CHAPTER - 4
CASE STUDIES

Any social phenomenon can be studied quantitatively as well as qualitatively. In the earlier chapters our primary focus has been to present a quantitative analysis of the issue of child labour as found existing among our sample. However, Child labour is a problem that cannot be wholly comprehended through numbers and statistics. In order to understand this social problem, one needs to indulge in its qualitative analysis as well. As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, we have seen that apart from that functionalist and conflict perspectives, child labour can also be studied from an interactionist perspective that bases its study on the everyday experience of the subject. Thus acting as Micro-sociologist we undertook such an exercise to discover how these children come face to face and address everyday activities. For this purpose 10 case studies were conducted. The cases have been picked up to cover all the categories included in the study namely:

A1. Children Living with family, working with family and going to school.
A2. Children Living with family, working outside family and going to school.
B1. Children Living with family, working with family and not going to school.
B2. Children Living with family, working outside family and not going to school.
C1. Working children staying away from home, with employer
C2. Working children staying away from home, on the streets
C3. Working children staying away from home, independently

We thought it wise to pick up one additional case from every category (other than category B2 and C1 from where we selected 3 cases and 2 cases
respectively) and give its detailed profile which would help us set a better picture of these unfortunate children.

Since the largest proportion of our sample came from the category B2 (i.e. children living with family, working outside family and not going to school), i.e., 136 (56.76%), so taking up just one case from this category would not have done justice to it. Moreover the sample here offered rich diversity in its content. Keeping this in mind we took up 3 typical cases from this division to be studied in detail. Also, rather than taking up 1 case from category C1 (i.e., working children staying away from home, with employer) we decided on taking up to 2 typical cases from this category, as these cases would help us see the actual misery that this segment has to undergo in terms of its excessive exploitation at the hands of the employers.

This chapter provides us with a detailed profile and gives us an overall account of such deprived children.

4.1 (A1) Sonam-Standing by family
Case of child living with family, working with family and going to school

Sonam is a very responsible 14 year old girl who lives with her father and younger sister in Bapu Dham Colony Sector 26 Chandigarh. Though Sonam’s family comes from a small village near Ittawa in U.P, but now it has been 20 years since they have been settled in Chandigarh and it is here that Sonam was born. She is from a Hindu family and a staunch devotee of Maa Durga.

Sonam’s father sells gol gappas and tikkis to make a living and support his two children. Sonam is very close to her father, more so after the untimely demise of her mother and helps him with his work. She prepares his entire golgappa rehri for him. This includes boiling potatoes in ample quantity, peeling them, boiling grams, making chutneys (pudina and sweet), chopping onions and chilies, making tikkis and cleaning the rehri and the utensils required by the customers. It takes her three to four hours to do the entire job.

After giving her father a cup of tea in the morning and sending her sister off to school. Sonam starts her work on the rehri, which is usually around 9:00 am and the rehri with its entire food items is ready by 12 noon. She then fixes lunch for her family, after which her father leaves for work only to return late in the evening.
This does not mean that Sonam ignores her study. Rather she is very 
particular about them. She goes to the night school in Bapu Dham colony run by the 
Durga Das foundation. The school caters especially to the needs of those children 
who are unable to attend regular classes in the morning due to their work as it starts 
from 4:00 pm in the evening.

Sonam’s teacher is a very kind lady who fully understands the problems of 
such children. She motivates children to work hard and make a name for themselves 
and their parents in the outside world. It is due to this motivation and hard work that 
Sonam has deeply taken to studies. She is in class five and stands first in her Class. 
She loves to go to school. Even her father is very particular about her studies and it 
is his strict instructions that she be regular with her classes. In order to help his 
daughter out, it is he who usually prepares the evening meals. He knows fully well 
that Sonam’s entire morning goes in doing household chores and preparing 
foodstuffs for his rehri and somewhere feels guilty about the same. But he also 
knows that things can’t be otherwise, so to compensate for this he wants her to have 
the evening to herself. He lets her do whatever she wants to do in that time, be it 
studying or playing with her sister and friends. Says he, " Meri beti bahut 
samajhdaar hai, ye mera sahaara hai. bhagwan aisa bachha sab ko de. Mera has 
chalta to main apni bachhi se kabhi kaam na leta ise bhi subhe school bheja jaise 
chhoti wali jaati hai. Par kya karun mere halat he kuch aise hain. Fir bhi main 
apni taraf se koshish karta hoon ie badi bhi padhe, likhe aur khele who bhi to ahhi 
bachhi he hai." (My Daughter is very mature. She is my support. God should give 
such a child to every parent. Had it been just up to me, I would not have taken any 
work from my child. I would have also sent her to school in the morning as her 
younger sister. But what can I do? My circumstances are such, though from my side 
I try that my elder daughter also studies and plays as she too is just a child. What 
could one say after hearing these words? I kept quiet but enquired from Sonam her 
views on the topic) "Mujhe apne Papa ki help karna bahut accha lagta hai, ye koi 
bahut bhari kaam rahi hai jo main kar rahi hoon. Har bacche ko apne maa bap ki 
itni madadat to karne hai chaaiaye. Fir mere papa mera aur meri choti behen ka 
bahut khayal rakhte hain aur hame bahut pyar karte hain." (I love to help my 
Papa. It is not a heavy work that I am doing. Rather every child should help his or
her parents this much. Then my father takes immense care of me and my younger sister and he loves us a lot).

These words brought a smile to my face. I loved the way she defended her father and came to his rescue. I realized that life though unfair was not that bad for these three as they had one another to fall back on.

4.2(A2) Pooja – Maa, I want to help you.
(Case of a child living with family, working outside family and going to school)

Pooja is a 14 year old Kashtriya Hindu girl. Though originally she hails from Pauri, a small town in the Garwhal region of Uttranchal, she was born in Chandigarh and her family has been in Chandigarh for the past 17 years. She stays with her family in sector 25 Janta Colony.

Her father is a rickshaw puller and her mother cleans utensils in other people’s houses. She has a younger sister and two younger brothers who study in sector 25 Government school. Since past 4 years Pooja, in order to help her mother financially as well as from the health point of view has been going to clean utensils and clothes in other people’s houses. She goes to work from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm as she attends schools regularly in the morning, that is, from 7:00 to 2:00 pm. She is in class 5 now and realizes the importance of education. Pooja earns Rs. 600 a month from her work. A part of this income was spent in paying her own and her sibling’s school fee, which was just Rs 11.00 per child, the rest is added in the family kitty.

Explaining why she works she said “Apne maa bap ki madad to bar bachhe ko karni chahiye, hamare ghar ke aise haalaat hain ki mujhe kaam karna pada. Perkoi baat nahi, main khush hoon aur ye tasalli bhi hai ki apne chote bhai behen ko padhaane main main apne maa haap ki koi madad kar paa rahe hoon. Main is liye bhi kaam kar rahi hoon ki unko kaam na karna pare. Who aaraam se sirf padh payan aur baaki bachhon ki tarehen khaadi samaye mein bina kisi chinta ke khal saken, kahi apna bachpan na kho dein jaise maine kho diya.” (Every child should help his or her parents. The circumstances of our family are such that I had to work. But it is alright. I am happy and satisfied that I am able to help my parents in properly bringing up my siblings. I am also working so that my younger siblings do not have to work and that they can also rest, study and play freely like other children in their spare time. I wish that they do not miss out on their childhood as I did.)
Pooja is a brave girl and does not let anybody take undue advantage of her. At work place she does the tasks assigned to her quietly and claims that her employers are nice people who don’t say anything to her. Yes, if somebody tries to get smart with her she makes it a point to set him or her right. As she told me that once she had gone to work in a house, there certain guests had come. One of them, a boy, tried to misbehave with her. She did not take this insult and slapped him and told her employer what all had happened. Her employer was a nice lady. She immediately asked those guests to leave and apologized to Pooja on their behalf. “Main kisi se nahi darti. Hame jagahhe jagahhe jaa kar kaam karna podia hai. Agar hum apna khayal khud nahin rakhenge to kaun rakhega.” (I am not scared of anyone. We have to go different places to work. If we don’t take care of ourselves, who will?)

As far as the child Labour law is concerned her reaction was very simple. She believed that it should be left to the child weather she or He wants to work or does not want to work. If he/she wants to work he/she should be given the freedom to work but if he/she does not want to work he/she should not be forced to do so.

4.3(B1) Satto - An invisible child labourer
(Case of a child living with family, working with family and not going to school)

Satto is a Hindu Valmiki girl. She is 8 years old. She was born in Chandigarh though the basic domicile of her family is village Arampura in U.P. from where they migrated to Chandigarh 10 years ago. Satto’s mother died when she was only 4. The incident left its mark on her. Though she is 8 years and should be full of life and vitality as other children of her age, she chooses to remain quiet and subdued – in a world of her own. Life has not been easy for this child. Her family comprises of her stepmother who is a tailor, her father who sells fruits in sector 26 market along with her two elder brothers. She also has two younger sisters.

Satto comes from a large family, which though many times a boon, can also act as a curse. It is not easy to feed so many mouths and fulfill satisfactorily the requirements of everybody in the family. Satto’s parents and her brothers are busy earning bread for their family and creating some buffer, which might prove useful in difficult times. In such circumstances Satto has no choice but to cooperate with her family and to lend it support in her own way. This she does by taking care of her two younger sisters, Mita who is 4 years and Gudiya who has just completed 2 years. In
addition to this Satto’s work also includes other household chores like cleaning, washing and cooking.

Satto’s day starts quite early. She gets up at 6 am and first cleans the house, meanwhile her mother fixes breakfast. After the morning meal her parents and brothers leave home for work and she is left alone with her two sisters. She baby-sits for both of them during the day, ensuring that they are clean and well fed. Then she washes clothes and fixes lunch. By the time it is three in the afternoon she is dead tired and takes a nap after making her sisters sleep. When her mother comes home at about 4 pm Satto is ready with a cup of tea. All this seems quite unthinkable for a child her age. But that is the bitter truth which many children like Satto have to face. Satto’s parents are illiterate, hence educating their children is not their primary concern. Her mother says, “Ye padh likh kar ka karegi. Achha hai abhi se ghar ka kaam keaj sambhaal le aage chal kar bhi to ye hi karegi.” (‘Why does she need to study, it is good that she is learning the household chores as she has to do the same in future also’).

When asked if she wants to go to school and play in her free time as children her age do, She said, “ pata Nahi” (don’t know) and tears rolled down her cheeks. Is this not deprived childhood, a case of invisible child labour? Invisible because – Satto does not receive any remuneration for the labour that she puts in or that her labour is treated not as labour but as a learning process required for aptly performing her future roles.

This story bears a starling resemblance to the story of Cinderella and we hope that her life also takes a positive turn and that she is freed from the clutches of bondage, miseries and fear.

4.4(B2) Usha - on the way to begging
(Case of a child living with family, working outside family and not going to school)

Usha is a Hindu Valmiki girl and is 8 years of age. Her parents are no more and she lives with her elder brother and sister and grand parents in sector 25 Jhuggies. She is a beggar and is often seen begging in sector 14,15 and 17 markets.

Usha offers a pitiable sight as she roams about all alone bare footed with torn clothes. Her face and neck are always bruised. Her filthy appearance shows that she has not cleaned herself in days. A small cloth bag hangs around her neck in which she puts the money collected during the day, the bag – completing the need of her
attire and indicating the seriousness of her work. Her deplorable condition forces me to
give her a rupee, taking which, she says, “Didi ye to bahut kam hai. Kuch dava
dila do mujhe dard ho raha hai. Kuch khane ko dila do. Do din se bhokhi hoon.”
(Didi this is too less. Buy me some medicine, my wounds are really paining. Buy me
something to eat as I have not had any thing since two days.) It is not for the first
time that I have heard these words from her rather whenever I visit sector 15 market
in the evening I usually notice her standing outside the bakery and telling the same
old story to everyone. Also, from the time I remember I have always seen her head,
neck and face badly bruised.

My first encounter with her was when I had gone along with my family to
sector 15- market (Real Bakery). There I saw a badly injured girl (USHA) asking
everybody for food and money. On seeing us she came up to us and said, “Aye didi,
aye babuji, meri dawa kara do, kuch khane ko dila do”. (Sister, sir, get me some
medicines, something to eat.) Taking pity on her my father got her some medicines
and ointments which she could apply on her wounds. He also got her a packet of
milk which she eagerly took and ran away. Seeing this, I wondered if this
appearance is was ‘get-up’ and the wounds deliberately created to gather attention
and invoke pity, though one can never be really sure.

It has been some time and now Usha recognizes me and is quite comfortable
with me. So when I asked her the reason for her begging she said, “Bhaiya
maangne ko kaheta hai. Who bhi yahin kahin maang raha hoga. Wo roj mere saare
paise leleta hai. Agar paisha nahi kamaungi ya uske liye kuch khane ka nahin
jutungi to bahut marega. Phir kuch to ghar bhi dena parta hai. Meri badi behen
bhi maangati hai.” (My brother asks me to beg. He must also be begging here
somewhere. He takes my entire money every day. If I am not able to earn money or I
don’t take anything for him to eat then he will beat me a lot. Then I have to give
some money at home too. My elder sister also begs.) Usha along with her brother
and sister are the breadwinners for the family as their parents are no more and their
grand parents are too old to do anything.

Usha and her siblings leave for work at around 10:00 am and their first
destination is sector 17- market. This distance they cover on foot. On reaching the
market place they divide their area of operation. Usha begs around the parking place
while her sister and brother cover the areas near the fountain. Usha makes Rs. 40 to
Rs. 50 per day, which her brother takes away and leaves her with a rupee or so. When asked if she would like to go to school and study as education was important she said, “Main Liza Didi se thoda bahut padh leti hoon. Bas itna kaafi hai”. [I study a little from Liza, (and out of respect calls her Sister), and that is enough] On enquiring who this “Liza Didi” was, she told me that Liza was a girl who taught some deprived children from sector 17 market in the rose garden on alternate days at around 10:00 am. “Woh home naam likhna sikhati hai aur thoda thoda jama ghata bhi sikhaati hai. Isse jaada main padhana nahin chahad”. (She teaches us to write, to add and to subtract. I don’t want to study more than this.)

Seeing her clear disinterest in studies, I did not pursue with this topic further. I asked her if she knew that begging was not a nice thing to do, more over it was strictly prohibited. I said to her, “Tumhe police pakad kar le jaayegi”. (The police will take you away.) To this she replied, “Pata hai, par jab koi police wala aata hai to main bhaag jaati hoon didi. Uske jane ke baad phir wapas kaam par lag jati hoon. Haan kabhi kabhi woh peet dete hain per itna to chalta hai.” (I know, but when any policeman comes I run away. When he goes away then again I start my work. Yes Sometimes they beat me but that is alright.)

While we were taking two policemen from the beat box came and on seeing her slapped her tightly telling her to leave the market area immediately. When I asked them the reason for this behavior, they told me that such children had become a nuisance in the market. They always troubled the people visiting the sector 17 market by begging and running after them till they gave them something (food or money). Moreover, after the recent amendments in the child labour act 1986, they were instructed to be further strict with them.

Seeing Usha’s state my heart went out to her. To me her future seemed as bleak as her present was and past must have been. I wondered if one could really do anything for helping these children and in the process bringing a real change in their circumstances and attitudes.

4.5 (B2) Seema- From school absenteeism to child labour
(Case of a child living with family, working outside family and not going to school)

Seema today is a 14-year-old young girl who lives in Sector 25 Janta Colony but I have known her from the time when she was 5 and sometimes used to accompany her mother (Rajesh) to work. Her mother used to clean our house then.
At that time Seema’s father was working as a sweeper and used to drink a lot. Under the influence of alcohol he would daily beat Seema’s mother and give her no money from his earnings rather take away whatever she earned. When her elder son (Seema’s Brother) would come to her rescue, who was then just 8 years, even he was not spared. Seeing this Seema and her younger brother would get very disturbed.

As it is life, was not smooth for Seema’s younger brother, as he was handicapped. His right leg was in a bad shape due to polio and he was unable to move it. Clearly, Seema’s family was going through a very bad patch. Seema’s mother wanted to send her children to school but she did not have the money to pay their fee which was already quite subsidized, just Rs. 10 per child. Also she did not have their birth certificates without which the school was not going to admit them. Seeing this sorry state of affairs my father got Seema and her elder brother admitted to sector 25 Government school. While the son was regular with the classes, Seema started missing out on them. She would find one excuse or the other for not going to school and gradually because of lack of attendance her name was struck off from the school rolls. God only knows what was going on in her mind then. Once or twice Seema’s mother tried to convince her to join school but she would just not listen to her. One could clearly see the early sparks of defiance in her behavior. She would neither help her mother with the household work, nor go to school, but only while away her time with friends.

Today Seema’s father is no more. He passed away a year back due to excess consumption of alcohol. Seema’s elder brother who is now 17 years old is working as a sweeper, having been employed on compassionate grounds in his father’s office. Seema’s mother still cleans, washes clothes, utensils in other people’s houses to earn her living. She has shed a lot of weight and has grown very weak. She looks tired from both, work and life. Age has also taken its toll on her. She is sick of her circumstances, more so of her daughter Seema who has become a source of tension for her.

Nothing has changed with Seema over these 8 years and with time she has become even more defiant. She does what pleases her and does not listen to anybody. Though she too has started working in people’s houses - doing their washing and cleaning but it is because she needs money to satisfy her personal
needs, adding to the family kitty has never crossed her mind. Seema takes immense care of her appearance these days. Big danglers hanging from her ears, her Kajoled eyes and painted lips, her high heeled shoes and clothes cut in the latest style make her look much older than her age. She is also seeing a boy from her colony whom she intends to marry a year or two later. The boy who is himself not more than 17 is often seen accompanying her to the houses where she works. He keeps on waiting for her outside the houses where she works and when she is free she joins him only to return late to her own house. This is a major source of worry for her mother. Expressing her fears she says, "Main to subhe se kaam per nikal aati hoon aur ye ghar pe akeli hoi hai. Bhagwan jane tab ye kis se milti hai, kya karte hai. Ek to ye pahe se hi kam na thi aur bachi kuch kisai ne poori kar di. Sara din sheeshe ke samene khadi reve hai. Hamari cloni ka mahaul bhi theek na hai, har tareeke ke awaara ladke nasha karke ghoomete dikhte hain. Pata nahi is ladki ka kya hovega?" (I go out to work early in the morning and she is left all alone at home. God knows whom she meets and what she does in that time. She herself was no less, in addition the exposure from Cinema has spoiled her further. The entire day she keeps on standing in front of the mirror. Moreover the atmosphere of the colony is also not alright. One can see Drug addicts roaming here and there. What will this girl do?)

Rajesh keeps anxious and gloomy. Seema does not pay any attention to what her mother has to say and always ends up fighting with her. She is often heard saying to her close friend Soma, "Meri ma ka to dimaag kharab ho gaya hai, parshaaan kar mara hai. Mera to ghar jane ka man hi nahi karta". (My mother has gone mad. She troubles me like anything. I don't feel like going home.) Seema's mother does not know what to do about her daughter. Seema has gone beyond her control. She fears for her future. "Is ladki ne to mera jeena haram kar diya hai. Man to karta hai ki ise aaj he ghar se bahar nikal doon. Baap ke sar pe na hone ka najayaz faida uta rahai hai. Agar is ke bhai ko pata chal gaya to is ka or us lakde dono ka khoon kar devega." (This girl has made my life miserable. I feel like shunting her out of the house today. She is taking undue advantage of the fact that her father is no more. If her brother comes to know about her and her boyfriend he will kill both of them.)
All this has no impact on Seema. She is even more adamant to have her way. Poor Rajesh! Why was Seema not understanding her mother’s circumstances? How could she forget the struggle that her mother had gone through to just bring her children up. What had gone wrong? – Were some of the questions that kept on bothering me for quite some time and all that I could think of was that being a parent was not easy and the difficulties get compounded if one is single and poor on top of it.

4.6(B2) Veeramma – A ragpicker’s story

(Case of a child staying with family, working outside family and not in going to school)

Veeramma is a 10 year old, semi clad, Tamil girl who lives with her family in the Madrasi colony in sector 25, Chandigarh. Her family is from Tamil Naidu but now has been settled in Chandigarh for the past 15 years. Veeramma’s father works as a casual labourer, hopping between road construction and rickshaw pulling and her mother is a rag picker. Her two elder sisters clean utensils in people’s houses. Veeramma too tries to contribute to the family income by picking up rags. She leaves for work around 11 in the morning after a heavy breakfast, stopping only at the various dumping sites. Veeramma like her mother carries a big jute bag in which she collects the items selected from the dumps, along with this she also carries a short stick at the end of which is tied a magnet- and improvised device for metal detection. From Plastic bottles and cans to worn out boxes and old newspapers, from old tattered clothes and broken toys to badly damaged appliances and wires, your name it and she has it all in her bag. From the garbage she even picks up things which are edible and are in the right state for her to consume. But this is not an easy job as many times in this process she has been cut or bruised from broken pieces of glass and other sharp objects which she was unable to identify in the dumps. Once the cut in her foot was so deep, that it had taken her 15 days or so to get back to work. Moreover due to the filthy environment in which such children work, many of them develop respiratory and skin problems. Veeramma too has developed a skin allergy and is often seen itching.

By the time Veeramma is through with her work for the day it is 4 in the evening. Her mother has already left. Feeling hungry she too rushes home with other fellow rag pickers. On reaching home she just has something to eat, then she along
with her mother empty out the days hunt and start sorting by placing different items according to their materials and rates in different heaps and piles. After this is done both of them leave for the nearest Kabadi only to return home after selling their stuff. Though, Veerammama’s mother makes Rs. 40-50 a day, Veeramma earns Rs. 15-20 for her day of hard work. She gives this entire sum to her mother only keeping with her Rs. 2/- from which she buys churan from the local shop while her mother purchases the ration required for the evening meals.

Veeramma is an illiterate and speaks ‘Hindi’ in bits and pieces and is only fluent in her mother tongue ‘Tamil’. Because of this reason she has not been able to study in the School here. “Padhana chata par hindi nahi ata” (I want to study but I do not know Hindi.) She also dislikes the work which she is doing and wants to switch over to any other clean work. When asked about her views on children working at such a young age and the recent law passed against this malady she said shaking her head, “Accha hai baccha ko padhna”, then shaking her belly she adds, “per pehele KANA mangta”. (it is good for children to study but first food is required.)

I knew that was true, I also knew that these rag pickers were quite a vulnerable lot. Since they had to spend a lot of there time away from home alone in all types of filthy and dirty place, they could easily become victims of sexual abuse. This was more so in the case of female children. Moreover the atmosphere of their colonies was quite bad since a lot of them just lived in tents and had no proper houses, no privacy was there. With just one room to live in, the children were properly seeing things which they were not supposed to see at such a tender age, all this making them grow faster and maturing them way beyond their true years. When I inquired about this from Veeramma, She looked at me, simply giggled and ran away.

4.7 (C1) Meena – The Story of a domestic servant
(Case of a child staying away from home with employer)

Meena is a 13-year-old Hindu sansi girl. She is at present working as a full time domestic servant in one of the houses in sector 15A Chandigarh. Though she stays in the house in which she is working as a domestic help, her family stays in kumhar colony Sector 25. She, along with her family, actually belong to Rajasthan
but now it has been 10 years since they have been residing in Chandigarh—a place which has become a home to so many migrants.

Meena’s family does not present a very happy scenario. Her father ran away with another lady leaving his wife, (Meena’s mother), all alone. Now he has been missing since 6 years. At that time Meena was 7 years old and her younger brother was about 5 years. No wonder both of them do not remember much of their father, a subject, which they rarely discuss even today, so as not to cause their mother any further misery. After her husband ran away Meena’s mother was left all alone to fend for her two children. To improve the life of her children and to provide them emotional and financial support she married her husband’s younger brother. Today she has a two-year-old son from him, her health does not keep very fine and she is always complaining of pains in her back and neck and is hardly able to move about. She is also not financially very sound. All these circumstances forced her two children to begin work at a tender age. Meena started working at the age of 10 as a full time domestic help and her younger brother sought employment in PGI Canteen as a Canteen boy when he was around 8 years of age.

At present Meena gets Rs 800/- per month for her work which includes cooking, washing clothes and cleaning utensils. Out of this sum she keeps Rs50 with herself and sends the rest home. Her employer is very hard on her and does not leave an opportunity to scold her. She does not even have a proper room to herself in the house and sleeps in a small room which was earlier used as a store in the house. Thankfully she has a bathroom and a toilet to herself, so what if it is in a very bad shape, at least that allows her some privacy.

Meena keeps busy the entire day. Her day starts with the sound of an alarm which she puts to wake herself as she is supposed to give bed tea to her employers at around seven in the morning. Then start the breakfast preparations followed by lunch. She hardly has time to take her breakfast and lunch properly, which comprises mostly of the left over food. Then it is time for clearing the kitchen and washing the clothes. By the time it is 5 o’clock in the evening, she is badly exhausted. After preparing the evening tea for everyone she allows herself the luxury of an hour’s rest. She has hardly closed her eyes and it is time again to prepare dinner. “Mujhe pata hi nahi lagta din kab shuru hota hai aur kab khatam”. (I don’t come to know when the day starts and when it ends.) Says she. As if this is
not enough, her employer does not allow her to go and visit her family for a day or two even on festivals. She can just meet them for 3 to 4 hours and has to come back the very same day, whatever be the occasion. Seeing this child in such a bad shape I was reminded of a bonded labourer – labour at its worst.

When I asked her mother about this and questioned her regarding Meena’s education she said, “Kya karun Padhai to tab karvaon jab pehle baaki jarooraten poori hon. Ye bibi mere bache se itna kaam leti hai, kya mujhe achha lagta hai? Kya main ise apni ladki bech di hai.” Saying this she started crying. “Mera bas chale to main aaj apna bachha wapis le aaon. Bhagwan kisi ko maa baap net banaye, banaye to phir bachhon ko paalene ki haisiat bhi de.” (What to do? I can make her study only when first the other requirements are met. This lady mistreats my daughter so much, do you think I like it? Or have I sold her my daughter? If it was up to me I would have got back my child today. God should not make anybody a parent and if He does than He should give them the resources to bring their children up.)

All this made me very sad and I wondered why life was so cruel to some and a bed of roses for the others.

4.8(C1) Service – ‘At your service’
(Case of a child staying away from home, with employer)

‘Service’ as he is called by his employer, is a 10-year-old Hindu boy from Kanpur, U.P and as the name implies serves tea in sector 17 market to fill his belly. His real name is Raju but not many know about this. His thin frame and stained teeth tell the story of his being under nourished and a frequent consumer of guthka. His father is no more and his family back home comprises of his mother who runs the house by farming corn and wheat and a brother who is just 4 years old and a sister who is now married. Chandigarh has been his hometown now for 6 months and he loves the city.

Here he lives in the premises of the shop where he serves tea and his employer is his sole relative. When asked what brought him here he keeps quiet for some time then blurts out, “Gaon mein hamare bahut dushman hain. Asliyat main yeh hamare babuji ke dushman hain. Hamare babuji ab nahin hain par yeh dushmani khatam nahin hui. Ab yeh meri zindagi ke peeche hain. Mere akela beta hone ki vajah se meri maa mere liye bahut darati hai, isliye usne mujhe yahan mere
bahanoye ke sath bheja hai. Mera maalik hamara door ka rishtedaar hai. Main yahan surakshit mahsoos karta hoon." (We have a lot of enemies in the village. Actually these are my father’s enemies. He is no more, the enmity has not ended. Now they are after my life. I being the only son, my mother fears a lot for me so she sent me here with my brother-in-law. This shop owner is our distant relative. I feel safe here.)

Service has received no formal education and earns Rs 700/- per month. In addition to this his employer gives him Rs 30 per day that covers his three meals. Out of the money earned Service keeps with him Rs 200/- and sends the rest back home. Life is hard for this young lad as his day starts at 9:00 am with a voice “Ae service jara 2 cup chai dena”. (Service give us 2 cups of tea) and this continues till 9 in the evening. This exhausts him and in addition to this he has to listen to verbal abuse from many whom he is not able to serve properly. When inquired about the recent law banning child labour in informal sector and his reaction to it, he said, “Kaunsa kanoon? Main aise kisi kanoon ke bare main nahin jaanta. Main sirf yeh jaanta hoon ki koi bachha apni marzi se kaam nahin karta, haluat hamein kaam karne par majboor kar dete hain. Sirf bachhon ka kaam bandh karne se kuch madad nahin hogi. Hamare halaat sudbaar do, isse hamari madad hogi. Aap kya sochti hain bibiji?”. (What law? I don’t know of any such law. All I know is that no child works because he or she wants to work. It is the circumstances, which force us to work. Only banning child labour will not help. Improve our circumstances that will help us. What do you think bibiji?) - I had no answer to his question.

4.9 (C2) Dildaar - Away to freedom
(Case of a child staying away from home, on streets)

Dildaar is a 13-year-old Mohammedan boy who serves tea at a tea stall in Sector 17. He hails from Bahari zila situated on the India Nepal border. His entire family (father, mother and three younger brothers) is in the village and earns its livelihood by farming corn and wheat on its 01-bigha land. Dildar is married. His wife also hails from the same village but is still in her paternal house as her ‘gauna’ (going from maternal house to the husbands house) is yet to take place. Dildaar is married. His wife also hails from the same village but is still in her paternal house as her ‘gauna’ (going from maternal house to the husbands house) is yet to take place. Dildaar has come to Chandigarh with the consent of his parents, (as have many other boys from his village) to earn a good living, make a place for himself in the outside world and to support his family back home. Dildaar is illiterate (has received no formal
education). He starts working at around 9:00 am and continues to do so till 9 pm only to stop for a short lunch break. Dildar earns Rs 30-35 daily out of which he spends Rs. 10-20 on food and deposits the rest thinking that one must have some money that one might require in the hour of adversity. He is a skinny fellow with white patches on his body showing signs of malnutrition and improper hygiene. He has nobody in Chandigarh, a place which has been his home now for the past 3 months. He is a 'street child'. These days after finishing his work he goes to "Vineet-17", a shelter home for street children in sector 17. There, by paying Rs 1 daily he gets a meal and a place to sleep at night. Life is tough and cruel for this young boy. When asked about this he says “ Kamainge nahain to khciyinge kahan se?.” (If we don’t earn then from where will we eat?)

When asked about the recent law banning child labour in the informal sector and his reactions on it, Dildar said, “Hamari madad karna chahate hain to humko koi aur kaam dila dein. kuch aur paise kamaane ka tarika bata dein. Agar yeh sab nahi hai to phir is law ka koi phayada nahi hai. Agar main aaj kaam karna bandh kar doon to khaaonga kahanse? Main Yahan akela hoon, mera kaise chalega? Kya main bheek maangoan? Mera maalik ik achha aadmi hai. Jab woh police ko aata dekhta hai to mujhe peeche ke darwaje se jane ko bol deta hai aur jab who chale jaate hain to phir mujhe aane ka ishaara kar deta hai. Woh meri problem samajhta hai.” (Banning Child labour won’t help. We work because we need to earn a living. I have to support myself and my family. What will education give me? I am not happy with this law.)
4.10(C3) Bahadur – The Cook
(Case of a child staying away from home, independently)

Bahadur is a Hindu Nepali boy who cooks Chinese food in one of the small food shops of Sector 15 rehri market. He is 14 years old. His family is in Nepal and he stays here independently in a room which he has taken on rent for Rs500/- a month, as have many other boys from his native place. His room does not offer him the luxury of television, fridge or an equipped kitchen but yes it has an attached bathroom and toilet and is a place where he rests and passes his free time and sleeps when he comes back from work, which is also quite late. He shares his accommodation with a boy who is a helper in a juice shop in Sector 15.

Bahadur misses his family a lot. His father is a tailor and usually spends a lot of time in his small tailoring shop. His mother is a housewife and his younger brother is just 6 years old. It is not easy for him to stay away from them all but he knows that in life one has to make compromises and priorities have to be decided.

It was the circumstances which forced Bahadur’s family to send him here. His father’s earnings alone were not sufficient enough to give them a decent living. It was getting difficult for them to make both ends meet. Some kind of financial support was required to put their lives back on track and Bahadur was their best bet. Moreover terrorism in Nepal was on rise and many schools including Bahadur’s were closed. His family thought it wise to send him to Chandigarh where other boys from their neighborhood were already working and doing well for themselves and their families.

Chandigarh has now been Bahadur’s home away from home for the past 3 years and he is well adjusted to the place culturally. Bahadur works for 10 to 12 hours a day starting from 8 in the morning and continuing till about 8 in the evening, stopping in between for a short lunch break and a smoke. He is good at his work and gets Rs1500/- a month and two free meals. Out of the money earned he sends Rs 800/- home and keeps with himself Rs 700/- from which he pays his room rent, buys toiletries, clothes, cigarettes etc.

It has now been two years since Bahadur has been smoking regularly and consumes 2 packets of cigarettes daily. He believes that cigarette smoking is a stress buster and relieves him of his mental burden. His view reminded me of the Movie song, “Har fikr ko dhuan main udaata chala gaya, main zindigi ka saath nibhata...
chala gaya" As if all this is not enough, Bahadur has to also take in a lot of scolding from his employer and customers whom he is not able to satisfy. Sometimes his employer even goes to the extent of beating him. But he takes it all in his stride and does not complain much. He is a staunch devotee of Lord ‘Vishnu’ and it is probably his faith in Him that keeps him going even in these adverse circumstances.

When asked about the recent law banning child labour he said “Accha kiya law bana diya. Par sirf law banaane se kya hoga. Yahan to koi check karne bhi nahiaaya ki kon kon bachha kaam karta hai. Aur maan lo ki koi check karne bhi aa gaya to koi kya kerega? Ham sab ko kaam se hata dega? Fir hamara kya hoga? Ghar paise kahan se bhejenge? Sarkaar ko bolo aur tarika nikale hamari madad ka.” (It is good that a law has been made. But what can be done by just making a law. Nobody has even come here to check who is working and even if somebody does come to check, what will he do? He will throw us out of our work? Then what will happen to us? How will we send money home? Ask the government to find some other way of helping us out.)

What he said made a lot of sense to me and I prayed to God to have Mercy on him and grant him a happy and a carefree life, which he could share and spend with his near and dear ones.

**Conclusion:**

These case studies provide us with a much closer look into the lives of working children – their reason for toiling, their abysmal working conditions, their life styles, their attitude towards this malady and their reactions and views on the recent ban on child labour in the residences and hospitality sector.

As far as the recent ban is concerned, a majority of these children share similar views. Nobody has really welcomed the ban, rather everybody is skeptical about it. Out of these ten, many believe that just ‘putting’ a ban on child labour would not be of much help in the eradication of this problem. What is required is some initiative on the government’s part to tackle certain basic problems like poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. They also believe that in addition to this the Government should provide them with some alternative source of income / work, otherwise after sometime they will again go back to their old work or some other work to support themselves and their families.
Children like Dildaar, Seema, Pooja and Service who want to work (either for gaining independence and fulfilling personal needs or for supporting their families feel that the government should not force its decision on others and it should be left to the child to judge and decided whether he or she wants to work or not. In case he/she does want to work he/she should be given the freedom to do so, in case he/she does not, nobody should force him/her in this matter.