CHAPTER III

CHILD LABOUR IN MATCH AND FIRE WORKS INDUSTRIES OF VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT: ISSUES AND EFFECTS
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While the industrial growth was taking place in India, a new class called “Working Class” emerged in India. At the same time the job security, working hours, wages, working condition, bonus, etc. forced the labourers to join together and struggle to attain benefits. In this process a new section called “child labour” emerged and earned the name as a ‘ stigma of the society’. Hence many theories were put forwarded to abolish it. The labourers in Virudhunagar industries were also formed a part of this movement. There were thousands of ‘child labourers’. This chapter deals with how the Match and Fire Works Industries were established in Virudhunagar area and what is the effect of that ‘child labour’ on the society of that area.

The present Virudhunagar district, once formed a taluk of Ramanathapuram district i.e., a ‘land of Ramanathapuram Sethupathis’ was carved out as a district in the year 1984. The total area of the district was 4243 Sq.Km. and its population was about 15,65,037 with 7,84,912 males and 7,80,125 females as per the Census of 1991.¹ The important towns are: Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Sattur, Rajapalayam, Srivilliputur, etc. Though many of the towns have many industries, Sivakasi is called “Tiny Japan”, because of Matches and Fire works industries.

1. CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES CONTRIBUTION:

There is a story regarding the origin or matches in this part or Tamil Nadu. As per this story while the missionaries are responsibility for introducing modern matches.

Christian missionaries from the west came to Tamil Nadu continuously from 16th century onwards. They at first aimed conversion of villages en masse. The SPCK, SPGFP, LMS, Luthern Missions etc. sent their missionaries in the 19th century continuously to implant Christianity.

The pioneer work in the introduction of modern home appliances was done by the Christian Missionaries in the 19th Century when they established their mission stations for their prime work of conversion among the poor mass. The availability of necessary materials made them to think over introducing the matches since they were very familiar with such matches while they were in the West. Hence they imported this technique to India. Further these people had link with Ceylon where the missionaries practiced the manufacture of matches. They brought many sticks from Ceylon through the Indian origin Estate labourers who migrated to Ceylon from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu and returned after sometime. While they returned they transmitted this technique from Ceylon to Ramanathapuram area. Thus a group of people who knew the use of matches and production developed in Ramanathapuram area particularly the Nadars of Virudhunagar area.

II. AYYA NADAR'S CONTRIBUTION:

One among them was Palaniappa Nadar who was well versed in the manufacture of matches. He was a great genius in making sticks in his house along with his sons like Ayya Nadar who became the master mind of this industry in Sivakasi area.² His company was named as “Camel Safety Matches Industry”. In their house they produced hand made match sticks with the available chemicals and wood.

² Sivakasi-Where light and sound are packaged, A panorama of match, fire works and printing industries of South India. A booklet of the Chamber of Matches, Sivakasi, dt.1.10.03.
When they manufactured matches at cottage level they need not recruit more number of labours. They managed it as family affairs. Safety matches being an important commodity in domestic use has been till 1920 imported from foreign countries like Sweeden, Japan and Czechoslovakia. But this was stopped because of Ayya Nadar’s enterprising activity. Due to the First World War the need for matches was very high in the war field. Hence the British Government sought the help of Indian manufacturers to get more number of matches in order to replace the supply from other countries i.e. Japan, Germany etc. The enterprising of Nadar community utilized this scheme and established numerous match industries in cottage sector and exported it. Even after the War, after 1918, the need for the matches did not decline because the ban on matches of foreign countries was not yet lifted. In the meantime the people were accustomed to the new indigenous matches. Hence they competed with the foreign made matches i.e. Sweeden’s WIMCO matches which monopolized the industry at that time. But when they turned towards the semi-mechanised system they had to recruit numerous labourers and train them. But however they continued their business only at cottage industry level since they were inspired by the spirit of nationalism due to the freedom movement which was going on in India. During this period Gandhiji’s Non-co-operation movement sent message to the nook and corner of India that Indians should boycott foreign machines. This movement supported Indian cottage industries. Hence Ayya Nadar who was attracted to this message immediately disposed his imported German Safety matches machine to an industrialist of Ceylon.

Then he concentrated more on hand made matches. As Mr.

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4 ibid.
Nadar put it, he looked to hand-made matches because it also provided employment to the poor of Sivakasi, which was in dry belt where agricultural operations were difficult. Mr. Nadar’s ambition was to provide as much effect on living conditions in villages as, “Agriculture cannot sustain everyone and we should have a blend of heavy body; both are necessary”, Mr. Nadar said. According to him the Japanese way suited India best, as they believed in the appendage “Necessity is the mother of Invention.”

Thereafter they received inspiration from Calcutta, Bengal for the establishment of the Indian Safety match industry. With the entrepreneurship motivation Ayya Nadar and his brother Shanmuga Nadar went to Calcutta in 1922, after seeing an advertisement from a Bengal news paper given by a match manufacturer to train the purchaser in the machine. In Calcutta they met Mr. Purna Chandra Roy who advised them to go for an imported machine from Germany. Ayya Nadar and Shanmuga Nadar were trained in its operation and techniques for nearly eight months. The result of their trip was the emergence of Sivakasi as the “Centre of Match and Fire Works Industries”, and earned a nick name “Tiny Japan” or “City of Light”. They started semi-mechanised operations in match making. He also trained many people in this industry. Thus he laid foundation for the growth of cottage industries of safety matches in Sivakasi. In the meantime Ayya Nadar became a business magnate in this field. In 1923 he established “South Indian Losseefire Match Industry” at Sivakasi. Later on many a number of big and small industries were germinated and produced hand-made matches.

6 Ramaswami, Op.Cit., p.343
GROWTH OF MATCH WORKS:

The growth of match industry attracted many hundreds of people who suffered a lot during the First World War and after. They received food and other materials in ration shops, which was new phenomena to them. Each family severely lost their traditional jobs including agriculture and weaving. At the same time a large number of industries like textile, cement, printing, fire works, steel rolling etc., also came into existence. Hence people rushed to these industries to get a job.

The hand made sector at times faced a shortage of the raw material because of the predominant position of WIMCO held in potassium chlorate production. The answer of the hand-made industries was Pandiyan chemicals Limited, their own unit in the sector (along with Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation) to produce the important chemicals.7

As with chemicals and metal powder, with paper and printing, the mother industry is safety matches. But it has given rise to a host of ancillary units and this process is continuing, providing employment and also avenues for self-employment to many. In 1932, a Swedish concern WIMCO who had been monopolizing world supplies in matches established mechanised units of match industry in major cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and commenced large scale of production from their own factories abroad.8 Though the Match industries of Sivakasi and surrounding area initially incurred heavy loss, fortunately the competition was short lived. So it left its repercussions on the country’s economy.

7 Sivakasi - Where light and sound are packaged, Op.Cit., p.3.
Non mechanized match industry is basically a home industry. It is labour intensive. Men, Women and Children, aged persons and even partially handicapped persons can be employed. Employment opportunities can be brought to the door step of the people as a number of operations in production can be undertaken right at home. Non-mechanized sector, therefore, has great socio-economic significance.

As a matter of fact prior to the levy of excise duty in 1934 almost all the processes were being done at home.9 The Excise Law required that "once a stick is dipped in the chemical composition it becomes a live filling of match sticks in boxes, labeling, and affixing of excise stamps, pocketing and packaging have to be done within the four walls of a factory".

Thus being a home industry entire families consisting of men, women and children have been taking part in the manufacture of matches from 1923, the year in which the non-mechanised match industry was started in Sivakasi. The industry had spread to places like Sattur, Kovilpatti, Kalugumalai, Ettayapuram, Elaiyirampannai, Srivilliputur, Rajapalayam and Tirunelvell.10

With a view, however, to encourage the cottage sector, the government introduced a system of rebate. A rebate of two annas per gross in the case of 'B' class factories and four annas in respect of 'C' class factories was announced. This concession enabled enormous growth in the Match industries especially conversion of 'C' into 'B' class factories.11

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9 Report of the Committee of N.Hari Baskar "On child labour to review the present working conditions and measures taken to mitigate their sufferings at Sivakasi in Tamil nadu", 1984, p.27.
10 Ramaswami, Op.Cit., p.350
11 ibid., p.351.
The graded production has been given to cottage and small industries by Government against the large scale mechanized factories. The idea behind the policy is to protect the industry which provides employment to a larger number of people.12

When the tax exemption was given to the cottage industries the total number of match industries was raised to 7400 from 1800 after the period of 1979-80 in Virudhunagar district.13 There are registered (government approved) and unregistered match factories. Most of the unauthorized match works are run by contractors. They are coming under the categories of ‘cottage industries’.

According to the Report of Harbans Singh Committee (1976) the Government restricted the radius distance of the industry. The government stopped to issue license to start new match and fire works industry within 15kms of Sivakasi. In the year 1987 the Government reduced the radius to 5 Km. to establish industries.14 Presently there is no radius distance, and the excise duty is also reduced for the cottage industries.15 The period between 1922 and 2000 has been the share of small scale hand-made match units from nothing to 85 per cent of total production in the country.16

IV. FIRE WORKS:

Fire works for religious as well as social display purpose are traditionally ascribed to the Chinees and Indians. China developed this to a great extent over the centuries to sway the world with its monopoly. The Chinese developed it as an art, and victory celebrations. In India, however, the adoption of fire works making was

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12 ibid., p.352.
13 Workshop conducted by NCLP, Virudhunagar District collectorate, dt. 15.10.99.
14 Office of the Project Director, NCLP, Lr.7407/T.2/86-3, Virudhunagar District Collectorate, Virudhunagar, dt.2.3.87.
15 Interview with the Manager of the Chamber of Match works, Sivakasi, dt.2.10.03
Child Labour in Fire Works

Child Labour in Match works
restricted to only a few items of gun powder and iron borings. The present day chemicals such as potassium chlorate, barium and strontium nitrate, aluminium and magnesium powder had not then been discovered.

India restricted its manufacture to making rockets and high blast crackers with gunpowder, and flower pots, with gun powder and iron filling only. Even today, Bengal venerates her discovery of the fascinating flower pots by holding street to street competitions. After the gradual appearance of chlorates, nitrates, and metal powders, the fire works makers improved their production, progressively adding these elements to obtain colour brilliance, flash, sound and special effects. In the early days the use of these new elements with imported chlorates, nitrates, aluminium and magnesium, was restricted only to making large types of fire works for festive and religious occasions. Subsequently, smaller items such as rockets, and flower pots and Bengal lights appeared on the market for family consumption.

The idea of match making mooted them to make Colour Matches also, because the process was more or less same. During this period, Colour Matches and Star Matches were imported from Germany. Books on chemistry helped them to improve the quality of their products. Having achieved a measure of success in Safety Matches, Colour Matches, and Star Matches, they ventured upon the making of sparklers then the most popular item in the small Fire works family, which were at the time imported from UK and Germany. China was then exporting only fire crackers of several size and ranges but no other fire works.

18 ibid.
19 History of the fire works industry in India, A booklet from the Chamber of Fire works, Sivakasi, not dated.
It may be confidently said that the germinal seed for the making of modern family fire works or small fire works was planned in the year 1934 when the Central Excise Duty on Matches was promulgated. Until the outbreak of the World War II in 1939, there were only a handful of factories in Sivakasi of Tamil Nadu and Trichur and Irimajakuda in Kerala State.\textsuperscript{20} From 1938 to 1944 the import of fire works and fire crackers was obstructed by the Second World War. This shortage gave a fillip to the indigenous industry, which was in its infancy. During the year 1940, the Indian Explosives Rules were enacted whereby a system of licensing was introduced for manufacture, possession and sale. Thus the first organized factory, with several precautions and safety measures came to be set up in the year 1940. The shortage in the market helped these, then seasonal factories to work even during off-season and build up stocks. With the World War II coming to an end and the gateway for import of raw materials having been reopened, the indigenous industry enlarged itself. Not only the existing factories broadened their efforts, but also several new units came into existence, of which National Fire Works, Kaleeswari Fire Works and the Standard Fire Works were prominent in the year 1942.\textsuperscript{21}

These three factories started marketing their products throughout the length and breadth of India. These were later supplemented by new units at the average rate of 10 per year. What started as 1 or 2 factories had risen to 189. By the end of 1986 the total number of factories was 260 in Tamil Nadu alone. Other states also took up this production very earnestly.\textsuperscript{22} The past 15 years have witnessed organized factories

\textsuperscript{20} ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} ibid
\textsuperscript{22} ibid.
started in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karanataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

To begin with, a few persons carried on the manufacture of Fire works in private houses. The political movement in the country led to several anarchist activities and the Government promulgated ordinances regulating the manufacture and use of explosive substances under the Arms Act and Explosives Substance Act in the year 1883.

Though it gave a blow to raising industry at the initial stages later the industry developed in greater dimension. Sivakasi became an important centre of this industry. The industrial growth led to certain social problems such as industrial pollution, child labour, housing, public health etc. The modern fire works factories are generally located in rural area with a view to safeguard the society. Further it is also dangerous to dwelling houses, railways, highways and other buildings. Each fire works factory is usually housed in a number of smaller units, by a specific distance as prescribed by the Factory Act in order to avoid dangerous condition.\(^\text{23}\)

The government restricted the quantity of chemicals to be used or kept in each of the factories and the number of persons to be employed in them.\(^\text{24}\) The minimum age of the employees fixed at 16 for carrying chemicals is prohibited. The tools used to be soft metals such as brass, copper, aluminium or wood. These regulations are being enforced in order to minimize the effect of explosion that may occur in the factories.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{23}\) The Factories Act of 1948.
\(^{24}\) ibid.
\(^{25}\) ibid.
The phenomenal growth was only due to demands accelerated by the increase in living standards and earning power, and the availability of chemicals like potassium chlorate, red phosphorous, zinc oxide, pyrotechnic aluminium powder, magnesium powder etc., being produced indigenously and in plentiful quantity. An important sector is that factories producing these raw materials were not far off Sivakasi, the main fire works producing centre. Another factor that contributing to the spurt in the production of fire works is that many important raw materials were produced by the fire works makers themselves at separate sites. The “founding fathers of the Match works industry” mooted this venture.\textsuperscript{26}

Low rain fall and a dry climate prevailing in the Sivakasi area contributing to unabated production. What could have been consumed in three hours of the diwali day came to be produced in 300 days, almost with overtime jobs during six months of the year.\textsuperscript{27} In monetary form there has been a steady increase of 10% annually, and today’s production stands at an outstanding figure of 300 crores of rupees at the market value.

It has to be admitted that the name of the Fire Works Industry has been tarnished to some extent because of accidents involving loss of lives and limbs. After certain controls exercised by the Government, the accident rate fell considerably from the year 1978. In spite of the increase in the number of factories from 169 to 260 in the year 1986, the number of deaths was only 4 and injured only 5. Against this, there was

\textsuperscript{26} History of fire works industry in India, op.cit., p.3.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid.
an alarming number of accidents and deaths involving in illegal and home-made fire
works.\textsuperscript{28}

In Fire works the process is different from crackers to crackers. Various
hazardous chemicals are used to roll the papers and fill the class in it. In some interior
villages, crackers, flower pots and zameen chakkars are made at home for the local
market. Children are involved in loading flower pots, fixing the fuse, making paper
pipes, filling rings and making boxes in short, in all the activities except that of mixing
the hazardous and poisnous chemicals.\textsuperscript{29}

The match industry is controlled by the powerful Nadar lobby. Kothari in her
article “There’s Blood on those match sticks’, child labour in Sivakasi, 1983 points to
the fact that the eleven families of Kovilpatti and Sivakasi are responsible for over 70
percent of the production in the non-mechanised sector and together, their output is
more than that of the mechanized sector. Similarly, although there are 200 Fire works
factories in the Sivakasi area the distribution of production again favour the Nadars;
five of whom (with more than five units each) manufacture fire works worth of 50
million rupees. A few others have a turnover of over 5 million rupees per year.

The Researcher was told by Mr. Marichamy, a foremen of Standard Fire Works,
factory in Tayyalpatti village that “we prefer child workers. They work faster, work
longer hours and are dependable”.

There are definite economic advantage in employing children in the Match
Industry although there is a severe adult unemployment in that area. Indicative of that
when the Tamil Nadu Government threatened to implement the ban of child labour, the

\textsuperscript{28} ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} w.w.w.google.com, “child labour in match and fire works industries in sivakasi”, ‘Children still
work’, by Asha Krishnakumar, Sivakasi.
owners of Match and Fire Woks factories protested vociferously. The Secretary of All India Chamber of Match Industries, A.D. Amirthalingam, threatened that if child labour was prohibited, the factory owners would go in for mechanization or diversification of business.\(^{30}\) He also added that the opponents of child labour were being financed by a multinational firm, the Chief competitor of the Sivakasi Match units, which together hold 30-35 percent of the market. He contended that there was no alternative to child labour as there was an acute shortage of labour in and around Sivakasi. He also warned that if the children were sent away from the factories they would beg in the streets.\(^{31}\)

**V. CLASSIFICATION OF LABOURERES IN MATCH INDUSTRY:**

**Sectors of the Industry:**

The Match Industry in Virudhunagar consists of two broad sectors namely the mechanized and the unmechanized, the concern lies with the unmechanised sector which is popularly broken down into the “middle” and the “tiny” sectors. The dividing line here is in terms of production - a match unit producing more than 12 crore match sticks a year is conventionally classified as a middle unit. Although up-to-date information on the shares of the shares of the mechanized, the middle and the tiny sectors, is not available, it is generally believed that these shares are 30 per cent, 50 per cent and 20 per cent respectively of the total production of matches.\(^{32}\)

The tiny sectors can itself be divided into further sub sectors. The first consists of those units which are members of the Co-operative industrial societies, which

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\(^{30}\) Financial Express, 17\(^{th}\) October, 1983.

\(^{31}\) ibid.

provide raw material and distribute the produce of their members. The Second consists of units run by trading companies and those which are sister concerns of other tiny and middle sector units.\textsuperscript{33} And the third consists of units which are run individually but have a long term agreement with a trading company, or a group of match manufacturing units, and meets the others given to them by these companies or units.

Each would have its own specific problems; and that greater light would be thrown on the dynamics of the match industry if representatives of all sectors were included, even though in a narrowly economic sense, there may be little difference between them.\textsuperscript{34}

Although the characteristics of the units themselves formed the focus of enquiry, the household in ownership of or operating the units in the cases of leased units, was the identifying unit. Destructions have been made, therefore, between a match unit which is the sole economic activity of the household, and those where it forms part of a conglomerate, even though the size of aggregate capital may be small.

The match units were established during discrete periods. Thus two units were started in the immediate post-war periods, 1945, and three during the early years of the third five year plan, period i.e. 1961-62, eleven units were set up during 1969-74 and an equal number during the Janata Government phase, 1977-1980.\textsuperscript{10} It is of interest to note that while there are only two cases out of 21 in the tiny sector where the joint family partnership occurs, in the middle sector this form of organisation is utilized in five cases out of seven. The tax liabilities arising out of the large scale of operation combined with the advantages of retention of the joint family system must be playing

\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} ibid.
their part in this phenomenon. The middle sector units are all parts of group of firms in common control and the joint family helps to ensure this common control.

In many of the tiny units, the operator of the unit is a foremen, who had earlier learned his skills as an employed person.\textsuperscript{36} In one or two cases, even though the head of the household supervises the unit, it has been necessary to hire a skilled foremen knowing the technique of chemical mixing and dipping.

Generally agriculture and animal husbandry play a minor role in the economy of the households, though the situation is markedly different in the case of the middle sector units.

To complete the picture, the following table classifies the households in terms of their participation in the work of the match units, and the nature of such participation. To make this situation easier to appreciate, the functions to be performed in match production have been identified for the moment to be the following:

**Different functions in Match Industries:**

The following is the various functions to be carried out by the labourers:\textsuperscript{37}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-ordinating functions and functions</th>
<th>Functions in match production</th>
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<tr>
<td>Servicing match production.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Supervisor</td>
<td>Frame filling</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Accountant</td>
<td>Box filling</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Purchase</td>
<td>Band rolling and labeling</td>
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<td>4. Maintenance</td>
<td>Side frame filling and side frame painting</td>
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<td>5. Packing</td>
<td>Inner box making</td>
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<td>6. Sales</td>
<td>Outer box making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chemical mixing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chemical dipping</td>
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\textsuperscript{37} ibid.
The adult male members are doing the co-ordinating and servicing functions but at the same time the rest of the works are carried out by the women and children. Household child labour exists in three production; female child labourer is full time worker.

Among these 17 operations, three are relatively frequently subcontracted by the unit. As far as inner, and veneer outer boxes are concerned there are contractors who undertake the work on a “per gross” basis, when it is required on a large scale and individual households on a small scale.\(^{38}\) Cardboard outer boxes are printed with the label and provided to the match units by the specialized printing units.

The technology in match industry can be decomposed into these seventeen operations, and the tools are identical except perhaps in the quality of their construction and therefore longevity, the essential difference between the degree of division of labourers they employ. In other words, while the size of the capital employed, or the size of the workforce, are measures of the scale of the unit, it is the division of labour which provides the most accurate index of the response of the operating household to different scales of operations.\(^{39}\)

Where an operating household runs more than one unit, the division of labour may quite likely to be across these units. In other words, different parts of the production process are undertaken in the premises of legally distinct units. This factor is particularly important in the case of middle sector units which all form part of a larger group of interrelated business activities. The division of labour is appreciably

\(^{38}\) ibid., p.16.

\(^{39}\) ibid.
developed in these units. Thus while all have at least one foremen, and mazdoor, there
are specialized persons for the chemical grinding, mixing and dipping, wax dipping and
packing. In addition there are supervisors, accountants, bus and van drivers, sweepers
and so on. The piece rated operations, it is significant that boys are employed as
assistants for the chemical based operations though, also, directly for frame filling. In
the case of girls and even more with respect to women there are very clearly defined
groups of workers with specific responsibilities under the supervision of male
employees.40

In these cases box filling often combined with side frame filling while band
rolling are clubbed with cardboard pasting. Packing in which women do participate in
the middle units is generally done separately from the major production operations.
According to the statistics of Match Works Chamber, in Sivakasi the year 2000 A.D.
there were 11,000 units. From out of this 1000 units were registered. Out of these
1000 units, 700 units more than 500 units were situated in Virudhunagar district only41

The manufacturing of the match box process is broadly included the frame
filling, chemical dipping, chemical mixing, box making, box filling, labeling of band,
rolling, and packing.

In the first step in the frame filling girl children are extensively employed. Girls
are required to fill a frame made of iron rods and wooden scales weighing 4 kgs. All
these scales are clamped one upon another by needling holds on both sides through
frame rods.42 The workers have to place the wooden stick in each groove. Once all the

40 ibid.
42 Hellan R. Sekar, Child Labour In Match Industry (NODIA: Child Labour Cell, National Labour
Institute, 1992), p.87
field scales are clamped tightly the splints are clamped, stamped with a wooden plank for leveling. After this the frames are carried, mainly by girl children, to a different rooms where usually males are employed. The splints are parafined and heated on a hot plate. Splints heads are then dipped in the paste containing potassium chlorate, tetra phosphate, trisulpher and manganese dioxide. These chemicals are mixed in water to make a paste. Boxes are filled with match sticks and arranged in a wooden tray. A mixture of red phosphorous and sand or glass powder, is applied on the side of each match box to act as friction strips. These boxes are then labeled with excise duty band rolls and packed into bundles.

It is clear that female workers, both adults and children are far more widely employed in the match industry than the male workers. They are universally employed in piece rated work and not used in any kind of work requiring supervisory capabilities. On the other hand, there are cases of boys serving as apprentices or helpers in functions in which at least a small number will continue after growing up. There are thus some slight changes for a boy of not only continuing to be employing later life but finding a job in a monthly rated vocation in the match industry.

VI. LABOUR FORCE IN MATCH AND FIRE WORKS INDUSTRIES OF VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT:

a. Adult and Female Workers:

Hundreds and thousands of traditional bound people belonging to different professions rushed to the newly established Match and Fire Works Industries with the hope of getting wages uninterrupted to feed their family. They have been victims of
generations of neglect, discrimination, and deprivation. They were all untrained and uneducated labourers and working in a new and unfamiliar place. This profession may be new to majority of the labourers. They were not accustomed to factory system. But after becoming labourers they steadily learned and satisfied with what they were paid by the owners.

Many people migrated from their villages and left their family, and villages as they were because the family land was non-irrigated land and the prospects of agriculture in dry and semi-arid conditions were not very promising and the family had barely enough for more subsistence. Poverty increased over the years, and the culture of helpless dependence became deep-rooted. This led to alienation in a stratified society, which in turn meant living a life that was threatening and intimidating. They began sliding lower and lower down the scale of human development; he and his family sank deeper and deeper into a quagmire. So they were forced to live in low rented thatched roof building without any living facilities. This ultimately developed as a "cheri" or a residential quarters with filthy condition. But however due to the low wages they have to forbear all those insanitary conditions in order to save money and send it to their family members who continued their caste based professions in their villages.

In such a way females belonging to the neighboring areas moved to the factory as labourers and earned wages to subsist their family income. Thus the wage earners were almost uneducated, ignorant of sanitary facilities and unaware of the occupational disease. They were derooted from their traditional bound villages and settled in the

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neighbouring place of their working spot. But in due course they found that the work was heavy, time bound and involved using of many dangerous chemicals which would cause deceases when they touch it or inhale the smoke etc. Further they found that they had no job security because they might be dismissed at any time by the owners, if they were not satisfied with their work.\textsuperscript{44} Further their continuous working hours without rest, caused for the deterioration of their health producing new deceases. Since they were away from their family with which they had been bonded for a long period they developed the home sick. But at the same time they could not leave their factory to see their family whenever they wished. This homesick distracted them from their concentration on work. This physio-psychological factors made its impact on each and every labour of the factory.

In these circumstances they were forced to bring their family by parting from his relatives as well as villages. In her report Helan R.Sekar has clearly delineated this parental perception. When parents were asked why they sent their girl children to work 70 per cent replied that their household income was low and they needed the additional income. Since most of them wanted male children to go to school, the burden of earning this additional income fell upon girl children. The source of such parental perception can be traced to pervasive illiteracy and low level education among parents. Whenever they needed more money they were forced to get loan either from his neighbour or from his factory owners. The owner was ready to advance loan to them with the aim of keeping them under his control forever. Further he secured his workforce uninterrupted.

\textsuperscript{44} Annual Report of AITUC, 1965-66.
In the meantime the wage earners who obtained loan were not able to release themselves from it. So they were forced to send female to the factory in order to improve their family income and release themselves from the debt as well as lead good family life.

In the meantime the factory owners also needed more number of workers but at the same time he wanted to engage female children for low wages in terms of economic point of view. Since both the labourers as well as the factory owners desire were one and the same the labourers were very easy to get job for not only their family members but also for their relatives. Due to competition because of abundance of available labour force the labourers were not bothered to get low wages at the entry point. Their aim was only to obtain the job at first.

This competitiveness was utilized by the owner by way of offering the low wages as far as possible and extracting more work even beyond working hours. At first the workers were never bothered about such a heavy work and more number of women and children even in the place of male workers. They were forced to do such work due to poverty and illiteracy.

Though this condition may be considered as general in all the industries situated in a poverty stricken and availability of abundant cheap labour place, this prevailed widely in Match and Fire Works Industries as compulsory, since a lot of works in this field can be done by them. This situation was exploited cleverly by the owners.

In the Match and Fire works Industries of Virudhunagar district there were

46 ibid.
nearly one lakh workers who work more than 7 hours per day and earned a sum of Rs. 70 to 75 per day as wages. They have no leisure time. Lunch time was only half an hour. They were paid daily. Hence they obeyed the company orders obediently without raising their voice of protest. They can take leave one day after 10 continuous days of work. They have to do work in the night also at the emergency season.

In the same manner the female workers has to work from morning to evening with half an hour lunch break. There was no maternity leave. At the time of pregnancy their service would be terminated and after getting the normalcy they may return back to the work, as a new entrant if the vacancy would not be filled by an unemployed lady. Many workers were affected by many diseases.

Another section is children. They have to come to the factory in the early hours of the morning. They too work continuously without morning breakfast. They too have a lunch break of half an hour. They may return home after sunset. They were under the watchful eyes of Kankani (Supervisor). They were paid Rs. 30 to 35 per day as wages.

Children came for work out of necessity and without their earning (however meager that may be) the living standard of families would decline further. A large number of them did not even have families or cannot count on them for support. In these circumstances the alteration to work may be idleness, the worst crime. The children were being misused and made to do work beyond their physical capacity that may not formation of skills which may lead to better prospects and can thus be

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48 ibid.
CHILD LABOUR IN MATCH AND FIRE WORKS INDUSTRIES:

Virudhunagar district is famous not only for the Match and Fire works Industries but also for the printing press, Business, Oil and Litho printing papers. Lottery tickets of most of the states are also printed here.49

Match and Fire works Industries in Virudhunagar area have the highest concentration of child labour in the world. The climate is also suitable for manufacturing of matches and fire works. “Unemployment” is a dirty work here.50 Because the people of Virudhunagar district are ready to go for low wages wherever the employment is available. For this reason this district has more child labour particularly in Match and Fire works Industries. Some surveys are being done by some different departments, private volunteers and others for some time. Yet the problem finds no solution.

Many agencies surveyed the existence of child labour in Match and Fire Works Industries of the Virudhunagar district. Each survey gives different figures on the strength of the child labour there. The reason is whenever the surveyors went there the Factory owners never said about the real strength of the child labours. Their display board always tells that there is no salaried labourer engaged by the company or business house. Some were closed the unit on hearing the news of coming of officers for survey. The following table shows the strength of the child labourers

\[\text{Table}\]

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50 ibid., p.165.
STATUS OF CHILD LABOUR BASED ON NATURE OF WORK

1994 Survey

1996 Survey

1999 Survey

1. MATCH INDUSTRIES 2. FIRE WORKS 3. OTHERS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Survey</th>
<th>Surveying Agency</th>
<th>Geographic area covered</th>
<th>Type of Industries</th>
<th>No. of Child Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Social Welfare Department</td>
<td>Entire District</td>
<td>Match works, Fire works, Others</td>
<td>31,685, 3,001, 5,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Anaganwadi workers and Noon Meal Organisers</td>
<td>Entire District</td>
<td>Match works, Fire works, Others</td>
<td>9,465, 2,156, 5,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,823</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Regular School workers, Noon Meal workers, NSS Volunteers and Bill Collectors</td>
<td>Entire District</td>
<td>Match works, Fire works, Others</td>
<td>4,126, 521, 5,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,808</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (ILO Project)</td>
<td>Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Sattur, and Vembakkottai</td>
<td>Match works, Fire works, Others</td>
<td>2,929, 481, 3,063</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,473</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Problem of Child Labour:**

The parents of Virudhunagar area who live below poverty line were compelled to sell the labour of their children which resulted in exploitation of child, through demand of maximum turnover at minimum wages. In a study, it has been observed that more than 50,000 children from the town and neighbouring villages were exploited in the Matches and Fire works industry in this district where they worked for more than 12 hours a day for a paltry sum of Rs.5 to 8. Many of the problems created by working children are economic as well as social in nature as follows:

a. Child labour involves the use of labour at its point of lower productivity and is, therefore, an inefficient utilization of power. It frequently precludes the most productive adulthood by distributing child workers behind.

b. Child workers are necessarily handicapped by limitations of physical strength and experience so that they are not so productive as the adults.
Socially this problem is responsible for creating a section of youngsters who are suffering from some deceases like Primary complex, Chronic branchits, and Bronchopneumonia. The District Medical Officer's report reveals that every day child workers came for treatment for some deceases caused due to the use of chemicals. Further the age group of 6-18 were numerous receiving the treatment. Some of them lost their vision due to accident at the time of working, some became handicapped even at the age of 10. They in course of time became dependent of their parents or somebody else or beggars. The mortality age is reduced in this area, when compared with the neighbouring districts where the child labour is significantly low. Further, the standard of education was declined due to the child labour. The children who have to go to schools with books and notes, were sent to the factories with lunch box. Nearly 65% of the children at the age group of 10-14 did not attended schools. From among the adults at the age group of 14-18, nearly 70% were not going to schools. Because of this trend, this district was declared educationally backward district. That is why Mr. K. Kamaraj, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from 1955-1965, who came from Virudhunagar, after having his personal experience introduced educational reforms so that even the child labourers would get the benefit of education. He opened night schools for the benefit of this type of children. He also introduced "noon meal scheme" in the year 1960 so that the poor children's parents would send their children to schools instead of factories. These two measures made only minor impact on this area, as per the report of the Ramanathapuram District Chief Educational officer.
To sum up the child labour is economically unsound, physically disastrous and physiologically as well as morally dangerous and harmful not only to the future society of this area but also whole of India. Hence it is necessary and essential to prohibit the employment of child labour here and its exploitation need to be eradicated.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{B. CAUSES FOR CHILD LABOUR:}

\textbf{a) Economic Cause:}

In a place like Virudhunagar district where well over 40\% of the people lived in a condition of extreme poverty, child labour was prevalent largely in all the industries. In the Match and Fire works industries they were employed numerously. As per a statistical statement there were 4,126 children working in the registered Match industries in the Virudhunagar district in the year 1999.\textsuperscript{52} Children came for work out of necessity and without their earnings (however meager they may be) the standard of living of their families would decline further. Further there were a large number of working children who stayed in their relatives houses situated in the locality nearer to the industries. In these circumstances the alternative to work may be idleness, the worst crime. Each available information established the fact that poverty was not only the cause of child labour as is generally assumed but also to get rid of becoming the young children as juvenile delinquency. More than one lakh of children daily frequented the working spot from the surrounding areas by means of crowded buses or walk or any mode of transport. The children were forced to do work like machines for the profit of others. None of the work they did was of the type that led to the formation and development of skills which may lead to better prospects and can thus be justifies.

\textsuperscript{51} ibid., p.37
\textsuperscript{52} Survey of Regular School Teacher and Revenue and Development officials, 1999.
Poverty at the macro level (at the societal level) or at the micro level (at the familial level) alone cannot be responsible for child labour. If poverty is cited as the only cause it will find it difficult to account for the grounding percentage of child labour in the developed countries. One learns that the latest report of UNICEF has pointed out that surprisingly high percentage of working children in the industrialized countries exploding the myth that the phenomenon is unique to poor-nations.

Social thinking of parents is also working to augment the economic improvement of their family. The parents of girl children were worried about the social custom in which they have to bear the burden of bringing up their daughters and paying dowry and other socio-cultural expenses. Further they were not having any good opinion about the educational system.

The proverb goes “Bookish knowledge will not give employment”. Further they were of opinion that education was expensive and they could not get it. So they wanted to send their children for a job. This type of social thinking was also prevailed upon the people living in this dry and arid land.

On the other side the industrialists desire of accumulating wealth through such children, negated the first and resulted in the production of a society full of disabilities and ‘under-growth’ mental faculty.

The occurrence of child labour in this area is the result of multiple cause and that no culture would suggest that the children should be the breadwinners of their respective families.

i) **Poverty:**
Poverty is one of the essential factors behind child labour in Virudhunagar district because it is a dry area. It is not suitable for agriculture. The rain bed cultivation frequently failed and caused famine and created poverty. So the small land owners were driven to seek some other jobs in those periods. Hence they shifted over to the new, small or large household or cottage industries to substitute their agricultural income. In Virudhunagar area nearly 80% of the people earned a partly amount of Rs.5/- in a day in 1950-1960 Rs.7/- during the period 1960-1970, Rs.10 in the period 1975-1980 and so on from out of their land. But at the same time in the neighbouring district it was triple the amount of the earning of each male member. At the same time the living expenditure soared into the heights enormously and the peasants wanted to shift from peasantry to some other cottage industries. At that time there was a mushroom growth of the Matches and Fire works industries. So they shifted their profession from peasantry to industry. Thus the peasants were converted into industrial workers and came to work under one roof. Their salary was as low as they could not run family by one man’s earning. So the rest of the family members including women also went to the work. Hundreds of households at Virudhunagar district lived in extreme poverty and needed the money which their children earned.

ii) Vicious circle:

The analyses of respondent’s answers shows that nearly 75% of the male workers and 70% of female workers are erstwhile child workers. They also argue that their children were working in the factories due to the parents’ anxiety to see them as wage-earners as themselves. Further they also accepted that they and their children were working hard but they said that this was our fate"
Generally Child labour is said to be caused by poverty. However, there is a reverse effect too. Such that it remains locked in a vicious circle. When the parents sent their children to work particularly to hazardous work, their potential to work may last hardly upto 30 to 35 years as they were early start of work. Hence it is like a vicious circle, these parents again sent their wards when they reached their forties and this continued as a never-ending process and poverty persisted. This is due to the inability of the parents who began their career as child labourers. The vicious circle is also determined by the wages levels. While the wage of a children in the Fire works industry stared from Rs.300 per month, the average wage of an adult worker was about Rs.800. The maximum wage of an adult worker in the Fire works industry that is, at the end of one’s service, may be about Rs.1200 p.m.. In many cases workers may work in two shifts continuously for more money. But even for overtime work they were paid only the normal, single, wages.

Maharatna (1997) in his discussion of “Children’s work activities and surplus labour” argues that children’s participation not only disguises surplus labour but also substitutes adult work-hours, thus in no way alleviating household poverty. He emphasized the need for fertility regulation among poor couples, dissemination of knowledge and delivery of family control methods at affordable price.

b. Social Cause:
   i) Marriage customs:

   The problem arose in this area primarily because of attitudes of the society also.

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The point is that the lack of familial attachment, declining moral values, wrong priorities, attitude to education and the absence of the human dimension in parents’ decision making ruined the future of children. The parents of girl children were worried about the social custom in which they have to bear the burden of bringing up their daughters, paying dowry and meeting the expenses of other socio-cultural expenses out of necessity. In Tamil society the marriage expenses have to be met by the bride’s family and they have to send their daughters to the house of bridegroom with house hold articles and gold ornaments. They have to spend huge amount. Each parent realized that it would make him as a long-time borrower. Further he thinks that if he gives education to her by spending a lot of money, they would not enjoy the money which she would even after getting employment because she would become a member of bridegroom’s family. So each parent thinks that the money spent on her education is to fill the coffer of other man’s family. So he thinks why he should spend money on her daughter. Instead of sending her to schools, he decides to send her to the factory to earn money at least meet a portion of his family expenditure. Hence female education is not favoured by them.

ii. Education – no scope:

At the same time he thought that the education of his son would be helpful to this family. Then he liked the education of his son. At the same time his attitude towards education is negative because it is expensive and at the same time his education is not sufficient to get any employment. Hence he decides to send his male child to the factory where he could earn money and his employment here at least
would fetch him permanent income and settle in his life. 80% of the respondents to the questionnaire replied that the present education is not helpful to get a useful employment. Only a 10% is of the opinion that if they try they can get jobs. The remaining 10% is of opinion that even though their sons have passed higher level examinations they should have political influence or money to get a decent job. Thus almost 100 percent of the parents are of view that sending of their children to industry even at the tender age that is below 10 is a practical step for the individual as well as family future. Throughout the survey area irrespective of castes, the people have the same opinion.

iii. Family attachment:

Another social cause is the family attachment towards their ward. The parents of the survey are replied that they wanted their children to live in the same land where they born. If they get education they will go far away from their village and family and that would finally break the family bond. They expressed that if their son went to a distant place he would not look after them at their old age. So their desire for secured life in future at their old age is depending upon their sons employment while they were at the middle age. Hence the net result is the continuance of “child labour”.

i) Illiteracy:

Illiteracy among the parents is found to be major cause of child labour. Illiteracy has also helped to perpetuate poverty, further exploitation and child employment. In the study area, the most of the people belong to backward and depressed class. Most of them are of opinion that the basic education was enough for their children. The proverb says “Education is not useful for those who are going to do physical work”.
Nearly 86% of the respondents of this study area who are also working in the Match industries, replied that they do not know who is the President of India or Prime Minister of India and they have no idea about progress of education. But at the same time nearly 95% of the working children answered that they know the names of the Cine Stars and films in which they acted. This shows that their knowledge is restricted only with seeing the pictures in their leisure time and gossips about the films at the working or lunch hours. So they have no aspiration to come out of the industries to learn more and gain knowledge. Even 90% of the sample child labourers have no idea about the newly developed “computers”. So illiteracy ensures that the child remains unskilled worker thereby blocking the changes for upward mobility. Child labour and illiteracy, thus it has been argued maintain the existing social inequalities.

A majority of the children going to work belong to illiterate parents. Fathers of 33% of the children, and mothers of 53% had never gone to school.54 The parents of the children have generally low level education only studying upto the fifth standard; this enabled them to obtain poorly paid jobs, keeping them along with the parents. This reveal that two thirds of the parents are either illiterate or drop out of the school and has been forced to work in their child hood.55 This childhood experience manifests in their attitude towards child labour. Child labour in this context becomes intergeneration.

The low educational status of parents is reflected in the lower educational level of their children. Forty-four percent of the children have never been to school and 56% are dropped out at this stage or the other. Among the dropouts, 46 percent has studied

55 ibid., p.27
beyond the standard while 10 percent has studied upto sixth standard. When children were asked about attending schools, 70 % wanted to study 50 were satisfied that if they were able to read bus boards, count the number and money and some others wanted to be clerks. The reason for dropping out from the school was for providing support to the family, lack of means to purchase books and uniforms, traveling a long distance to reach school, and parents unwillingness to send children to school.

ii. Discrimination of girls against boys:

With regard to education, girl children are discriminated against male children. Fifty percent of the people felt that education has no relevance for the girl child. It is more important for the girl child to save money through work to enable her parents to meet her dowry expense. Apart from this, taking care of younger siblings so as to relieve the adults for productive, employment is another major reason for their remaining at home. Male children are not available for domestic work since they have to go to school and are expected to study in the evening. Girl children are, thus burdened both with wage work at the factories during the day, and domestic work like feeding the cattle, assisting in cooking and other household chores after coming back from the factories.56

iii) Tradition:

Child labour exists here, because their parents are working already in these industries. If a family or a particular caste people has a tradition of a particular occupation there is every likelihood that the children will be caught up in the

56 ibid.
same process. In Virudhunagar district getting a job by a child is very easy. So the parents do not bother about the family planning. Because they think that in a growth of a child they have the responsibility for only three or four years. After that they may send their children to work. So the children are not a burden to the parents. This concept of their children is also responsible for the growth of child labour. Further after some years their family income is to be improved marginally because of their children’s income.

iv) Part-time workers:

In Virudhunagar district most of the children follow dual system such as attending work in the morning and schools in the evening. The factory opens at 7 o’clock when they go for work and at 10 o’clock they stop their work and go to school and in the lunch break they come to their working spot. At the end of lunch break again they return to school and after ending the school they return to the working place and continue the work till 7 o’clock at night. This type of work left the children unable to concentrate either on their work or on their studies. Due to this a child may learn to read and write but he can not aspire for a higher position.

v) Vocational job:

During periods of vocations children’s entry into work force goes up remarkably. During holidays children accompany their friends and family members to the factories and continue it even after the reopening of their schools. This practice is generally encouraged by parents as a result of which children continue to work in factories even after the reopening schools. Subsequently this type of children would

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57 Interview with Mr. E. Sinnamari, Virudhunagar District, Virudhunagar, dt.5.10.03.
Child Labour in Full-time work

Child Labour in Part-time work
become a part of the industries and that would lead to the dropouts in the schools.

VIII. ISSUES:

Exploitation of Working Children:

The wages paid in the match and fire works industry are both piece and time-rated, and also on a contract basis. The time rated wages may monthly, weekly or daily paid. Contract paid wages are usually to be found in the packing operations.\(^{58}\) It may be noted here that the piece rate wage for frame filling, band rolling and labeling and inner box making industries a component of “waking allowance” in the case of one unit. This is at the rate of 2 paise per frame filling for frame filling and 2 paise per gross for the other occupation. The piece-rate is determined by the minimum wages for several reasons, the most prominent among them being high levels of adult unemployment, non-implementation of minimum wages in other sector or employment, existence of a surplus labour force situation and adequate number of man-days of employment.\(^{59}\) All these result in situation of abject poverty, and some times as low as 50 paise per day judged even subsistence living to the child. The employers in small establishments extract the maximum labour from a child for a minimum pay.\(^{60}\) Children are exploited to the maximum in the fire works factory. Their earning range between Rs.1.50 and 4.50 and the 40,000 Indian children who packing fire works in Virudhunagar district particularly in Sivakasi earn a daily wage of 40 cents, while their employers make $150 millions annually.\(^{61}\) The children in match units in this area are forced to work under inhuman conditions in order to earn just Rs.3. for filling 2,500

\(^{61}\) Jill molowe & others, All works No play: The worlds youngest labour sacrifice their childhood to days of endless toil, News Week: The International News magazine, Vol.ci.Number 4, January 24, 1993.
splints, the equivalents of 50 match boxes, into a frame, they are paid 13 paise or so. Depending on a child’s ability and age, they manage to earn 25 paise to Rs.2 a day. The report of a survey carried out by the Labour Bureau (in 1979) shows that children working on frame filling are paid as low as 78 paise a day and those on box work, packing and label pasting 80 paise. As the piece-rate system is prevalent in Virudhunagar district, the children work feverishly to ensure maximum output. Inspite of more than 12 hours work a day and this feverish activity, the younger children between 4 and 10 years earn only an average of Rs.2 a day. Another exploitations is the rest hours. Thus the children at the age group of 5-10 years are exploited by the industrialists of this study area. The age group of 11-14 years are also exploited but always they are forced to do hard work. The older children earn a maximum of Rs.7 per day.

In the match and fire works industries rest hours is only half an hour between 10 to 1.30 p.m. During this time they have to wash their hands which might have been soiled with chemicals. Some children do not wash their hands properly. They take their food by the hands which are not washed properly. They might have consumed chemicals along with their meals. This destroys their health.

Further when the child workers go home back, they could not get any rest and nutritious food. They sleep on the floor only by using a mat. They have to get back in the morning at 4 a.m. and make themselves ready to pick up the transport so that they could reach the factory in time. This daily work is not giving ant rest hours. The children are usually bringing their ‘kanchi’ (grual) in their aluminium box. They never

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62 The Lesson of the Sivakasi Blast. The Hindu. 21st September, 1981
consume sufficient vegetables and protein content dhal or energized food. The food which was cooked in the early morning may be poisoned sometime and it would affect the children’s health.

The children who are working in the industries are affected directly by the work load and the chemicals used in Match and Fire works as Ammonium Phosphate, Potassium Chlorate, Sulphur, Manganese and Phosphorus which cause major disorders in the human body. They handle chemicals like Barium, Stranium, Chlorate and Carbonates. They work with the most poisonous and inflammable of chemicals. These being the nature of health hazards associated with Match manufacturing, there is no systematic survey on the health status of workers in the match belt. The detrimental effects of working in dark, crowded rooms filled with chemical smoke from the dipping operations in the cottage sector and from the long hours in a crouched position are yet to be studied in a systematic way. However, the Area Development Report (1981) identified the following occupational hazards and health problems of the Match workers:

* Women and children employed in frame-filling, packing and labeling suffer discomfort and postural defects due to long hours of work in a crouched position on the floor. Complaints of back-ache are common.

* Based on a sample survey of workers height (103 cases) it is found that 102 persons were below the normal height of ICMR norms. About 31% of the children in the age group of 10-15 years have not even reached the height norm of a 10 years old child.

* About 50% of the girl children surveyed, matured only at the age of 15, which seems to indicate both physical and mental deprivation.
The Match industry of Sivakasi is one of the most hazardous industries in the country where children work. Children tell about the strain of the heat and the heavy frames which make them feel dizzy and faint. The children have to be very alert or else there is a danger that they will set fire to themselves. Fire accidents occur when the match heads rub the frictional surface in the course of putting the box together too quickly.\footnote{L.V. Iyengar, \textit{Pyre of Childhood: child workers in the factories of Sivakasi}, in Manju Gupta and Klaus Voll (eds), \textit{Young hands at work: Child Labour in India}, (New Delhi: Lucknow: tma Ram & Sons, 1987), pp.28-33.}

The Fire works factories are particularly dangerous. It is only when newspapers report the accidents that one hears about the health hazardous in the industry. Smithu Kothari reports (1983) that a cracker factory in Chellapatti village, twenty kilometers from Sakaran Koil, went up in flames, and six children were charged to death in the fire. They had been engaged in suffering cracker powder into fire-crackers when the accident occurred.\footnote{Smithu Kothari, Op.cit., p.1192} In another accident thirty two children were burnt to death in an electrical fire in a cracker factory. In July 1991, thirty six people were killed in a blast in the fire works factory near Meenampatti village about five Kilo meters from Sivakasi. Within seconds about fifteen buildings of the factory were charred. The newspaper reported that the minimum age of the victims was 13 years. Their bodies were charred beyond recognition and neither parents nor employers could recognize them.\footnote{The Hindu, 12th July, 1991.}

The working conditions are hazardous. The children are brought from home in factory buses at 3 a.m. in the morning. The buses are packed to the bim. In an accident, thirty seven children lost their life when a bus was overloaded with child
workers. It was swept off the river Arjuna to a flash flood in Thiruthangal. Interestingly, when the bus was stuck under a bridge they wanted to get out but were prevented from doing so in order to prevent the bus from being swept away in the flood. In connection with the incident Mrs. Jayalaxmi, a Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) Member, had called for a probe into the Sivakasi industries alleging that the number of deaths was very high. She said, “the agents of the factory buy the parents off and conduct mass creation of mass burial in some secluded places”.

During 1993, the National Labour Institute’s report came out with the following findings based on a sample survey. Interview with doctors and the records from November 1990 to January 1991 the ESI hospital, Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district, reveal that among the children below 14 years treated in the paediatric ward of the hospitals,

* 15.5 per cent suffer from primary complex,
* 4.4 per cent from chronic bronchitis and
* 6.7 per cent from broncho-pneumonia

Local doctors and doctors of ESI hospital admitted that there was a correlation between the work in the Match industry and respiratory disease and age infection.

**b. Health:**

A visit to several factories revealed that a large number of child labourers have sunken chests and their bone frames give them a fragile look. The heads of a few are shorn probably because the skin on them has developed severe infections. In a number of Match manufacturing units, the chemical powder is stored in the same room in which children are doing frame filling. Children carry the odour of chemical powder

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of themselves all the time. Many of them have scabies on hand, arms and legs. The report of Area Development Programme Ramanathapuram, prepared by UNICEF, (1992), states:

“Nearly all workers are exposed to airborne concentration of substances. Disease are only defected after accumulative position take after perhaps 20 years of continued exposure.”

From the above discussion, it is clear that working children face risks and hazardous. In domestic work and organized factories the degree of hazardous may be low but in the unorganized sectors, work hazardous remain. Most of the household units are concentrated in the preparation of frame making and labeling.

The working condition is disease pruning place. Further social stigma has permeated through the child labour. Hence efforts are on to tackle the suffering of the child labourers by Government as well as Non-government Agencies.

The above discussion shows that the Virudhunagar area emerged as a child labour breeding centre due to the growth of various industries particularly Matches and Fire works industries. This type of industry needs more number of children because there are many divisions in it which can be managed by utilizing the children which is a cheap labour in that area. But this child labour produces an unhealthy society, faculty and perpetual labour folk instead of technocrats and intellectuals. Hence the Government realized the necessity of prohibiting the recruit of children in such hazardous industries like Matches and Fire woks industries.