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Demand and Supply Side Factors of Child Labour in India

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ABSTRACT

The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 completely prohibits child labour in hotels, dhabas, restaurants, motels, tea shops, resorts, spas or other recreational centers all over India with effect from October 10, 2006. Despite of the above provision, child labour is continuing in organized as well as unorganized sector in India. Presence of child labour is the violation of the child labour laws as well as the lack of implementation of primary education or Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Present paper deals with the major demand side and supply side factors of child labour in India. Paper also finds out some major problems regarding implementation of the law. Suggestions to eradicate the problem have been given at the end of the paper.

KEYWORDS: Child labour, child abuse, child rights, bonded labour.

Introduction

The good physical and mental health of a nation and the advancement of a civilization demands the fulfillment of the obligation to the younger generation by opening up all vistas of opportunities for every child to unfold its personality and rise to its full stature physical, moral, mental and spiritual (Pradhan and kamalan, 2003). The child cannot develop into a full-blown human being, unless constructive and congenial environment is assured for his/her development.

Ironically, in reality, large numbers of children are denied their fundamental right and are subjected to backbreaking labour in pathetic conditions. Children are forced to work for the livelihood of their family. As a consequence, children are not only deprived of their dignity but also their freedom to play, and their scope to develop physically, mentally and emotionally is lost (Bhargava, 2003). Studies show that several domestic servants in India on average work for 20 hours a day with small intervals (Shah, 1997). According to a UNICEF survey, about 90% of employers of domestic workers in India preferred children of 12 to 15 years of age. This is mostly because they can be easily controlled and obliged to work for long hours and can be paid less than what would have to be paid to an adult worker (UNICEF, 1997). Researchers give a range of incidence of child labour in India from about 44 million to about 100 million. Some studies show every fourth child in the age group of 5-15 is employed. It is estimated that over 20% of the country¨s GNP is contributed by child labour (Joseph, 1993). UNICEF figures from various resources that put child labour in India at between 75 to 90 million. For some observers, the exact number of child labourers in India could be as high as 150 million. In brief, India is the largest producer of child labourers and illiteracy on this earth. According to at least one study, a quarter of the world¨s total number of child labourers are in India and every third household in the country has a child at work (Joseph, 1993). A study undertaken in Kashmir shows that over 80% of child labourers in Carpet making work, 70% in Hotels and Dhabas and 60% in domestic services worked as bonded labourers (Shah, 1997). Studies also show that about 86% of bonded labour is found in India¨s agriculture sector (Anti Slavery International, 1999). However, causes of child labour vary across households and across regions and countries. Countries which are equally poor may yet have relatively low levels of working children. Weiner (1991) argues that India is a significant exemption of the global trends toward the removal of children from the labour force and the establishment of compulsory, universal primary-school education. Poverty has not prevented governments of other developing countries from expending mass education or making primary education compulsory (Weiner,1991). On the compulsory education J.S.Mill argued that the state should compel the education of "every human being who is born its citizen," and that the state "ought not to leave the choice to accept or not to accept education in the hand of parents". "It is therefore an allowable exercise of the power of government to impose on parents the legal obligation of giving elementary education to children.

Some Major Researches on Child Labour

Weiner (1991) shows that the major cause of child labour in India is the illiteracy of adult population and not the poverty. He points out that child labour prevails due to the vested interests of politicians, industrialists, upper castes and poor parents who get benefits from the use of child labour. Gunn and Ostos (1992) revealed that children scavengers, their parents and government officials can be convinced more easily by example than by precept. According to Joe (1992) girls are receiving fewer wages than the boys. The health pattern was found to be unsatisfactory. Dixit (1997) revealed that the causes for girl child labour are poverty, unemployment, inequitable distribution of land and assets, migration of labour, inadequate income of adult workers, 'zamindari' and bonded labour system, social and cultural factors, educational backwardness, ignorance of parents, large families and inefficiency of protective legislation. Duraisamy (1997) concluded that the incidence of child labour is higher in A.P., Karnataka and M.P. & it is lower in Kerala, Delhi and Haryana. He suggested that expanding schooling and literacy would be useful policy instruments for bringing abut reduction of child labour, than the trickle-down effect of economic growth. Using the data of NSS for the year 1993-94, Thorat (1999) shows that the nexus between poverty, caste relations and child labour is fairly clear in rural as well as in urban areasChandra Suresh (2004) in his book argued that the main cause of child labour is poverty. The problem of poverty is the result of economic processes.

Demand and Supply Side factors of Child Labour

Supply Side Factors

Households or parents are the main suppliers of child labour. Some researchers say that parents send their children to labour market to get some economic benefits. But parents do not send their children to work willingly. They have no option rather send their little children to labour market to earn their livelihood. These forcing factors which are responsible for the supply of child labour are called supply side factors. Some of are as under:

1. Poverty, 2. unemployment of parents, 3. Low wages for adults, 4. Illiteracy and ignorance, 5. Cast system, 6. Lack of political will, 7. Unequal distribution of wealth, 8. Poor school environment, 9. Lack of schools, 10. Growing educated unemployment, 11. Ill treatment by the teacher, 12. Large family size, 13. Migration, 14. Lock of social security, 15. Illness or death of the parents, 16. Lack of awareness, 17. Low government expenditure on education (Primary education), 18. Costly higher education, 19. Traditional families, and 20. Ill habituated father spending money on drinking, gambling, etc.

Demand side factors

Child labour is demanded by employers as it increases their profits. Every employer or producer of businessman wants to maximize the profit or minimize the cost. According to Karl Marx, the child labour is a source of profit to employers and is thus inher-

ent in a capitalist system of wage labour. As profit declined, Marx wrote, the capitalist buys "with the same capital a greater mass of labour power, as he progressively replaces skilled workers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children." Some factors are responsible for the demand of child laboures. These factors are as follows:

1. They are cheap, work long hours for law wages.
2. They do not protest of do not make complaint.
3. They are more active, agile and quick and feel less tired in certain tasks.
4. They do not form trade unions.
5. Greater willingness to do repetitive, monotonous work
6. Less absenteeism (none if bonded)
7. They are also better candidate for tasks of helper in shops, small hotels & dhabas.
8. It is easy to pressurize them according to their exploitative motives and tactics.
9. They can be punished for default easily.
10. They do not demand bonus, medical facilities, leave and other social securities.

Suggestions to Eliminate Child Labour

The important steps needed to abolish or eliminate child labour in our country are summarized as follows:

1. Restriction to Job Market:

There should be complete restriction on the children's entrance into the job market. If this is not done, today's illiterate child labour will become tomorrow's illiterate and unskilled adults.

2. Poverty Elimination Programmes:

The root cause of growth of child labour is poverty. So poverty elimination programmes be launched widely. In the districts, where poverty is more, proper employment opportunities be provided there.

3. Increase in Income:

Attempts must be directed towards raising the income of the poorer sections of the society because poverty and deprivation force children to work. It is the cruelest form of hypocrisy to pay insufficient wages to fathers of families and then to show sympathy by employing child workers and by contributing to child welfare agencies to feel that duty has been done.

4. Adult Education:

Adult education programmes should be widely launched. Then the parents would recognize the value of children for themselves and for the nation.

5. Strengthening of Inspection:

One reform which can he carried out immediately is strengthening of inspection so that provisions of the law are not violated. The penalty for the breach of the Act should be both imprisonment and huge fine.

6. Increase the Age limit:

The age limit of the child labour should be increased than that defined in factories Act, 1948 of 14 years. As supported by V.V. Giri, the age limit of employment of children should be raised to 16 years.

7. Need of a Comprehensive Legislation:

There should be consolidation to the existing laws relating to prohibition and regulation of employment of children into a single comprehensive law. This legislation should include employment, regulation, welfare and development of child labour.

8. Recreational Facilities:

Necessary recreational facilities besides education must be provided to children to develop their mental and physical status. The facilities of nutrition and health care be also provided.

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