

These in life. that
child labour
contravenes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

These lines give us a realistic picture of Blake's society where boys were sold for two to eight guineas as per their ages. In fact, it is true to every society where child labour is practised. Child labour is ubiquitous, even though it varies in form and degree.

A scar on the world's conscience in the twenty-first century, it is a social evil and a ban against development. Generally, regressive in nature, it is a serious global issue worth paying attention to. Since 2003, June 12 has been chosen as World Day against Child Labour to focus on the urgent need to eradicate child labour. The International Labour Organisation Convention No. 138 (Article 3rd) defines hazardous child labour as "work, which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to harm health, safety or morale of children." Work that is neither exploitative nor detrimental to a child's development is permitted from the age of twelve, under the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 138.

It is 'therefore' essential to differentiate between works that is exploitative and work that is developmental. Working children are vulnerable to extreme exploitation in toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Many of these endure lives of deprivation and suffering. This badly affects their physical, psychological and moral growth. When we turn the pages of newspapers, we come across various instances of child abuse either in houses or in industries. Child labour is a heinous crime, a punishable offence, and yet it is a sad fact that it is an age-old phenomenon though the rise in child labour is largely associated with the rise of industrialisation and capitalism.

International conventions define children' as aged eighteen and under. From

the economic point of view, a child is supposed to be the least active member of an economy.

Socially, children are the foundation of a nation and psychologically, childhood represents the tenderest phase when a child craves for simple things like love, protection and freedom in life. That child labour contravenes these three aspects is clearly evident if we take the global scenario into account. Child labour is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where 41 per cent of those aged five to fourteen work, compared to 21 per cent in Asia and 17 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Asia accounts for 60 per cent of all child work forces because of its higher population. Asia is led by India which has 44 million child workers, giving it the largest child workforce. In Pakistan 10 per cent of all workers are between ten and fourteen years (Weiner, 1999) while Nigeria has 12 million workers. These figures are not absolute. Though various agencies operate their rackets of employing children forcibly, the whole issue goes unreported and often the culprits remain unpunished. Laws are blatantly disregarded so far as child labour is concerned. Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits employment of children below the age of fourteen in hazardous conditions.

Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986 regulates the working hours and wages of children less than fourteen years working in non-hazardous employment. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986 amendment provides for seven years of imprisonment for recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child (below eighteen years) for the purpose of exploitation. There are restrictions, but child labour is so deeply

seated In the Indian society that it shows no sign of diminishing. Children are bonded by debt, forced by parents or even kidnapped by gangsters to work. Eighty-five per cent of rural children work in cultivation and agriculture sectors; forty per cent of urban children work in manufacturing sector, tea plantations and fireworks factories. For families below the poverty line, survival is the sole priority.

As a result, children take upon themselves the onerous task of contributing to the family income. The nexus between poverty and child labour is complex. Neither is each the sole index of the other. Children are less troublesome and more helpless than adults. Some people take advantage of it in order to cater to their vested interests. Inequality in the distribution of wealth leads to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few who make the underprivileged work in servitude. Absence of social welfare schemes, access to easy loans and population explosion aggravate this problem.

According to Myron Weiner, an eminent scholar and internationally known authority on political change, it is the failure of the education system in India that fuels it. Equally important is the utility and relevance of education, especially to families on bread-line. Our caste system is also responsible for it. To dominate someone weaker than us is just unacceptable and it shows our spiritual degradation despite being civilised. The use of bonded labour in the carpet industry is extensive and conditions in that industry are nauseating.

An estimated 50, 000 to 10, 50, 000 children, as young as six years, work in confined, dimly-lit workshops, chained to carpet looms, working for almost

twenty hours to prepare expensive carpets that will eventually beautify the houses of the rich. Moradabad district in Uttar Pradesh has a brass industry that exports vases, tea sets, plates all over the world. Children are engaged to remove molten metal from molds near furnaces, directly exposed to temperatures of approximately 2000°F. They suffer from tuberculosis, and other respiratory diseases due to constant inhalation of fumes from furnaces. The glassware industry in Ferozabad employs about 8, 000 to 50, 000 children who work in rooms with poor ventilation, broken glass, dangling electric wires and intense heat.

At Shivakasi in Tamil Nadu 50, 000 children work with explosive and toxic materials. Serious accidents take place in such factories almost every year. There is a demand for trafficked children as cheap labour or for sexual exploitation. Some estimates have as many as 1. 2 million children being trafficked every year. Thirty per cent of India's nine million prostitutes are children. Around half of them are smuggled from Nepal and Bangladesh. HIV/AIDS and child labour are integrally linked but this link is not explored in any depth.

The condition of the girl child is more precarious than that of a boy. Globally, the circus is one of the most indigenous forms of employment for the children. This happy world has a darker side. There are 44 million child labourers in India and it is really sickening to see that an industry that gives joy to the little ones is nothing but a veritable inferno for those kids who are part of it. Each case points to the stark reality.

Shouldn't we be ashamed of ourselves? The answer is ' yes'. The more we remain indifferent to this situation, the more it will worsen. India has some of the most active NGOs compared to rest of the world, who have managed to keep this issue at the forefront of national and international attention. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have eradicated child labour; Indonesia and Thailand have made considerable progress; India is yet to show a similar result. A systematic, sympathetic and sincere approach is necessary in our society if we want to banish this evil practice completely. We must accept our responsibility, even though we are not directly associated with it and take initiative to stop this injustice as soon as possible.

Generation of public opinion, compulsory and employment-oriented education, proper enforcement of laws is also required. This problem cannot be solved without the participation of children. They have their own analysis of society. Therefore, their potentials should be properly developed to enable them to fight for themselves.

Children are God's greatest gift. They are born to live and blossom. They should not be subjugated to unbearable pain.

Though their imagination becomes blackened by the ' soot' of avarice, inhumanity, callousness, their dreams are stolen and innocence is lost, their hope of making a positive change in their life must be restored. The paradise thus regained, will be a better place to live in because " what is done to children, they will do to society", as remarked Karl A. Menninger.