

The Menace of Child Labour in Assam

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Abstract - It is known to all of us that children are the apostles of peace and future hope of humankind. They are the most lovely creation of nature. They are the future of every nation. Children whose rights are guaranteed as well as respected grow up as responsible adults. No nation can reach its developmental goals unless appropriate steps are taken to ensure the growth and development of children who are an important part of national human resources. It is therefore very much important to protect children by guaranteeing their rights. But unfortunately, it is seen that children are the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Children's rights are seen to be violated even when it is the obligatory task of every nation to provide them a right to good start in life that encompasses sound nutrition, health care, a hygienic home and community environment. The rights of children are seen to be violated in a number of ways such as child trafficking, child labour, child pornography, child prostitution, child marriage, child kidnapping, discrimination against children on the basis of caste, creed, tribe or indigenous background and so on. This paper tries to focus particularly on the menace of child labour in Assam throwing light on the factors and forces responsible for its upholding and tries to give suggestions or recommendations for the prevention of child labour.

keywords - Child, violation, child rights, child labour, Assam

I. INTRODUCTION

Children are the most lovely creation of nature. They are apostles of peace and future hope of humankind. It is known to all of us that children are the future of every nation. No nation can reach its developmental goals unless appropriate steps are taken to ensure the growth and development of children who form an important part of national human resources. Children are very precious and important asset of every nation since they are the leaders of tomorrow who will hold the country's flag high. So the development of children is to be recognized as integral to national development. Every society is under obligation to protect the vital and vulnerable years of childhood because it is a fact that the health and prosperity of a nation is contingent upon its healthy children and it has been sufficiently demonstrated by developed countries who have relied on superior quality of their human resources for advancement in every aspects of life. But unfortunately, children are the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Children's rights get violated even when it is the obligatory task of every nation to provide them a right to good start in life encompassing sound nutrition, health care, a hygienic home and community environment. Child rights violations take place in multiple ways such as child trafficking, child labor, child pornography, child prostitution, discrimination against children on the basis of caste, tribe or indigenous background etc. This paper tries to focus particularly on the menace of child labor in Assam throwing light on the factors and forces responsible for its upholding and tries to find out solution to this problem and also tries to give recommendations for the prevention of child trafficking.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- To focus on the magnitude of child labor in Assam and to try to find out every possible reason behind it.
- To create awareness of child rights and evil of child labor among the general masses.
- To put forward certain suggestions/ recommendations regarding the menace of child labor for its abolition.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is entirely based on secondary sources of data which include articles, books, newspapers and internet websites.

IV. CHILD RIGHTS AND THEIR VIOLATION

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors. The United Nations' 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child or CRC, is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights-civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty with 196 ratifications. According to UNCRC, Child Rights are minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be afforded to all persons below the age of 18 regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability and therefore apply to all people everywhere. The purpose of the UNCRC is to outline the basic human rights that should be afforded to all the children. There are four broad classifications of these rights. These four categories cover all civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of every child:

- **Right to Survival:** A child's right to survival begins before a child is born. A child has the right to minimum standards of food, shelter and clothing, to live with dignity, to health care, to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment.

- Right to Protection: A child has the right to be protected from neglect, exploitation and abuse at home and elsewhere.
- Right to participation: A child has a right to participate in any decision making that involves him/her directly indirectly. There are varying degrees of participation as per the age and maturity of the child.
- Right to development: Children have the right to all forms of development: emotional, mental and physical. Emotional development is fulfilled by proper care and love of a support system, mental development through education and learning and physical development through recreation, play and nutrition.

Unfortunately it is seen that everywhere in the world, children's rights are getting violated even when it is the obligatory task of every nation to provide them a right to good start in life encompassing sound nutrition, health care, a hygienic home and community environment. Child rights violations take place in multiple ways such as infanticide, child trafficking, sexual violence on children, discrimination against girl child in education and in access to food, child marriage, child labour, child prostitution, child homicide, discrimination against children on the basis of caste, tribe or indigenous background etc.

V. MEANING OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour refers to any kind of work that exploits children, deprives them from their childhood and their rights. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), the term 'child labour' means any work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

VI. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AGAINST CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

For the protection of child rights and to abolish child labour in India, the constitution of India has certain provisions against child labour in India. They are-

Article 21 A- Right to Education: It implies that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age 6 to 14 years in such manner as the state, by law, may determine.

Article 24- Prohibition of employment of children in factories etc. – It implies that no child below the age of 14 years shall be employed in work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.

Article 39- The state, shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing: That the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength.

VII. LEGAL ENACTMENTS IN INDIA

Apart from the constitutional provisions there are many legal enactments with a view to reduce and abolish the problem of child labour in India. They are-

- The Factories Act of 1948
- The Mines Act of 1952
- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2000
- The Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009

VIII. CHILD LABOUR IN ASSAM

Assam at a Glance: Assam is a state in the north-eastern region of India situated in the south of the eastern Himalayas along the Brahmaputra and Barak river valleys. Assam is surrounded by the seven north-eastern states of India: Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The state covers an area of 78,438 square kilometer. The state is bordered by Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh to the north; Nagaland and Manipur to the east; Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Bangladesh to the south; and West Bengal to the west via the Siliguri Corridor, a 22 kilometers strip of land that connects the state to the rest of India. As per 2011 Census, the total population of Assam is 31,205,576. At present the state has 33 districts. Agriculture provides the highest contribution to the economy of the state. Tea farming of Assam is its biggest contribution to economy. However the agriculture sector is yet to experience modernization in the real sense.

The Menace of Child labour in Assam: The problem of child labour is a very common in the entire state of Assam. Thousands of children are working both in rural and urban areas. Since the state of Assam is predominantly agrarian; the children have to help their parents in the fields and farms. However, majority of children working in rural areas are mainly concentrated in agricultural activities. In the urban areas, child labourers have to work without parental supervision and face more exploitation. Child laborers in Assam are mostly engaged in cultivation, construction works, tea gardens, jewellery, quarries, brick kiln industries, cottage industries and other small industries and domestic works, etc. A good number of brick industries in Assam are running mostly with child labor. The brick kiln owners engage the child from 8 to 12 years at a very low wage in different works of the brick industries.

In different types of shops children are employed as helpers. These shops are mainly vegetable, grocery, stationary, hardware, etc. Sometimes they carry the load of 15-20 kg to their houses from this work place and look after domestic works as well. Hence this section of child labourers has to bear double burdens and in fact, a hard struggle for subsistence.

A large number of children in Assam are found working in brick kiln industries along with their parents. Here the children have to carry the load of mud and assist their parents in different activities like shaping, carrying of mud, loading and stacking bricks, etc.

Children in Assam are also found to work for garage and workshop. There are so many motor garage, bike workshop, steel workshop and repairing shops and some of them employ child workers. A large number of children are employed in unorganized sector and they work as domestic servants; or as workers in hotels, restaurants, canteens, wayside shops, and establishments; or as hawkers, newspaper sellers, coolies, vendors, or helpers in repair shops, etc. The children are also taken with their parents in construction work for loading, unloading and breaking of stones, etc.

It is known to all of us that agriculture is the primary occupation in the state of Assam. The children are also employed as agricultural labourers along with the adult family members. They are also used as bonded or as contractual labourers. It is found to be seen in Assam that children are given the work of taking care of younger siblings in many households. They are assigned with various household duties like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, dishes and such other works. When they work as hired domestic workers they are over

burdened with heavy work that takes up their entire day and they are not allowed to go home until the work is finished. The children in rural areas are often engaged in large numbers in the cottage industries, such as, silk weaving and carpet making. These force them to stay in cramped and dark in interiors for long hours.

In Assam the children are employed in quarry works also. Both male and female children are employed in such work and the children in villages are also often engaged in quarries and construction sites that often prove dangerous to their health.

The following table shows the statistical scenario of the menace of child labour in Assam.

Table 1 Child Workers aged 5-14 years between 1971-2011 Censuses in Assam

Year	No. of child labor
1971	2,39,349
1981	-
1991	3,51,416
2001	3,51,406
2011	3,47,353

Source: Census: 1971, 1991, 2001, 2011

The table shows that the number of child labours in Assam as per the report Census 1971 was 2,39,349, the number of child labours in Assam as per the report Census 1991 it was 3,51,416, as per report Census 2001 it was 3,51,406 and as per the report Census 2011 the number of child labours in Assam is 3,47,353. However, no data regarding the number of child labourers has been found in the report Census 1981. However, the figures in the table show us that there is an increase in the menace of child labour in Assam despite there are constitutional provisions as well as legal enactments for the abolition of child labour.

Some of the reasons:

Poverty: Poverty is a major cause of child labour. Poverty is a foremost reason for which the children are engaged in productive activities in the informal sector. Due to parents' poor economic background, children are forced to perform difficult tasks at their early age in order to supplement their parents' marginal income. To go to work for earning is very much necessary for these children in order to satisfy their basic needs, particularly food. Children should go to the nearby street to get food or cash. Their parents are not usually in a position to feed them. So, they have to go to work and to get payment in order to feed themselves and to help their parents economically.

Child Trafficking: Trafficking involves transporting people away from the communities in which they live, by the threat or use of violence, deception, or coercion so they can be exploited as forced or enslaved workers for sex or labour. When children are trafficked, it is merely the act of transporting them into exploitative work which constitutes trafficking and children are then left with no option but have to do labour in order to feed themselves.

Unemployment: The unemployment problem is prevalent in Assam which is also another reason for the prevalence of child labour in Assam. It is known to all of us that slow development is taking place in Assam, industrialization, urbanization, economic development- all these are not taking place at a fast rate. Therefore there is the problem of unemployment which in turn is also giving rise to the menace of child labour in Assam. There are some parents who send their children to work to compensate their unemployment. Due to the lack of employment opportunities of the parents, children of such parents are bound to work for their livelihood.

Migration: Migration takes place in various forms. It takes place throughout the world such as rural-rural, rural urban, urban-rural and urban-urban and when it is caused by factors such as natural calamity and conflict, then children are affected by it. When they do not have proper food, clothing and shelter then it is obvious that education for them remains just a dream and they have to get engaged in work to feed themselves as well as their family. Search of land, conflict, land dispute and the subsequent blood feud in rural areas cause rural-urban migration of innocent children. So migration can be said to be one of the main causes of child labour in Assam because every year we see that Assam witnesses heavy flood in most parts of the state and migration takes place.

IX. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Since children are the future of a nation, therefore, it is of utmost importance that the problem of child labour should be solved to have a developed nation in the truest sense. Though the problem of child labour cannot be solved over night but the government should take strict actions to reduce child labour. To solve this problem in Assam, it is very much important that the government should at first focus on the reasons for the growth of this problem and then try to solve the issues. As we have seen that there are many reasons for the growth of this problem in Assam such as poverty, unemployment, migration due to natural calamity

etc., therefore mere making laws is not sufficient to solve this menace. The government should implement the laws strictly and those who violate the laws need to be punished as soon as possible without any failure so that there is a fear among the people in using children as labourers. Moreover, the government should try to facilitate employment among the masses, should give financial assistance for the poor families to educate their children, try to solve the problem of flood in Assam so that the lives of people including the children stop getting affected badly and so on. Moreover not only government has the responsibility in solving this problem of child labour but also the NGOs as well as the families. They should try as much as possible not to send their children to work by letting them to leave education. Awareness camps should be organized by the government as well as the NGOs specially among the poor and uneducated families about the human rights of children, the importance of education and the necessity to have a small family in this era and so on, so that the children in every household can enjoy their childhood and their rights properly without getting violated.

X. REFERENCES

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