CHAPTER 7

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CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In all societies, irrespective of caste, race or area, children occupy a very important position. The importance of children is stated in Vedas also. When we look into a child's eyes we expect to see hope, trust and innocence but when these signs of childhood are replaced by betrayal, hunger, fear and suspicion, we need to take stock of ourselves and the society we have created. The phenomenon of child worker is global and is as old as the history of mankind. Child workers continue to be a problem of enormous dimensions throughout the world. Deprivations are his daily lot. He/she is deprived of physical, intellectual, social, spiritual and psychological growth.

In the urban areas, child labour exists both in the formal as well as in informal sector enterprises, though its presence in the latter is more frequent. In small manufacturing enterprises, which are spread over wide locations and can ignore legal restrictions, the children often work along with their elder relatives and friends. Packing, pasting, labeling, wrapping etc. are the main activities of the children working in small industries. Domestic servants, workers in hotels and restaurants, canteens, dhabas, rag pickers, newspaper sellers, are the main categories of working children in the urban areas. The construction work is another activity, which also attracts children. In this context, child labour is considered as a source of cheap labour and means of quick profits by their employers.
Amongst various causes of child labour, unemployment, poverty and indebtedness of the households are the most important. Many parents secure advances from the landlords or the employers and repay the loans in terms of their child labour. In some cases the children are compelled to migrate temporarily to the nearest cities or the urban areas of adjoining states to earn the necessary subsistence.

In most of the developing countries, parents depend on their children to assist them in performing important work at home or outside. In the absence of any social security measures, dependence on children increases and in many cases the working children are the main or the only support for many parents.

Poverty coupled with illiteracy and unawareness on the part of parents and constitutional provisions enhance employment of children below 14, in almost all sectors of Indian economy. There are several forms of child labour – migrant labour, invisible labour, bonded labour, wage-based labour, self-employed and so on. UNICEF has classified child workers into three broad categories: (a) within the family: children helping in the domestic work or family occupations like agriculture/pastoral work, handicrafts, khadi and cottage etc. (b) within the family but outside home: children do local agricultural work, assist in shops, help in construction, harvesting crops, laundry/recycling of waste and so on. (c) outside the family: children are employed in bonded work, doing errands for rich land lords, various works in the village industries, skill trades, unskilled industrial
occupations, and informal sector like shoe shining, car washing, begging, prostitution and so on.

7.2 General Background of the Children in the Study Region

Child workers are a problem of the whole world and it is more acute in the poor countries belonging to the third world, mainly due to economic backwardness of the families. Thus, economic reason moves the whole family to work as a production unit. In the rural areas the children belonging to the poor agro-based families generally work with their family members. On the contrary, in the sub-urban/urban slum areas, most of the poor children have to work either with their family members or individually, or under any person on daily wage or on monthly basis.

In the context of the field survey in the study sites the family background of the child workers, namely caste, religion, type of family, educational status of parents, occupations of parents, number of members in the family, levels of income and tenurial pattern of occupations emerge as the most important determinants of child labour or the involvement of children in different jobs to assist in family income.

If we consider the nature of work of the children, we find that most of the children in the region are engaged in Zari work. Their nature of work, duration of work and activities are varied. Some are partly engaged, while the others are fully engaged in this work. In the study area it was found that some of the children work on part-time basis. Most of the
part-time workers are school going children. After returning from school they find some engagement in Zari work. The children are forced to do this work either on part-time or full-time basis to support their families as well as themselves. It is also found that economic condition of child workers’ family is quite poor. As such it is very difficult for them to maintain the minimum livelihood. Despite their hard physical labour they are unable to earn any surplus income. That’s why each and every member of the family is engaged in this work.

Various types of problems have been noticed among the child workers and it is perhaps largely due to their teenage engagement and other related factors. The problems involve aspects like regularity in school attendance, duration of work, social and economic insecurity and so on. The major problem of the child workers is that they do not get the minimum educational facilities. Because of constraints like parents’ illiteracy or very poor educational background, the children are unable to get proper educational guidelines from them. Lack of minimum infrastructural facilities in the houses, poor income level as well as economic uncertainty of the families are factors owing to which most of the poor parents are not able to provide tuition of coaching or any other guidelines to their children for better result as well as their education. A large proportion of child workers have not got any formal schooling as during school-time they mostly remain involved in work. Due to this poor educational background most of the parents are not well aware or fail to understand about the significance of their children’s education. The study also reveals that a higher percentage of the families have a monthly income of only upto Rs. 1500/-. Besides these, the social environment is another major cause for which
educational progress gets seriously affected. It has been observed that alcoholism, gambling, inter-familial and intra-familial conflicts among the adults, have a tremendous effect on the practices on non-enrolment, dropout or absenteeism or irregular participation in school which again seriously affect the educational environment.

The other problems faced by child workers are insufficiency of nutritious food, unhygienic health condition, malnutrition and other diseases. The people in the studied area mainly take rice, vegetables and pulses for lunch and dinner. Most of the people are unable to buy sufficient nutritious food like animal protein, milk and fruits. Most of the people use the polluted water of the ponds for their daily necessities like cleaning, bathing, washing, cooking. Beside these, the lack of drainage system and poor sanitation also affect their health system. Due to these several causes, the problem of the children are in very bad shape. The overall adverse situation does not permit them to avail of proper education, health facilities and others, and ultimately this situation force them to take up work with their families or outside the families at rather early ages.

7.3 Eradication of child labour (Normative issues of the problem)

Child labour is both an economic and social problem. The “Child Labour” today brings before one’s eyes image of exploitation of little children, weak, underdeveloped bodies, illiteracy, physical abuse etc. Children are employed to supplement the family income and to help the family in their traditional crafts by acquiring necessary skills at very early age. The situation became really bad with the advent of industrialization in India, when
factory owners found it far more profitable to employ children at low wages who could be made to work uncomplainingly for long hours.

It is acknowledged that child labour should be eradicated. It is also admitted that child labour cannot be eradicated within a short period and that only legislation alone cannot solve the problem. The denial of opportunities to children for their proper physical development and education is an issue of serious nature. It is true that the problem of child labour is basically an economic one; but it has far-reaching social implications. If we consider the problem of poverty, which prepares the ground of employing child labour, a way has to be found to give the child the necessary education in his respective years.

Apart from enforcing compulsory primary education for the child labourers, the entrepreneurs and factory owners should introduce minimum wage for child workers. This measure is not an alternative to education. It is possible that just as making school mandatory would reduce the supply of child labourers, so raising their wage rate and thus the cost of their labour would lower the demand for them. Child labour may lose much of its attraction to employers. The market would automatically readjust to this situation with a shift from the demand for better paid child labour to better paid adult labour.

The Government of India has not officially abandoned its objective of ending child labour and enforcing compulsory primary education for the children. The Government made 'amelioration' and not 'abolition' as the catchword in its National Policy on child labour 1987. This policy embodied a mixed prescription. Child work was allowed in less
hazardous jobs through greater regulation, and on the other hand Government declared to set up new non-formal educational centers to enable children both to work and study.

There are some norms arising from the inherent dignity of human beings and these are recognized in international conventions accepted by different countries irrespective of their levels of development. In India, no doubt there have been some improvements in poverty levels but there have been no corresponding improvements in the prevalence of child labour (Bhatty 1996). There has also not been much improvement in literacy rates.

The programme for eradication of child labour should create an atmosphere where people will realize that it is unethical to deny a child the opportunity of going to school and also creating a consciousness about the evils of this practice in the society i.e. in the minds of parents, labour contractors, entrepreneurs, politicians and labour leaders. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State policy (Part IV of the Indian Constitution) directs the state to provide free and compulsory education for children upto age of 14 years and this was to be achieved within 10 years from the commencement of the constitution. Though, in West Bengal, school education upto the higher secondary level has been made free, but it has not been possible to ensure that all parents send their children to schools. If every school going poor child were to be given a stipend along with one free nutrition meal (i.e., mid-day meal), it would have pursued the parents to send their children to schools. The money from the stipend would some what offset loss in income and the free meal would ensure better, healthy growth of a child.
Compulsory primary education must be introduced and this should be accompanied by improvements in the education system. It should be done by changing the rigid school curriculum and by incorporating training in crafts along with reading, writing and basic mathematics. Even a cultivator or a landless worker should have the minimum education and that should be imparted to him in his childhood – this should be the norm in introducing compulsory primary education. Here it is important to say that along with introducing means for removing poverty, compulsory primary education is a greatly effective tool in keeping children away from the labour force. Parental apathy is definitely a constraint in sending the children to school. Along with compulsory primary education, arrangement may be made for adult education programmes imparting knowledge of sanitation, healthcare and nutrition as well as creating awareness for a small family norm.

In India, be it either rural or urban region, the female children, because they are destined to leave the family after marriage, are considered less worthy of education than boys, are more suited to contribute to family income. Parental apathy is greater in case of female workers.

Apart from parental apathy, another much more influencing factor for sustaining child labour is the hidden strength of the vested interests who intend to perpetuate this evil only for their own private interests. Child labour has been the unfortunate creation of a class of labour which can be forced into work and discarded at will.
There has no strong political will to eradicate child labour. So, an atmosphere could have been created where parents, employers and politicians would feel guilty and made to realize that sending children to work is unethical and that it is their duty to give back to children their basic rights of carefree childhood. The children can also be motivated to demand education and a good life. For this, steps should be taken to implement the existing Acts and also to undertake rehabilitation programmes for children. A suitable population policy based on family planning programmes should also be pursued since all welfare programmes for children are in the forms of giving food, medical care. The Non-government Organization and the village Panchyets could also pay an important role in making the people understand the urgency of family planning.

7.4 An Appraisal of the problem of child Labour

Problem of child labour is basically due to abject poverty of the people. Apart from poor economic condition, low literacy rate and population overgrowth, indifferent attitude of the people towards child abuse or hardship of children are primarily responsible for encouraging the existence of child labour. Although there is sufficient protective safeguard for the child labourers, still the proper utilization of these provisions is lacking. Another drawback is that there is no specific legislation for the protection of child labourers of the unorganized sector. Hence, proper implementation of the provisions meant for the protection of employed children; amendment of the Acts so as to provide the maximum benefits to the child labours, proper rehabilitation facilities, formation of necessary plan of action by the Government to tackle the problem are suggested. But at
the same time it should be kept in mind that law alone can never do anything. For the upliftment of the children, to provide them their basic human right, a social awareness is very much necessary and in this regard the role of NGOs is extremely important. Because, until and unless we change our exploitative attitude towards our children, the rights of the children envisaged in UN, National policy on child labour, ILO's conventions and recommendations etc. would remain far from reality.

The evil practice of child labour has its roots deeply embedded in the system of social stratification and most importantly in the attitude of people towards the problem. An immediate awareness campaign targeted at the common man, specially in rural region can hardly be awaited.

7.5 Recommendations and policy prescriptions

To abolish or to eliminate child labour, integrated approach and efforts are required. If the health and welfare personnel's efforts to encourage small family norms, social scientist's attention to solve family problems and help in building healthy family environment, educationists efforts to develop the child with desirable attitude and skills, and economists' view of spreading the awareness that a child could be more productive if given chance to develop and contribute to society are not implemented simultaneously, the child labour problem is likely to remain embedded in society. So, the policy makers need to shift the focus from 'policy making' to "policy taking" or "policy implementation" thereby recognizing significance of the policy.
In view of the various factors contributing towards employment of children in our country, the following steps are suggested to mitigate the evils of child labour:

- Statutory provision should be strengthened and there should be adequate checks and balances of controlling the enforcement machinery.
- The existing legal provision should be so amended as to cover wide ranging field of child labour currently out of the purview of the law.
- Provision of adequate social security measure for the poor people need to be introduced so that their children can be educated.
- Small family norms should be strictly enforced and the population growth should be brought to below one percent.
- Poverty should be removed and a majority of B.P.L. people should be brought above the line.
- Adequate health service for the children should be taken up by Governments.
- Vocational course and arrangement to mix work with education should be top priority. It is the responsibility of any Government in any country to ensure that the children of the nation are provided with necessary opportunities for all round integrated development.

India being a developing country, should exploit all its resources for the welfare of the human beings. From the statistics, it is seen that the majority of child labour exist in rural areas compared to urban areas. Most of the child labour are found in the informal sector.
The legislation defines a child labour as a child within the age group of 14. Then the question arises as to the children who are engaged in rural areas by their parents in agricultural work, cattle herding etc. Should we eliminate their employment from the ambit of child labour legislation? If this is done so, then necessarily, the figure of employment of children becomes very less.

The population problem is also another issue which can never be lost sight of in the present context of problems of child labour. The majority of Indian population resides in the rural areas. Birth control is followed strictly by the urban and educated people. But for the illiterate, rural masses more the number of children mean more income to the family. So, until the masses in the village are educated, made aware of the evils of large family and the scenario of socio-economic conditions of the people are changed the elimination of child labour may remain a far off dream.

Side by side the efforts to eliminate child labour, there should be laws legislations to improve their conditions. The child labour should be allowed to come under the trade unions and the trade union law should be amended suitably. If this is not done child labour strictly suffers the torture of his employers because he is too weak to fight for his cause and the Government too has not allowed him to form trade-union. Besides, there is also no wage structure for child labour. So, minimum wages should be laid down and payment of minimum wages should be enforced. Other facilities like annual earned leave, nation and festival holidays, payment of bonus, ESI, EPF, compensation under
workmen’s compensation Act, etc. should also be made available at par with the adult workers.

The income levels of the families of child labourers should be raised through income generating schemes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) and TRYSEM etc.

It is concluded that the economic disparity among the people all over the country is the root cause for the mal- nourishment of child labour. Unless and until resources of the country are distributed among all equally and equitably, the problems of child labour would continue for year after year and it would very adversely affect the progress of the Nation.