned by male child labour is Rs. 20.35 and by female child labour it is Rs. 6/-.

This is mainly because of the difference in the amount of time spent on the job as well as the nature of job performed. Another reason is that unlike the female child labour which is paid on piece-rate basis, the male child labour is employed at the factory level where the wages are paid on shift basis (i.e. per day basis). Security of job is an alien concept in this industry. The labour in the glass bangle industry does not work all month along. Monthly earnings of child labour in the present analysis has been calculated on the basis of number of days worked in the previous month. The average monthly earning of child labour is Rs. 302.60. While the female child labour earns Rs. 150.05 per month, the male child labour earns Rs. 455.20 per month.

The socio-economic characteristics of the sample households supplying child labour to the glass bangle industry show that majority of them belong to the socially and economically backward castes. The O.B.C. and Scheduled castes
account for 45.3 per cent and 34.7 per cent of the households respectively. Upper castes and Muslims account for 7.3 per cent and 12.7 per cent respectively. Muslims are mainly associated with the trading in the bangle industry and their proportion in the manufacturing is comparatively low. The educational status of the head of the households show that majority of them, either have no education or have very low level of education. The illiterate comprise 46.7 per cent and education level upto primary level account for another 32.0 per cent. However one finds that among the illiterates, 51.47 per cent are OBC and 50 per cent are Scheduled castes as compared to 45.45 per cent Muslims and only 21.05 per cent Upper castes. In brief, it can be said that the households supplying child labour in the bangle industry are poor households with low literacy level and a large majority of these households belong to the Scheduled castes and OBCs. This indicates that among the socially and economically backward, the concentration of the households belonging to the Scheduled castes and OBCs is the highest. This may be a contributing factor for a high incidence of child labour.

The migratory status of the households reveal that the proportion of non-migrant households is marginally higher than the migrant households. The non-migrant households are 51.3 per cent of the total households surveyed. However, it should be mentioned that among the migrant households, all the
migration is short distance. While 12.3 per cent of the migration is intra-district, the inter-district migration that account for 87.7 per cent is reported from the neighbouring areas of Mainpuri, Etah and few from Agra. This implies that the workers in the glass bangle Industry at Firozabad are mainly locals or are migrants from the neighbouring districts.

Majority of the households supplying child labour in the glass bangle industry are poor households with low level of earnings. The average monthly income of these households is Rs. 1335/- (including the child’s earning). As most of the households are large households, their low level of earnings makes it difficult for them to make both ends meet. The information regarding the housing type reveal 44 per cent of these households reside in kutcha houses. The classification of the head of the households of the child labour according to occupation shows that 54.0 per cent are engaged in occupations related to the glass industry and 15.3 per cent are not working at all. The reasons forwarded for not working were mainly sickness and old age. This indicates that occupational status of the head of household to a certain extent do influence the nature of work taken up by the children. Besides the occupational status, information was also gathered regarding the age when the head of the households in the sample started working. It was found that around 41 per cent of the households, the head of the household started working as a child labour.
The study reveals that majority of the head of the households (76.0 per cent) do not want that child labour should be abolished. The reason for this may be the poor economic condition of most of these households and a significant economic contribution made by child labour in the family income that they are unable to think of foregoing this income. Regarding awareness about the child labour schools in Firozabad, 92.7 per cent of the head of the households were ignorant.

Hazardous working conditions prevail both at the household and non-household level of production in the glass bangle industry. However, the dangers involved are more in the case of latter than former. Generally, the harmful effects of child labour are most visible in the long run and may not be visible at a younger age. Since safety measures are almost non-existent, the chances of injury to the child appear to be quite high. Injury to the child was reported by 28.7 per cent households. It is shocking to observe that among the households that reported injury to the child, 93.02 per cent borne the cost incurred on the treatment of the child’s injury themselves. This reflects the callousness of the employers and the helplessness of the parents who cannot forcefully demand the cost of the treatment. The employers on their part were reluctant to talk about child labour and denied that they employ child labour. However, 85 per cent of the employers did say that child labour in the glass bangle industry exists mainly
because of poverty. All the employers were aware of the existence of the law prohibiting employment of children. Since wages paid to child labour are lower than the adult labour, the employers employ children mainly because it is a source of cheap labour. The child labour helps the employer to maximise profits at minimum costs.

In the glass factories, study clearly shows that all the labour - skilled as well as non-skilled are employed on a daily wage basis. The wages paid to the labour are not uniform and differ according to the nature of the work done. A wide gap exists between the wages paid to the skilled workers and the non-skilled workers. A non-skilled worker for an eight hour shift depending on the nature of task performed, gets wages anywhere from Rs.30/- to Rs.90/-. On the other hand, skilled workers get paid upto Rs.300/- for an eight hour shift. Wages to the skilled workers are the best in the Industry. The child labour work alongside adult labour and the tasks they perform, though hazardous in nature, require the least skill compared to other workers. Child workers in the factories get the lowest wages (around 60 per cent of the adult wage for the same amount of work). Thus, the hypothesis that child labour is paid lower wages than the adult labour for the same amount of unskilled hazardous jobs in the bangle factories is accepted. Women are not engaged for any work concerning manufacturing of bangles inside the factories. They work only at the household level of production of bangles. Their amount of payment, and the work done is
measured in terms of the ‘tora’ (312 bangles) and this payment is often abysmally low.

A major observation that emerges from the present analysis is that it negates the common belief that a child should start working at an early age to learn the skill. It refutes the hypothesis that transfer of skill and knowledge from highly skilled workers to the child labour is hereditary. Though the transfer of the skill is found mostly among the family members / relatives or someone close, but there is no evidence to the belief that in order to learn the skill children have to start learning from an early age. The study brings out clearly that majority of the skilled workers did not start as child labour and they joined the work-force at a much later stage. Amongst the skilled workers, only 27.5 per cent of the workers started working before attaining the age of 14 years. This study contradicts the view presented by Neera Burra and Myron Weiner in their respective studies mentioning that the Labour Department justifies child labour on the grounds that a child has to start working at an early age to learn the skills and to get acclimatised to the heat.

This study also shows that economic condition of the households play a vital role in pushing the children into labourforce. It has been hypothesised in this study the age at which a child takes to employment depends upon the income of the household. In other words, higher the income, higher the entry age into
employment. The positive significant regression coefficient between the two variables helps in accepting this hypothesis.

The impact of adult literacy and schooling of children on incidence of child labour is clearly brought out in this study. A positive significant relationship exists between the educational level of the head of the households and the schooling of the children and age of entry into employment. The correlation between the education of the head of the households and schooling of the child worker shows that these two variables have significant positive correlation (significant at 1 per cent level of significance). It implies that higher the level of education of the head of the household, higher would be the schooling of the child and consequently lower incidence of child labour, as child would be rather at the school than at work. The correlation result between the schooling of the child worker and age of entry into employment of children also exhibits a significant positive relationship (significant at 1 per cent level of significance). This indicates that children who attended school join the labourforce at a relatively higher age than the children who do not go to school at all. Hence, the hypothesis that there is an association between the years of schooling and age at employment, is accepted. The children’s age of entry into employment is regressed upon schooling of children and the level of family income. Both the variables, i.e., schooling of children and family income, together explain 54.3
per cent of the variation in the dependent variable (children's age of entry into employment). These results further strengthens the findings of the present analysis.

The correlation between the number of children in the household (fertility) and children's age of entry into employment depicts a negative relationship but it is not significant. This implies that the age when a child takes up employment is more a function of income of the household than the size of the household.

The literacy of the head of the households exhibits a negative relationship with number of children. The average number of children in the households where the head of the household is an illiterate is higher i.e. 5.28 and it declines with increase in literacy level. Besides literacy, fertility is also positively associated with the economic contribution of child labour to the family income. It has been hypothesised in the present analysis that higher the rate of participation of children in economic activity or the incidence of child labour, higher is the number of children per family. High fertility could be both a cause and effect of child labour. The majority of the child labour households at Firozabad are large households. The average number of children per household works out to be 5.06 children. When the economic contribution of children in fulfilling survival needs of the family is high, then for the poor the procreation of children implies
more hands to help them economically. Additional child is not a burden economically as he contributes significantly to the family income. The economic benefit derived from children measured in terms of contribution made to family income by participating in economic activity, reveals that there exists a close association between child labour and fertility. In poor families, the child, since his very appearance in this world, is endowed with an economic mission completely devoid of developmental considerations of his personality. The schooling of children as mentioned earlier, is largely influenced by the literacy level of the head of the households. Moreover, the schooling of the children could mean a double liability because of the loss of the earnings if the child did not work and expenditure on education, howsoever small. Since majority of the child labour did not attend the school, shows that there are no direct costs involved in raising the children and the significant contribution made by child labour to the household income reflects that the benefits from the children outweigh costs. A child is more an asset than a liability. Most of the households supplying child labour are large households, and the contribution made to family income by the children by participating in economic activity is also quite significant shows that there exists a close association between the children’s participation in economic activity and number of children per household. The poor deprived of all material means of subsistence perceive all-in-all advantage in the child’s employment. The income accruing from children may be a pittance
but it does play a crucial role in saving the family from penury. The fact that children in the glass bangle industry as this study shows contribute 27.83 per cent of the household income neatly sums up why despite its manifold dangers the system not only survives but also thrives.

Besides, the socio-economic determinants, the action taken by the State also influences the prevalence of child labour. This study has also examined the role of the labour enforcement machinery in reducing employment of children and the difficulties that block the effective implementation of the child labour laws at Firozabad.

To conclude, one can say that the glass bangle Industry’s ability to survive and remain viable does not appear to be threatened by the elimination of child labour. The work performed by children in the factory requires virtually no skill. It does not also train them for future skilled labour. Even if child labour involved in the bangle production is removed, it would not have any effect on the industry, except giving way to adult labour. The children’s existence in this industry is mainly due to the poor socio-economic condition of the households and greed of the employers who are exploiting this situation. Due to significant contribution of child labour in fulfilling the economic needs of the family, the parents fail to see or tend to ignore the victimisation of their child by his
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Any study based on evaluation of the socio-economic situation remains incomplete unless certain solutions are also offered to improve the situation.

(1) The present study has clearly established the importance of education for curbing the practice of child labour. Compulsory primary education can be an important means of preventing children from entering into the labour market. Majority of the children do not even have basic education. Free universal compulsory primary education would be a step in the right direction. Besides this, a provision of food supplements, supply of books, stationery and uniforms in the schools would be added incentives for the parents to send their children to the school. There is a need to vocationalise high school education so as to make it subserve their future workneeds.

(2) The success of the child labour schools at Firozabad calls for further expansion in the number as well as the strength of these schools. These schools are a good beginning for the withdrawal of children working in the hazardous glass Industry, but the limited strength of these schools
is not creating the necessary impact. These efforts toward educating the working children are very encouraging but certainly do not match the magnitude of the problem. The number of such schools should be increased to create the necessary impact. An awareness about the existence of these schools should also be created so that the help is provided to the most needy sections of the population.

(3) The children entered the labour-force mainly for economic reasons. The loss of earnings would have to be compensated if the child labour is to be removed completely. Suitable economic development and poverty alleviation programmes that could raise the income of the concerned population so that they are able to fulfil their basic needs. This would save the children from entering the labour market to augment the family income. Since the majority of the households belong to Scheduled castes and OBCs, these groups should be given special attention.

(4) The households contributing child labour are large households. This indicates failure in the implementation of the family welfare programmes. The concept of small family norms should be propagated, especially among the poor and the backward castes.
The over-all labour conditions should be improved. The labour in the factories including child labour, is employed on daily wage basis and this deprives the labour of many benefits. There is no security of employment in this industry. This works in the employers favour and the exploitation of workers becomes much easier. Another way of helping the labour in this industry is by improving the production technology, which can reduce the risk of the workers in hazardous and unhealthy working conditions. At the household industry level, wage payment is based on the piece-rate system that is abysmally low. Children have to work for long hours because the low payment under the piece-rate system forces them to work much beyond their capacity to earn atleast a minimum amount to fulfil their daily needs. The minimum amount fixed by the government for various processes under piece-rate system should be increased. A child worker needs to be protected as a worker also and not as a child alone.

There is no denying the fact that despite a wide gamut of legislation to end this tragic practice, it still remains a factor to be reckoned with. Formulating laws that safeguard the interests of the children is not enough, effective steps are required to strictly enforce them. Efforts should also be made to plug the loopholes in the existing law. There is
a need for a certifying doctor attached to the Labour Office at Firozabad. This would check the widespread use of fake medical certificates that are produced in courts claiming the child’s age to be above 14 years. These certificates are used mainly as a ploy by the employer to escape prosecution for employing child labour.

(7) People should be made aware of the ills of child labour. Involvement of voluntary organisations in mobilising public opinion can also play a big role. Even though children do not constitute the vote-bank of politicians, still the political parties in India should take up the cause of child labour on humanitarian grounds.

In short, a multifaceted approach is needed to put an end to the problem of child labour especially in the hazardous jobs. This problem, as this study has revealed, is rooted in the socio-economic condition of the population, so the problem can be best tackled by legal intervention backed by various socio-economic schemes for the needy population.