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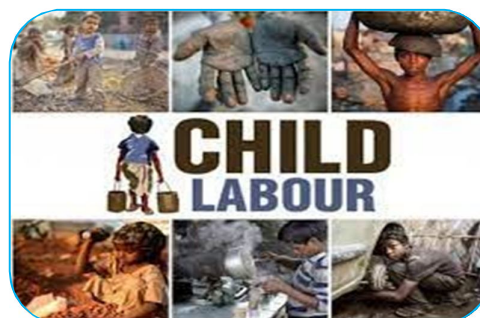
## CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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### ABSTRACT

Child labour continues to be a critical global problem, affecting an estimated 160 million children worldwide. Rooted primarily in poverty, it forces children into work to supplement family income, often at the expense of their education, health, and overall development. The majority are engaged in agriculture, but significant numbers work in hazardous sectors such as mining, construction, manufacturing, and domestic service. These children face serious risks including physical injury, exposure to toxic substances, long working hours, abuse and psychological trauma.



Key issues driving child labour include lack of access to quality education, weak enforcement of labour laws, high demand for cheap and compliant labour, and socio-cultural norms that normalize children's work. The absence of birth registration in many regions also complicates age verification and legal protection. Major concerns extend beyond immediate harm: child labour spreads intergenerational cycles of poverty, deprives societies of skilled human capital, and violates fundamental rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Conventions 138 and 182. The worst forms, including trafficking, debt bondage, and forced recruitment in armed conflict, represent grave human rights abuses.

Addressing child labour requires integrated strategies: poverty alleviation through social protection and decent work for adults, universal access to free and quality education, stronger legal frameworks with effective monitoring, and community-level awareness campaign. Corporate accountability in supply chains is also essential. Eliminating child labour is not only a moral imperative but a prerequisite for sustainable development, ensuring that children can exercise their right to learn, play, and grow in safe environments.

**KEYWORDS:** Poverty, Exploitation, Education, India, Human Rights.

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood is considered the most beautiful time of life. Yet, many children are forced to abandon their childhood and work for wages. Children are spending their time learning, or rather, acquiring knowledge, on work. As a result, the problem of child labour is emerging in the country and society. Child labour is not a sudden problem; it originated long ago. Child labour is a result of our ancient social system and social inequalities. The problem of child labour, which is becoming more severe day by day, is also due to economic inequality, illiteracy, and family burden, which are giving the wound of child labour a chance to flourish. In today's new era, industrialization and urbanization are considered the cause of development for any country and society, but instead of healing the wounds of child labour, these very reasons are only exacerbating them and deepening them.

India gained independence at a time when the country was plagued by extreme poverty and hunger. Numerous problems stared the nation squarely in the face, of which child Labour was a particularly serious issue. Concerned about the bright future of children, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that today's children are the architects of the nation's future. The nation's future rests on their shoulders. So, doesn't the question arise in our minds: Can children, who are ruining their lives by engaging in child labour, deprived of education and constantly unwell, build a healthy society and nation? How will they become conscious and strong citizens of the country? This is a matter of concern. The Indian government and numerous voluntary organizations are working to address the issues of child labour and the problems it creates. Various social and legal measures are being implemented. Employing children is a legal offense, and punishment is also provided. Children are the backbone of the nation. Therefore, we must all come together and partner with the government to combat the problem of child labour.

### **Description:**

As the name itself suggests, child labour means work done by children. According to the Indian Constitution, children below the age of 14 years who are physically engaged in any work are called 'child labourers'. In India, an age limit (14 years) has been fixed by law for children to work. If any child who is below this prescribed age limit works, then he/she comes under the category of child labour. Children below the age of 14 years who do mental and physical labour in any industry, mine, factory, agriculture etc. are called 'child labourers' and the work done by them is 'child labour'. Child labour is a serious problem not only in India but also globally. Today, nearly every country in the world is grappling with this issue. Many countries and organizations, including India, have established different age criteria for child labourers.

Different age limits are there like- According to the United Nations, a worker below the age of 18 years is a child labourer. But at the same time in India according to the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, a child labourer refers to a person who has not completed 14 years of age. Further, according to the International Labour Organization, the age of child labour is 15 and American law classifies child labour as 12 years of age or younger and in England and other European countries, as 13 years of age or younger.

One thing is certain from the above facts that the age limit for child labourers varies with changing locations and changing legal frameworks. However, the issue remains the same; child labour, where the worker is typically below the legal age limit and is neither physically capable nor mentally prepared for any strenuous work.

### **Child Labour in India**

Child labour is a serious problem for a developing country like India. The emergence of child labour did not occur suddenly; its history in India is very old. India has been grappling with the scourge of child labour since independence. India gained independence when the country's situation was dire. The people were plagued by extreme poverty and hunger, and numerous problems stared the country squarely in the face, of which child labour was a particularly serious issue. Poverty is at the root of child labour in India. Because of poverty, parents send their children to work instead of school or take them with them. They are even sold to others and forced into hazardous occupations such as firecracker making, carpet weaving, welding, matchstick and beedi making, the cement industry, brass industry, coal mines, stone quarries, and other hazardous jobs. Engaging in such hazardous occupations destroys children's childhoods and their lives are constantly at risk of life-threatening diseases. Child labour in India is being fuelled by economic inequality, illiteracy, the caste system, family burdens, and population explosion. There are many other important factors contributing to child labour.

### **Causes of Child Labour in India**

At present, child labour is prevalent in the country due to various reasons which are directly and indirectly promoting child labour. The progress of any country depends on the social and economic development of the people living there. If this pace of development slows down, that country lags far

behind in the path of progress. There is a segment of our society that is extremely backward socially and economically. Due to financial constraints and poverty, parents, in the greed of additional income, make their young children work as labourers or sell them to contractors. Illiteracy, ignorance, drug abuse, etc. are signs of backwardness for any society. Due to lack of education, people's intellectual development is hampered and as a result, they are unable to understand their own and their children's rights and become victims of exploitation.

### Cheap Labour

In today's world of self-fulfilment, who wouldn't want to be paid less and get more work done? Child labour is a result of this selfish mindset in society. Many shopkeepers, contractors, and factory owners employ underage children with the sole intention of extracting more work at a lower cost. There are many businesses where children help their parents. Such as working alongside their parents in small shops, hotels, sewing clothes and shoes, selling vegetables, and farming. This deprives them of education and leaves them trapped in the trap of child labour. It's often observed that the events around us influence our lives and temperament. Children have a strong learning instinct. This is why children who don't attend school and wander aimlessly are instilled with the desire to earn money, resulting in child labour. The rapid population growth is directly impacting the country and society. Problems like poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment are fuelling child labour. Population explosion directly impacts child labour.

### Effects of Child Labour

The scale of any country's cultural and social development depends on the state of its women and child development. Child labour today hinders this very development. Childhood is the most beautiful and precious moment in a person's life, but trapped in the vortex of child labour, children's childhood is destroyed by the harsh blows of forced labour. In India, children are considered a form of God, but it is shameful that in a country that holds such beliefs, children continue to be exploited as child labourers. Childhood is that tender plant of life which is nurtured by parents with the water of values. Due to the impact of child labour, the development of children is stopped and they are unable to grow physically and mentally. Children are put to hard and arduous tasks at an early age which are beyond their capacity in childhood; both the body and mind is tender, which can be destroyed by engaging in strenuous activities. Such a situation hinders health and development.

Education is every child's right, but child labour robs children of this right. Intellectual development is assured for an educated individual, but engaging in child labour robs children of all opportunities for personal development, thereby not only harming themselves but also hindering the development of the nation and society. Child labour is the result of society's exploitative mentality. Employing children for low wages and scolding them to make them work is essentially child exploitation. The most heinous and objectionable issue within child labour is the sexual exploitation of child labourers. According to a report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, A study conducted in India in 2007 revealed that children between the ages of 5 and 12 are the most vulnerable and vulnerable to various types of exploitation and abuse. This exploitation includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Working in factories, mines, the firecracker and beedi trade, and other similar industries and businesses exposes child labourers to a variety of life-threatening illnesses. Working in adverse conditions has a devastating impact on child labourers' health, putting them at risk of death.

Several laws have been enacted in India to prevent child labour, which protect the special rights of children, known as child rights. In fact, child rights are the personal human rights granted to children in the form of special care and protection. Under these rights, special steps have been taken to protect the health and lives of children and strict regulations have been enacted.

**The Factory Act, 1948** : Under the Factory Act, any child under the age of 14 is prohibited from working in any factory. This law imposes several restrictions on the employment of children between the ages of 14 and 18 in factories, including restrictions on who can work, what type of child, and how long they can work.

**The Mines Act, 1952**

Under the Mines Act, any child under the age of 18 is prohibited from working in any mine. The government had proposed implementing this strict rule, citing the dangers of mines.

**The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986**

The government has compiled a list of certain occupations that are proven to be dangerous for children. This rule prohibits children under the age of 14 from engaging in any of the occupations listed (including the bidi-matchstick industry, carpet industry, cement industry, manufacturing of explosives and incendiary materials, etc.).

**The Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) of Children Act, 2000**

Under this Act, inciting or compelling any child to do child labour or child labour Enforcing child Labour is a legal offense. Under this law, those who employ child Labour are severely punished. The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009

Under this law, there is a provision for free education for children between the ages of 6-14 years.

**CONCLUSION:**

Child labour is a threat not only to India but to the entire world, but the situation of child labour in India is very serious. The government is working to eradicate the problem of child labour, but society must also contribute. Many voluntary organizations are also active in this work. It is our responsibility to educate families who are backward in all areas about the lives and futures of their children, and to make them aware of the problems arising from child labour and its dire consequences. One of the causes of child labour is illiteracy. In such a situation, we should encourage and help children to pursue education at least up to the tenth grade so that they can find employment opportunities. Furthermore, if intellectuals and financially well-off members of our society take responsibility for each child from the most backward families and try to educate them well and make them capable, then the problem of child labour can be largely eradicated. Therefore, this would be a completely new approach. To foster children's intellectual development and self-reliance, schools and other institutions should periodically organize recreational programs and encourage children to participate. Efforts should also be made to raise awareness among children by depicting the incidents and consequences of child labour through plays. This task is certainly difficult, but if everyone makes a concerted effort in this direction, we can quickly overcome this crisis.

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