Chapter 5

Factors Responsible for Child Labour
FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD LABOUR

Poverty and child labour are contemporary to each other. Since India has an agri-based economy and since 70 per cent of the Indian population live in villages, therefore child labour is found mainly in this field. In poor families a large number of children in a family are considered to be an economic asset rather than a liability.

The problem of child labour is existent not only in our country but all over the world. The latest statistics show that about 250 million child labours exist in the age group 5-14 all over the world. India alone accounts for the largest number of child labours (Bhargava, 2003).

According to the World Bank Report (2000), nearly 6 crores working children are to be found in India; of which at least 1.5 crores are bonded labour. It is a serious shame that when other issues such as that of globalization and information revolution are being highlighted, very little attention is being paid to the issue of child labour. Mishra and Pande (1996) are of the view that the ultimate responsible factor for child labour is widespread poverty. It is this poverty that lets parent leave the child to fend for themselves.

Poverty is not the sole factor responsible for child labour. Other factors such as improper implementation of primary education system, poor schooling system, cheap labour, employer’s preferences, poor implementation of legislative measures, large family sizes and parent’s poor or no
employment are the other main causes of child labour. It has been found that 37 per cent people believe poverty, 33 per cent say over populated family, 10 per cent say government policy failure, 6 per cent say weak laws, 2 per cent say parents unemployment and 1 per cent say high education and living are responsible for growing child labour (source Internet: Google search).

As child labour has a prevalent presence in Sitapur, it is intended, in this research, to cover various statistics and causes regarding child labour in this study. During field work, it was found that child labours are found to be engaged in dhabas, general goods shops, road side waste pickers, household chores and even embroidery work, not to mention the dari (cotton carpet) industry.

In the course of research, it was found that social, economical as well as cultural factors are responsible for child labour. Each of these has been discussed below:

5.1 Social Aspects of Child Labour

Child labour are a socially disadvantaged group of society. They are deprived of basic necessities such as education, healthy diet, recreative time etc.

5.1.1 Parent’s Illiteracy

Illiterate parents discourage children to attend schools because they lack the awareness of the merits of education. In an analysis made by Geetha (2005), it was found that there was a high incidence of illiteracy with around 50 per cent of them reporting lack of education. Lack of education may have also induced them to send their child to work.
A seminar held in 1977 highlighted the fact that child labour is prevalent extensively in lower socio-economic groups because of the lack of appreciation of the merits of education on their part of the role it plays in leading an improved life (Singh, 1990).

In the research area it was found that education was rarely present and people did not believe its utility in their lives. Moreover, when they can’t provide higher education, what is the point of providing even primary education. Aiyaz’s father believes that since education can’t provide much to people like him, they should have skilled labour on their hands. This is why they don’t pay attention to education, be it for males or females.

Education is an important tool for nation building. It teaches people social etiquettes. Educated parents plan the futures of their children to the best of their ability. Education makes people bring up children in the right manner. It is an essential tool which makes people capable of leading a normal life.

A high degree of illiteracy is dominant in the research study area and parents also rigidly stood their ground of not wanting to educate their children. Most of the parents believe that like them, their children are born to work, and let them join school on and off, when children do not have much work on their hands. Also, they say that the children’s income helps sustain a part of their livelihood. They don’t even bother that initially, children earn low wages, because what matters is that the child earns, incomes will always rise.

It is observed from the field that female education is quite low in comparison to that of males. During the research study, there hardly was
found a female who had completed her education, even up to the primary level. Very few had learnt how to recite their holy scripture – the Quran, but majority of them belonged to the group which neither recite Quran nor had completed their primary education.

No male respondents were reported to have completed their education above eighth grade. The error solely lies on their illiterate parents. Aarif’s parents declared that they had no interest in the education of their children because they had no means of bearing the expenses of higher studies. Also, according to them primary education is a wastage of time because children actually learn nothing in such schools. The parents are also not aware of the merits of education and demerits of work; all they are concerned with is the wages brought in by their children.

5.1.2 Negligence of Parents Regarding the Ill Effects of Child Labour

Since parents don’t consider child labour bad, hence, they can be directly held responsible for the ill effects suffered by them. Illiteracy prevents them from taking right decisions about their children. Because of excessive number of children, issues such as health, education, social activities etc. are not paid attention to.

Most of the parents interviewed did not agree with the notion that child labour has an adverse consequence on the child’s future. By involving children into the labour force, they believe themselves to have done a wonderful job. Ultimately the child ends up earning, something which he could not do while in school.
Therefore, it is found that parents are very much responsible for the prevalence of child labour.

5.1.3 Improper Implementation of Compulsory Primary Education

Although there is a free provision for education upto primary level, the schemes, however, are not properly implemented, hence, resulting in the improper education patterns of people. Education is a weapon which can be effectively used to tackle the social evil of child labour, but the primary schools fail in providing the kid of education which can brighten the future of the children. The kid of education provided in most educational institutions is of little relevance to the children and does not prepare them in any way for the challenges ahead (Sinha, 1997).

When the level of implementation of the compulsory primary education was researched, with the reason of majority of children being drop out of school, it was found that teachers themselves are not interested in teaching these students. A teacher argued that, when these children ultimately have to earn and work, then why should they at all be coming to school. These children enroll into schools for the sole purpose of earning scholarships and getting cereals, which the teachers claim, they will happily distribute.

Majority of the parents are dissatisfied with the education system, the type of teachers and the entire setup. A significant factor in discouraging children from attending school is child labour and short comings of education system (Yadav, 2005).
5.1.4 Poor Education System

Poor education system along with the inaccessibility of schools plus an irrelevant and unattractive school syllabus, lack of skilled teachers will be taken up for discussion in this section.

Accessibility of schools is important for the children of remote areas, usually they do not have conveyance means to reach school. Schools are far away from the research areas. Distances make schools unattractive for children as well as parents.

The school curriculum is another unattractive feature of these schools. Most of the contents of the curriculum is irrelevant for poor children, who feel that learning in school is useless since it does not provide skills (Yadav, 2003). Extra curricular activities are almost non-existent in these primary schools and no due time and importance is given to sports and physical activity because of the lack of teachers of the subject.

Primary schools should basically be clean and safe. In the area researched, most of the schools had pucca buildings; the rest had semi pcuca or kuccha buildings. Most of the schools in remote areas have only one or two rooms with open verandahs.

Basic amenities like toilets and water are not to found in the entire area. Students generally use nearby fields for toilets; and to drink water, they take permission to go home, and do not come back. Electricity is not present in the schools. Most of the schools almost have no seating arrangements, and students sit on the floors. Though most of the schools have blackboards, they do not have teaching aids such as maps, charts, chalks etc.
Teachers do not use blackboards normally, but they do so during inspection. If the number of teachers in a school is more than one, the teachers engage in conversations. When there is only one teacher in a school, he takes this time to complete his personal work. No kind of discipline is maintained as such in the school.

It is widely understood that the learning ability of a student is greatly dependent upon the teacher’s teaching ability. A number of unskilled teachers are employed in primary schools in remote areas. Most are neither B.Ed. nor B.T.C., either they are plain graduates or post-graduates. In North India, especially more than half of these teachers do not have any kind of teacher training qualification (Zachariah, 2005).

Due to lack of proper teaching training, the teachers lack proper communication skills, and cannot interact with students properly.

When a search for presence of incentives to promote education was made, it was found that they are not provided adequately. A provision for scholarship and mid-day meals is there for students with 80 per cent attendance. The scholarship amount is Rs. 300/- student per annum and 3 kg of wheat is to be provided every third month. But students get only 7-9 kg of wheat per annum. This is mainly because of the corruption and greed prevalent in the staff itself. It was found during field study that such schemes are a failure at the grassroot level of upliftment of education. Although these policies have positively affected the enrolment ratio, there have not had any positive effect on the literacy rate of students.
A number of students can be found who have passed significant levels of education but are still unable to read and write properly, and this includes writing their names.

5.2 Economic Aspects of Child Labour

Child labour is to a great extent the result of poor economic conditions. The need to raise the overall income of the family pushes children into the labour force. Family size, economic status, adult unemployment are all factors which are responsible for child labour. These will be discussed below, on the basis of the information acquired during field study.

5.2.1 Family Size

A large family size is one of the major factors responsible for child labour, in general and particularly in Sitapur district. Parents consider children as economic assets rather than responsibility. The reason behind this is the lack of adequate resources. In rural areas of Sitapur, especially in the Muslim society, family sizes are considerably large. Children are not properly attended to and are considered a source of money. The average family size is 8-9. The needs of the family are dependent on the size of the family. When needs rise, expenditures rise, and this is when children are pushed into the workforce, so, the family expenses are meant to be borne by all family members, irrespective of age. This is when children get engaged in work (Bhargava, 2003).

The child labour brings in income, be it any amount, and this helps in raising the overall income of the family.
5.2.2 Economic Status of Child Labour’s Family

From the field study it was found that the economic status is usually not good. Majority of the families were engaged in the daily wage system. The people follow varied occupations.

A few years back, the process of dari (cotton carpet) making was carried out in the tehsils but due to continuous raids of labour officials, it was shifted to blocks so most of the adult respondents of field study are not involved in dari (cotton carpet) making. Because people engaged themselves according to the availability of work they normally went to the proper Sitapur in search of job, they got varied jobs except dari making. So they engage themselves in other things such as farming, mechanical work, rickshaw pulling, daily wage labourers etc. Many people even work outside their villages. Due to this moving out, people engage their children in this profession. The belief that if the child becomes a skilled weaver, his work and earnings will flourish make parents engage their children in this work. So, they borrow money from money lenders or creditors to set up one or two looms of their own. Also easy availability of jobs in the dari (cotton carpet) industry is responsible for concentration of children in this section.

Low income is a factor which is responsible for a number of hardships faced by families. An attempt was made to study the income of the families surveyed. It was found that families with one earning members have between Rs. 2300/2400 per month; two earning members brought in Rs. 3000/- in a month. Women hardly contribute to the family income some women engage themselves in chikan embroidery.
The field study found that majority of the families live in miserable conditions. They work, otherwise, they have no proper income. Rainy season sees there families face starvation because there is no availability of work. For this reason, majority of the families need whatever their children earn. Withdrawal of these children from the workforce would result in families facing economic crisis.

5.2.3 Adult Unemployment

Adult unemployment is also in a large manner responsible for child labour. Sometimes child labour even replaces adult labour because child labour is comparatively much cheaper, and easier to handle. Children work faster and get lower wages. Adults may raise objects regarding wages and work load and work hours, but children do not do these.

In the field studies, however, it was found that children do not replace adults, because, in the dari (cotton carpet) industry, different sections of work are handled by different ages. Here, the adults face unemployment only during non-availability of work, not because of replacement by child labour.

5.2.4 Insufficient Incomes of Adults

This is also a prominent factor for child labour. It was found during field study that majority of the respondents do not have enough resources to meet their basic necessities. So, during times of crisis, which is forever, there, they use their children as earning hands. Children bring in money, and this helps the family to a degree.
5.2.5 Lack of Resources

In rural areas, there is lack of resources of livelihood. Due to these lack of resources, there is hardly any employment opportunity in remote areas. Most of the people engage themselves in either dari (cotton carpet) industry or embroidery work. These are the only opportunities they find both of these fields, however, need skill, which majority of the people do not possess. This is because, earlier, these professions did not have much employment prospects, but now things have changed.

However, these professions are not consistent employment provides and hence workers sometimes have work, sometimes they don’t. So, in such cases having resources of income which are not permanent prone to be a problem for these temporary workers.

5.3 Cultural Aspects

Among other factors involved, the cultural aspect too is responsible for child labour. It has been believed down the ages that a child should learn the skills present in his family. This tradition also helps in enhancing child labour. This is justified both by the child’s parents and his employers.

Children in such setups are believed to be assisting their families, not working. Therefore, they are made to learn the craft as early as possible. Similarly, a cultivator's son who does not learn to handle the plough and other instruments at an early age will find it difficult to handle it at a later age (Yadav, 2005).

In the area under research study, the cultural factor was one of the factor dominant in the prevalence of child labour.
5.3.1 Tradition of Learning Family Craft

Dari (cotton carpet) making is a traditional business. People involved in this usually believe that their children should also learn this skill, so they take their children to their work places to develop their interest. Once interest has been developed, it becomes easier for their training.

A respondent, Saleem’s father says, “that now most of the people send their children to learn this craft, because of increased employment opportunities. If people who are not in this profession, can send their children to learn this skill, then we, who are already init, should also make effort to do so”.

In such remote areas, where other employment opportunities are dismal dari (cotton carpet) industry can flourish, and hence, child labour have increases by leaps and bound. Parents believe their children to have secure future in this profession. None of the concerned parties, employers, parent or children, see anything wrong it child labour continues (Yadav, 2005).

5.3.2 Prevalence of Cultural Myths about Child Labour

Some myths also result in child labour. Parents feel unduly obliged by employers when their children get work. But, the fact is that employers are only concerned about their profit, they actually maximize the profit in lesser time at cheaper wages.

No evidence, however, is to be found to prove that child labour is necessary to preserve the traditional arts and crafts. There is a myth that only the nimble figures of children can carry out knotting, but in actuality, children do work faster, therefore this myth exists.
It is also a common prevalent myth that child labour cannot be abolished because of economic factors. It is true that child labour exists because of economic factors and is a large problem, but effective laws and the will to remove it can help eradicate child labour.

5.3.3 Parents are the Ones who are Least Concerned about the Ill Effects of Child Labour

It is seen in the area of research study that inspite of telling them about the serious consequences of child labour, people believe that the children are working for themselves and their family and there is nothing wrong in doing. Children can learn skills at a young age only and this will benefit them in adulthood, when they will be able to generate more incomes to sustain a better livelihood.

5.3.4 Increasing Employment Opportunities in Unorganized Sector

It is a well known fact that main concentration of child labour is in unorganized sector. In an unorganized sector children do a variety of jobs in different well known industries of the country. In this sector, there is no union, so there is nobody to fight for their rights. They are continuously exploited by their employers. But it is surprising that neither the labours nor their parents believe that they are being exploited by employers.

5.3.5 Ineffective Enforcement of Legal Provisions

Although, there are a number of constitutional provisions against child labour, they are not properly implemented. Every district has a labour department, but inspections are not carried out properly. Labour officers inspect only those places where child labour is low, they never go to high impact areas.
The provision under child labour prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, deems that children are not to be allowed to work in hazardous industries. But everywhere, this law is violated.

It was found during the time of field study that due to fear of continuous raids by district magistrates, child labour has shifted from tehsils to blocks. In Sitapur proper, Laharpur and Khairabad tehsils child labour started decreasing from 2-3 years back. A number of employers interviewed said that if they did not give due bribes and commissions to labour inspectors, they were charged with keeping child labours, whether they actually did so or not.

The central as well as state governments have passed a number of laws for child welfare in order to eradicate child labour, but none of these policies, schemes or legislations have been properly implemented. Poor parents willingly involve their children in the labour force. This exists along with the harsh reality that the parents are not willing to put their children into schools, and nor are they willing to stop child labours through proper legislation. They usually harbour the belief that since children belong to them, therefore they have the right to decide their children’s futures. And they are the ones to decide as to how and till when they should use children to earn a living for the family.

5.3.6 Employer’s Preference for Child Labour

Child labour is cheap labour, and child workers are easy to handle from adult workers who may create demands. But none of the interviewed employees admitted that they employed child labour because they were
cheap. They said that the parents of these children came to them and insisted on having their children put in for work. In such situations, employers usually did not have much options.

But, in actuality, the fact that children can be easily controlled and have no awareness of rights makes children the best options to employ.

Child labour is a great source of profit for such employers, who make children work long hours with low wages. Neither the children nor their families bargain for wages with the employer. These people obliged the parents by giving their children jobs.

5.3.7 Lack of Strong Sense of Responsibility of Government Officials and Political Leaders

Because of a lack of strong sense of responsibilities towards their duties, the government officials and political leaders do very little to eradicate child labour, inspite of the fact that everyone is aware that child labour exists in nearly all hazardous and non-hazardous industries in different regions all over the country.

Labour officials and political leaders ignore the problem of child labour, infact they hide the seriousness of the problem. It is only by firm legislative law implementation that these problems will get eradicated.

Child labour exists because of these economic and social factors. Also, there is a cultural factor involved. Ineffective laws further add to the flourishing of child labour.
Chapter 6

National and International Initiatives for the Elimination of Child Labour