Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Child labour is one of the burning issues in a developing country like India. The poor and destitute children are deprived of better living. There is a close relationship between human deprivation and the practice of child labour. Human deprivations such as abject poverty, illiteracy, traditional approach like caste system are the root causes of child labour in India. Many scholars defined child labour in many ways. For Marx, child labour was the result of industrial revolution. Adam Smith says that child labour motivates the fertility decision in labour shortage societies. For Malthus, child labour is prevalent in those families which are unable to meet their basic needs (Edmonds 2006). Child labour refers to “engagement of children, less than 14 years of age, in the employment in shop, commercial establishment, workshop, farm, residential hotel, restaurant, eating house, theatre or other place of public amusement or entertainment”, according to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986. Despite several proactive legislations and policies in India, and child labour related provisions in various other labour laws, the decline in the magnitude of child labour has been less progressive than the expected and as a result, the problem of child labour persists as a challenge to the country (Satpathy 2009). One of the principal features of children doing wage labour is the piece-wage method of wage payment which puts enormous pressure to work at a feverish pace to increase their earnings which reduces their earning capacity in future and even incapacitates them. Children are required to work for longer hours, on the hand, on the other, they are generally paid less for the same work as compared to their adult counterparts (Singh and Mohanty 1993). So, it can be easily said that the prevalence of child labour is one of the greatest threats in achieving the goal of human development in India. But every child, being precious resources of the country, has the right to receive the best that the society can offer. Children need to grow in an environment that enables them to lead a life of freedom and dignity. Nothing could be better or more potent tool to provide an opportunity to grow into a worthy citizen than education (Murthy 2007). Education is the weapon through which the problem of child labour can be solved effectively. The present chapter deals with the problem, research strategy, research design and methodology of the study.

I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Child Labour is a global problem that has attracted International agencies, activists and NGOs worldwide. It is more common in the developing and the
underdeveloped countries. By and large, a problem of poor and destitute families where either parents cannot provide education to their children, or they have to depend on the earnings of their children. In India Child Labour contributes to 20% of the Gross National Product (GNP) which actually subsidises higher education for privileged children. The State of the World’s Children Report 1997 points out three key factors responsible for child labour; namely, (i) the exploitation of poverty, (ii) the absence of education and (iii) the restriction of tradition (http://www.unicef.org/sowc97). In India, high household expenditure and low parental education are the two main factors responsible for the increasing trend of child labour. Social factors are also one of the important reasons for working of children at tender age. Since in the developing countries, there is no system of family allowances as in USA, UK, France, Switzerland etc, in cases of orphan hood and death of wage-earning parent (s) the children do not have other alternative but to work for meeting their basic needs. This reveals the economic necessity of working children as they support the family unit and supplement the family income. This also reveals disastrous social consequences of the employment of children. At the macro level, the working children may decrease or reduce the life expectancy and condemn the country’s young to mean and wretched existence below the subsistence level. The worst among them are the girl workers as their problems have never been separately identified. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 prohibits the engagement of children, less than 14 years of age, in the employment in shop, commercial establishment, workshop, farm, residential hotel, restaurant, eating house, theatre or other place of public amusement or entertainment. The law was further amended on the 10th October 2006 to ban children under 14 years from working as domestic servants or on food stalls. It also prevents children from working in tea shops, restaurants, shops, hotels, resorts and other recreational centres. People found breaking the law may face two years in prison. Children in our country are not engaged in any form of work at the cost of their right to education. The Technical Advisory Committee on Child Labour in the Labour Ministry, Government of India, regularly surveys the risk factors involved in any industry where children are vulnerable to physical, mental and even sexual abuse. Anyone found violating the ban would be penalised under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act of 1986. Punishment could range from a jail term of three months to two years and/or a fine of Rs. 10,000/- to Rs. 20,000/-, but child rights activists are sceptical about the effectiveness of the ban. They point out that although India bans the use of young workers in hazardous industries, thousands of children continue to work in fire cracker and matchstick factories or are involved in carpet weaving, embroidery or stitching footballs. They say that the laws have remained ineffective in curbing child labour as
crippling poverty forces many of the parents to send their children, sometimes, as young as five or six to work in other people’s homes or in factories (Pandey 2006).

It is difficult to cite a current figure for the children engaged in child labour as Government has been reluctant to collect and analyse current and relevant data for the incidence of child labour. The 1981 Indian census reported 13.6 million child labourers in India (Weiner 1991: 20) and on the basis of these data Indian Government places the current number of child labourers between 17 and 20 millions (Human Rights Watch 1996: 122) which seems highly unlikely as the official National Sample Survey of 1983 reported 17.4 million child labourers, while a study sponsored by the Labour Ministry concluded that the child labour force was 44 millions (Weiner 1991: 20-21). UNICEF shows figures of child labour ranging from 75 to 90 million child labourers under the age of 14 years (Human Rights Watch 1996: 122). A universal difficulty in obtaining accurate data may be that individuals fail to report child labour participation during surveys for the fear of persecution. Although the figure for the number of child labourers is varying, they are all significantly high when considering that the child economic activity rate in India for 1980-1991 was 13.5% for males and 10.3% for females (International Labour Organisation 1995: 113). Comparatively, other developing countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia (where data are available) have lower activity rates – 5.3% for males and 4.6% for females in Sri Lanka, 8.8% for males and 6.5% for females in Malaysia (International Labour Organisation 1995: 113). These data seem to be misleading because the definition of child labour is different in the two censuses (unpaid workers are not included in the 1971 census). Thus, a comparison cannot be completely valid. The data show that, in a span of twenty years (1961-1981), the proportion of children who are working has not changed significantly, but since comparisons with these data are not valid this conclusion is questionable. Although the figures for child labour in India are not accurate, yet, they point to the stark reality of child labour (Deb 2006). Child labour is found both in rural and urban sectors of all the geographical regions. It is prominently demonstrated in relatively backward regions, and in the urban centres it does reflect market based commercial exploitation. North East, one of the backward regions of India, has witnessed the growth of a number of urban centres after Independence and these centres openly employ child labour in various commercial activities. A town like Silchar, a trade centre, demonstrates the employment of a huge child labour in transport vehicles, hotels and stalls, motor workshops and domestic sector. This striking feature of the growing urban centre is being taken up for investigation, especially in the context of Silchar town.
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The studies conducted on child labour are reviewed under the following classes:

(i) **Studies concerning with the magnitude of child labour**

The magnitude of child labour is very vast in India. The work participation of the children has been analysed by their age, sex, residence, nature of participations in terms of main and marginal workers. The obnoxious practice of child labour could be largely traced to the socio-economic compulsions of the parents and guardians who opt for their children to be employed as child labour rather than sending them to school and also state that educational levels are gradually low and illiteracy persists predominantly in the child labour. In the case of incidence of child labour, a number of demographic, educational and economic factors are highly correlated. According to the Labour Force Survey of NSSO (61st round) for the year 2004-05, there are 3.33 percent of total numbers of children who are in the labour force amounting to approximately 9 million children. Out of this, about 7.68 million children are workers and do not attend schools and rest 1.37 million are both workers and attend schools. There is a considerable fall in child work force among boys rather than girls. Much of India’s child labourers are concentrated in agriculture and allied activities. Trade, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing unit account for a significant share of child workers. The percentage of child labour is found much higher in rural areas than urban areas. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal appear to account for a large share of total child labourers. In South Asian context, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan are the countries where the participation of children in the workforce are observed to be higher (Das and Das 2006; Prasad and Yogi 1993; Lieten, Srivastava and Thorat 2004; Satpathy 2009; Rao 1993; Rustagi 2009; Lakshmansamy 1993).

(ii) **Studies dealing with the structural conditions of child labour**

Child labour problem is positively correlated with the level of poverty. Among the causes of child labour problem, poverty ranks first. From the point of view of employer, children provide cheap and convenient as well as uncomplaining labour force. These are factors which pull poor and needy children into the workforce. The push factors behind recruiting child labour are the economic instability, unemployment problem, uncertainty in labour sector and low level of life styles. There is a strong association of illiteracy with child work participation. Most of the children at work are illiterate since they are initiated to the work quite early in life. Migration is another major cause of child labour problem in India. The employers, although equally guilty, cannot be
blamed solely because the parents of the children sent to work also bear equal responsibility. Most of the parents of child workers are simply unaware of the welfare measures that are being implemented for benefit of their children. Secondly, many of the parents do not consider anything wrong in making their children work from an early age. They are more concerned about the children’s ability to be able to earn wages by becoming skilled, rather than about their academic education (Ray 2003; Mathur and Bhargava 2006; Giriraj 2000; Srikantan 1991; Sharma, Kumar and Padmado 1993; Singh 1993; Sharma 2006; Pandey 2006; Farooqui 1993; Singh 2007; Narayana 1993; Verma and Verma 1993; Sinha 1993; Shukla and Shukla 1993; Singh 2000; Murthy 1993; Ramana 1993; Vemuri and Sahastry 1993; Rosenweiz and Evenson 1977; Rosenweiz 1981; Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1985; Barakat-E-Khuda 1991; Jodha and Singh 1991; Singh and Nigam 1994; Subramanian 1993; Prasad 1993; Singh and Singh 1993; Lieten 2006; Murthy 2007; Dyson 1991; Vlassoff 1991; Shah 1996).

(iii) Studies highlighting the nature of child labour

Child labourers are forced to pick up the jobs mostly in unorganised sectors wherein they face problems like long hours of work, work in hazardous employment, low wages, work in unhealthy environment etc. Child workers constitute a critical factor in determining the productivity and profitability due to the nature of work in both organised and unorganised sectors. The practice of child labour is rampant mostly in the unregulated industries or workshops and other unorganised sector’s works, rickshaw pulling, motor workshops work, tea stall works. The child labourers are subjected to long hours of work, have to bear the brunt of the customers, passengers, employers. They have to work on pitance and for repaying old debts taken by parents. Child labour who are found in hazardous industry like tin, glass, bangle, fireworks, stone-work, have to suffer badly on account of excessive heat, dust, unhealthy and cramped working environment and affected with many deadly diseases. Most of the child labour remains unreported and unnoticed to policymakers (Tripathy 1989; Burra 1997; Patil 1988; Sharma, Sharma and Raj 2004; Singh and Singh 2009; Mishra and Mishra 1993; Kanakaiah, Reddy Narayana 1993; Mohsin 1993; Tiwari 1997; Bhatti 1996; Bhangoo 1990; Mustafa and Sharma 1996; Vasudeva 1989; Premi 1987; Mishra and Diwakar 1996; Singh 2008).

(iv) Studies focusing on the impact of child labour and the action for its elimination

The practice of child labour harms the physical and intellectual growth of child. The high incidence of child labour has repercussions on preschool education. Child labour should be regarded as the burden to the economy of a country. The relationship between education and work participation of children is similar. These differentials tend to confirm the competing demands made on
children by work participation and schooling on both, boys and girls, especially in the poorer families. Government should provide better employment opportunity for the adults, the family of child labour has to be benefited by the development programmes, media like television and newspapers should take strong step against child labour problem. The person who disobeys the law prohibiting child labour should be severely punished. There are various acts which prohibit the recruitment of child labour in India like Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, the Children (Pledging of Labour) Act (Govt. of India, 1933), the Employment of Children Act (Govt. of India, 1938), the Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961 and many more. By implementing action plans and obeying the Prohibition Act, a society may be freed from the evil of child labour (Singh and Mahanty 1993; Jameel and Kazmi 2002; Agarwal 2006; Tiwari 2006; Jain 2006; Srikantan 1978; Sarif 1991; Kumar 1993; Mandal 1990; Kumar 2002; Verma 1993; Pichholiya and Tripathi 1993; Chatterji 1996; Kumar 2005; Chander 2004).

The studies reviewed above reveal that they have mainly focused on the magnitude, structural conditions, nature and impacts of child labour. However, a few of them take note of remedial measures of child labour. None of them make a probe into the attitudes of the child labourers and their parents and employers as it is difficult to deal with the employers while studying child labour. Including these various aspects of child labour the present holistic study was undertaken in Silchar. A question is posed: What patterns of child labour are perceived in the urban areas of North-East India, especially in Silchar town in Assam?

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study had the following objectives to enquire to:

(i) To study the social background of the child labour
(ii) To know the child labour mechanism (recruitment, wage structure and working conditions)
(iii) To examine the attitudes of the children and their parents and employers towards child labour
(iv) To suggest measures for elimination of child labour

IV. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This is a diagnostic study which undertakes systematic analysis of various interrelated aspects of child labour found in motor workshops, transport services, hotels and stalls and domestic sector. It looks into the genesis, working, work conditions and work impact on the life of child labourers. It is based on the primary data collected from various stakeholders of child labour; viz; the child labour itself, parents and employers.
(i) Theoretical Perspectives

Before coming to the data and methodology of the study, a brief discussion is taken up on theoretical perspectives on child labour. On child labour there have emerged the following two prominent perspectives:

(i) Traditional approach to child labour and
(ii) Rights based approach to development

(a) Traditional Approach

Child labour is perceived to be an economic necessity of poor households, and the exploitative aspect in children’s work is associated with the profit-maximizing motive of commercial enterprises wherein children are made to work for long hours; they are paid low wages and denied opportunities for education. This perspective on child labour is also endorsed by organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO). As the ILO states that it is “not concerned with children helping in family farms or doing household chores” and defines child labour to “…… include children leading to adult lives, working long hours for low wages under conditions damaging to their health and physical and mental development, sometimes separated from their families, frequently deprived of meaningful educational and training opportunities that could open up to them a better future” (ILO 1983). The World Bank, on a similar vein, argues that child work that does not involve an exploitative relationship should be distinguished from child labour. It further argues that, in some instances, work done by children within the family may even contribute to the development of the child. “Not all child labour is harmful. Many working children are within a stable and nurturing environment with their parents or under protection of a guardian can benefit in terms of socialisation and from informal education and training” (World Bank 1998).

Thus, the traditional approach distinguishes between harmful and beneficial child labour. It is concerned with harmful child labour, detrimental to health and developmental to health and development of children.

(b) Rights-based Approach

The other definition of child labour is put forward by the groups critical of the conventional definition and they argue that the issue of child labour is not merely a question of whether work done by a child is exploitative and remunerative or not. According to them, all forms of work are bad for children, and any form of distinction between one form of work or other done by children is completely arbitrary. It is particularly so as there is nothing to prevent the child from transiting from one category to another. For instance, it needs to be
noted that in recent years much of the paid work that used to be outside the home has now been transferred to home-based work in the last few decades and many activities like carpet weaving, match stick making and glass works which used to be done in factories and under sheds are now done by children within homes. Thus, the distinction between the works done by children within home and those done outside the home, now, becomes blurred.

Further, the concept of segregating work done by a child into exploitative “labour” and non-exploitative “work” suffers from basic flaws and raises more issues that it resolves. First, under what circumstances can work be considered exploitative, especially since it is working conditions and not the work itself that determines the levels of exploitation? For instance, there may be situations where a child is working in less exploitative conditions in a carpet loom, that is, a family-owned farm. Hence, there is no simple method by which activities done by children can be classified as either “work” or as “labour”. Second, activities done by children can be classified into more than two categories, depending upon the perceived levels of exploitation. Thus, in reality, every working child is a child labour, irrespective of the exploitation.

Pointing to the close links between child labour and education, the proponents of this viewpoint further argue that all children who are out of school should be considered as child labourers. An out-of-school child is inevitably drawn into supplementing family labour, either on a full time basis, to help in the family occupation or manage family assets or simply engage in different ‘adult realising’ activities. Hence, any out-of-school child is a potential child worker. Votaries of this argument point out that restricting the concept of child labour to wage employment is particularly detrimental to the interests of girl child. First, it takes little or no cognizance of work done by the girl child (for it is normally the girl children who work at home, assisting their mothers with household tasks such as cooking, washing and cleaning and looking after younger siblings) and, hence, her contribution to the economy. More importantly, such a narrow interpretation of the concept will result in fewer efforts by all concerned to get girls out-of-work and into school. Thus, it is imperative to treat all working children (boys and girls) as out-of-school children and labourers.

This definition of child labour which equates all children not going to school with child labourers emanates from right-based approach towards development which considers being out of school as a denial of child’s right to education. “The rights-based approach when applied to the problem of out-of-school children dictates an inclusion of all children system, irrespective of whether they work in agriculture, in industry or at home” (UNDP 2001) (Sharma 2006 : 3-6).
Of the two perspectives on child labour, the traditional perspective has been used in the present study. It is appropriate for the developing societies as children in such societies like India are engaged in work everywhere - at home, at farm or outside. Therefore, child labour is clearly demonstrated as commercial and exploitative only in market or outside situation.

(ii) Sources and Types of Data

The study is based on empirical/primary data which have been collected from the respondents of the following three different categories:

(i) Working children  
(ii) Parents  
(iii) Employers

The respondents of these three categories were each drawn from the following four sectors of child labour:

(i) Motor workshops  
(ii) Transport services  
(iii) Hotels and stalls  
(iv) Domestic sector

(iii) Universe and Units

Silchar town is the universe and the child labourers, their parents and employers are the units of the study. These three types of unit have been used to collect and analyse the data in the urban context of Silchar town.

(iv) Sampling of Units

The main sample consists of 536 respondents who were drawn from the child labourers and their parents and employers. Hence, it comprises three sub-samples, one each, from the three categories of the units.

A sub-sample of 200 working children, 50 each, was drawn from the four areas of work; namely, transport, motor workshops, hotels and stalls, and domestic sectors by applying accidental sampling method. These children were selected by using accidental sampling method as total number of child labourers in these work areas is not known and figures are not available.

Besides, 200 parents and 136 employers of those children were also selected as respondents. Of the selected employers, 22 were from transport sector, 50 were from domestic sectors; 44 were from hotels and stalls and 20 were from motor workshops. In the three sectors; namely, transport sector, hotels
and stalls and motor workshops the numbers of the employer-respondents were each less than the numbers of the child labourers because in these sectors of employment some of the employers had employed more than one child labourer in their establishments.

(v) Tools for Data Collection

The field data were collected from the respondents during the period from 01.01.2011 to 04.03.2012. To collect the data from the three categories of the respondents there were constructed the following three interview schedules:

(a) Interview schedule for child labourers

(b) Interview schedule for parents of the child labourers

(c) Interview schedule for employers of the child labourers

These schedules contained both closed and open end questions and these were administered to respective category of the respondents. The open end questions were used to investigate the views of the respondents and closed questions were used to collect the data related to all other aspects of the study and the respondents.

For analysis of data various multivariate tables have been prepared for understanding the condition of child labourers and the attitudes of child labourers, their parents and their employers towards child labour.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study signifies the dynamics of the increasing problem of child labour which has multi-faceted social implications. The prevalence of child labour is one of the challenges to the realisation of the goal of human development. Putting children to work at tender age deprives them of the opportunities of elementary education and training. Moreover, as children are innocent and unorganised, they are subjected to long working hours and occupational hazards, which adversely affect and retard their mental and physical development. It makes a problem of humanity in the world.

VI. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study comprises eight chapters. Chapter 1 titled Introduction presents the research problem, research strategy, research design and methodology. Chapter 2 titled Child Labour in India analyses, nature, magnitude, conditions and impact of child labour in India. Chapter 3 on Field of the Study introduces the Silchar town in historical, regional, demographic and developmental perspectives. Chapter 4 titled the Child Labour in Transport Sector focuses on
the conditions of the child labourers in transportation. In the Chapter 5 on the Domestic Child Labour, conditions of the domestic child labourers have been discussed. Chapter 6 titled the Child Labour in Hotels and Stalls reveals conditions of child labour in hotels and stalls. Chapter 7 titled the Child Labour in Motor Workshops deals with conditions of child labour in motor workshops. Lastly, Chapter 8 on Summary, Findings and Conclusion concludes the study along with discussion of findings.