

CHAPTER-VI

Transformation of child to premature labour

The focus of this chapter is to study the process of a child being transformed into to a 'child labour'. The question is not whether the transformation of a human being to an immature labour is just? Rather, the question is whether could this be avoided. So, how can the process of induction of a child into labour could be prevented? Any reasonable person concerned with the welfare of next generation would agree that child labour is a sin but at the same time he would be confused as to how the sin could be shunned under the present socio-economic system.

A school teacher in Park Circus area (one among some interviewees) was asked by the present worker about his views regarding child labour. He was very much annoyed with this phenomenon (being a father of a child belonging to child labour age group) but he readily admitted that he also employed a child labour in his own house. He justified that employment by saying, " if I would have not employed this child labour (who has been working in my family for more than 8 months) she would be working in some other's family. I could not have prevented her being a child labour. Her service was essential in my family. But I also allow my child to play with her so that, she does not count me as an employer but as the father of her play-mate."

Like this teacher many other employers of child labour would justify such employment under duress and plead helplessness about not being able to prevent child labour.

An owner of an automobile garage was not apologetic about employing a child labour. To him poverty is a 'reality' and poor people's children are bound to work for their food. According to him, " Do you expect me to employ an adult worker by paying rupees one thousand per month to work in my garage as an errand boy? I personally

earn seven thousands rupees a month net of all expenses and it is very difficult for me to maintain my family of 11 people with 2 school going and 1 college going member of my family. I pay rupees 200 per month to the child labour who does all kinds of leg work and in the process would be trained as an automobile mechanic. It would be good for his future "

He admonished the present worker by saying , " You look to be an intelligent and educated person. Can you think of a situation what would happen to the catering houses, automobile garages, tea shops in our area if the child labour is withdrawn ? You can easily guess we would be out of business and the child labour households would be starving "

On being asked what would be the solution to this problem, the respondent (the garage owner) told the present worker in no uncertain term that the necessity of child labour can be done away with if the parents of the child labour are given proper food and employment and he advised the present worker to speak to the Government about the small enterprises which would face very serious problem if child labour is not allowed any more.

A mother of a girl child accused the present worker for asking question regarding her (age above 12 years) little daughter being employed as a maid servant to a wealthy family. She said, " what she would have done, would you give her food, arrange her marriage ? She is to get married. Even a 'ricksawala' would demand Rs.10,000/- for marrying the girl. Where from I would get this money ? And even if I get some money for the daughter's marriage, would she be able to subsist in the family (to which she would be married) , if she is not habituated in household work ? She concluded her interview with the present worker in a huff by saying, " you babus may be good at heart but good for nothing "

From the above statements one can easily see how the evil of child labour seems to be unavoidable under present socio-economic environment in our country. Since our concern was to understand the process of induction of child into labour force, we decided to prepare detailed case studies of each of the child labour. Again we thought only supply side of child labour is not enough and so the demand side (i.e., from the side of the employer) of the problem also need be studied. In order to bring our point home and to gain certain insight into the crux of the problem, we also interrogated some employers of child labour as well as the parents of child labour.

We would ^{now} briefly mention some significant cases of three categories of people i.e., child labour, employer of child labour and parents of child labour in both urban and rural settings. For reasons of anonymity we would use pseudo names.

Case 1 :

Suresh Sankar (Male, Age-12, General Caste, Urban child-labour, place of origin- Chapra, Bihar).

A 10' X 12' room is the house of Suresh at Tiljola Pub Para Slum. The raw materials used were bamboo sticks, a polythene sheet and some clay, the roofing materials especially straw could not be purchased as the price was high and Suresh's father gets 3 to 4 days' casual labour a week. Suresh was not born here. He was born in a lush green village located in the district of Bihar. He would be staying in the village upto the age of 7, after which his father brought him to Tiljola two days after Dewali in 1990. The intention of suresh's father was to give the child education. He would be working harder because he wanted his son to give some opportunity of education. His dream was to see his son going to the school with books and talking to his friend "not in 'boli' but in english". At that time he was a regular worker under a Government contractor. After 3 years of arrival of Suresh in Calcutta his father

became jobless as the contractor had to wind up his business of promotership due to some defalcation of fund of the clients. After that, he does all kinds of odd jobs as and when available . Suresh was admitted into the Corporation school where he found several Hindi speaking and Bengali speaking boys. He learnt all the Hindi alphabets as well as Bengali in class I. He could count upto thousand (1000) and do some 'addition' and 'subtraction'. The Corporation school did not charge any thing from Suresh as tuition fee and would also give a few books. But those were not enough for Suresh to continue his study. The main reason of his dropping out from school was lack of food in the household. While there would be at least one meal in the evening , the other meal in Suresh's family remained uncertain especially when Suresh's father became jobless due to closure of private construction firm . The high hopes and dreams of Suresh's parents about him collapsed. Suresh's father would be sending at least rupees four hundred (Rs. 400 /-) a month while he was in construction company and his family in Chapra (Bihar) was relatively well to do. But recently Suresh's father could afford under great difficulty only rupees two hundred (Rs. 200.00) a month for his family. It is therefore apparent that Suresh had to give up his study after class I . Should he then return to his native village ? Suresh's father did consult Suresh although he was merely a boy of nine (9) . He explained that even if he send Suresh to the village, there would be no work for him. It would be better if he stayed in town and looked for a job and think of studying in night school . Within a month or so he was offered a job in a tea shop as a dish washer. Suresh's father was very reluctant to get the boy admitted into the work force at age of nine (9) . So Suresh would be accompanying his father on those days of work and watch the activities done by the adults including his father. It seemed impossible for him to carry eight (8) bricks in head-load because he was very weak . He then began picking up rags from a neighbouring locality. He continued like this for about a year when he would be getting around Rs. 80 /- per week. The job was part-time and once the rags are sorted out and put in the Vat, his work could be over and he would be free from 11 a.m. onwards. Even then he did not think of going to school as he had no proper

dress and any assured meal in the morning. He developed contact with a boy in the area from where he would be picking rags. That boy introduced him to a Garage owner. Suresh was readily accepted as an errand boy.

The behaviour meted to Suresh gave him certain mixed feelings. The owner was insistent on good performance in his work and his approach was persuasive. But he would not increase his wages beyond fifteen rupees a day although Suresh is to work for no less than 12 hours. The owner would tell him that he could get trained here as a mechanic and earn a lot in future. But while allotting work Suresh is given only the donkey-work. Suresh knows he can not do better if he gives up the job. He is given some mechanical work which he could learn by seeing his senior's work when senior boys were not in duty. Generally, the garage closes down at 8 P.m. But when a driver brings his vehicle for some kind of repair work or change of a spare-part, say at 7.45 p.m. Suresh is to remain engaged until the work is over. Sometimes he gets no vehicle to go back to his house and the garage owner kindly drops him at Tiljola Pub Para (3 Kms away from the garage) in his two-wheeler. Sometimes the owner would give him a five rupee note saying that it was 'bonus' for his good work. Even then, when Suresh's father talked to the owner about the increase of Suresh's wages the owner said that Suresh was being given greater wages than he deserved as he serves only as an errand boy.

Suresh however, hopes that in course of time he would be able to understand the diesel engine and would be an able driver. If he can be a driver he can earn a lot. That is why, he thinks that he should not leave this job. He consoles himself by saying that this work is not comparable with his earlier work of rag-picking.

Generally, he comes to work daily at 8 a.m. by riding a bus for which he does not pay any fare as the conductor and helper know him to be a motor vehicle worker. Immediately on arrival he begins cleaning the garage, bringing water from the tap which takes atleast one hour. The mechanic arrives in the mean-time and he is to

bring to 'ghoogni', bread and then tea for all workers including himself. This tiffin is charged to the owner of the garage. They get some free time, generally between 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. He takes roti-dal by paying between rupees seven and rupees ten. The owner does not pay for this lunch. Suresh's daily wage is rupees fifteen a day which is a little better than his emoluments in the earlier job of rag-picking. So, effectively he can take rupees five to seven rupees for a day's job. The tips by the vehicle owners comes to rupees two hundred per month. The system is to distribute the tips equally among all the workers except the owner. The owner also is a talented mechanic and he is owning this work place for nearly 15 years. Once the garage became the victim of cleaning operation by the Government. Suresh did not know what happened. But garage could be opened after a week and Suresh continued working there.

He still thinks that he could go back to school if situation would have permitted. As he has to work from eight a.m. to eight p.m. and sometimes upto 10 p.m. it is however not possible for him to join even in non-formal school in the evening. Besides he is to be a driver. So, he decided to carry on like this.

He has two shirts and two half pants and a pair of Hawaii chappal. In winter, he wears a sweater presented by a lady who visits their garage and talks to Suresh very kindly. She is a owner driver and Suresh calls her *didimoni* when she comes to the garage.

Case 2 :

Gopal Sapui (Male, Age - 13, Scheduled Caste , Urban child-labour, place of origin - Burdwan, West Bengal).

Gopal's father left his village and came to Calcutta in search of a job in the 1980s. Gopal's father was a marginal farmer not only by definition but also in his economic status. He would be owning 0.27 acres of land at Jowugram in the district of Burdwan . He would be producing around 4 quintals of paddy and a quintal or so of vegetables from the little patch of cultivable land inherited from his grand-father. Gopal's grand-father had three sons and two other sons were older than Gopal's father. one of them left for a neighbouring village by selling out his share of land. His father-in-law gave him one bigha of land as dowry and invited him to settle in his village where the land price was less compared to that at Jowugram. The other uncle of Gopal still stays at Jowugram and lives very miserly. Gopal's father was very much interested in all kinds of machine tools right from his childhood. The first machine he saw was a table clock. Eventually he became acquainted with transistor-radio and then a pump set. He would be eager to learn about the machines and would be visiting the local town.

He would see all kinds of machines from sewing machine to various other engines. But he was very keen to learn the technique of making machine tools. He came to Calcutta several times with a relative of his who would be working at Howrah (Previously Howrah was famous for light-engineering industry and during the British rule Howrah would be treated as Birmingham of Bengal or for that matter of India). Gopal's father was a skilful worker and became acquainted with the lathe machine at Howrah. Later he got the offer at where a private enterprise installed a lathe machine at Park Circus area. By this time Gopal's father was married. Gopal was the eldest child of their parents. Gopal's father began neglecting his cultivation work because of

the scanty return he would be getting from his land. He gave the land to his own brother on a contract basis. His brother had ensured three quintals of rice per year in return to the use of land.

That is how Gopal's father brought the family to Calcutta, worked at Park Circus and began staying at Tiljola. The house owner would charge rupees thirty five for the 150 sq. feet accommodation which they have. Gopal's brethren are four, two sisters and two brothers. Gopal's mother was a simple housewife when Gopal was a lone child. Gradually, the expenses increased and Gopal's father became dependent on alcohol. A substantial portion of income of Gopal's father would be spent on alcohol and Gopal witnessed the daily quarrels between his parents regarding this alcoholism. Naturally, Gopal would be supporting his mother which would enrage Gopal's father. So, Gopal's student life was discontinued at class II and Gopal's mother began working as a maid servant in other's family.

Gopal also began earning as an errand boy in an enterprise. The engagement was possible because of Gopal's father. Although he would sometimes get drunk, he was very efficient worker and very responsible in nature. The owner would also respect him to be an "Immandar Admi". It was in a separate enterprise where Gopal began working as an errand boy. At that time, he would be getting rupees three per day. Gradually, he became able to learn the trade and to operate the machine within two years and so he began operating lathe machine under the supervision of Momin bhai, a skilful manufacturing worker. Momin bhai was very affectionate to Gopal and trained him while he would be working in the machine. Gopal was serving as a helping hand to Momin bhai.

Gradually Gopal could work on his own. Gopal's father was a blacksmith by caste although he was a non-practising smith while he was in the village. Momin bhai would be joking with him that Gopal would be learning this trade fast because he was

a smith by caste. Fortunately or otherwise Gopal began his training in the lathe machine at age of 9 and became a lathe-machine worker at the age of 11. Momin bhai allows him working independently for the last two years. Gopal is grateful to Momin bhai for his guidance. It is due to Momin's recommendation that Gopal's salary was doubled within two years and now he earned six hundred fifty rupees per month. According to the estimate of the present worker the net value added per day of Momin's work was Rs. 1000/- of which he gets only a sum of Rs. 80/- per day. Gopal hopes that he would be able to earn atleast Rs. 1500/- per month in another six months because he can now handle many operations even without the supervision of Momin bhai.

Gopal was very critical about his father's addiction. Unfortunately he has also been getting drunk atleast once a week. The explanation for such addiction was that he had to serve for long hours and a little of alcohol makes him fit for next day's work. The trouble has already started as Gopal's mother is very much annoyed about Gopal's addiction. Even Gopal's father sometimes criticised Gopal for this bad habit when he himself was not drunk.

Whether such trade brings alcoholism? In response, Momin bhai kept mum. Because Momin bhai himself spent atleast 25 per cent of his salary on drinks and dinner of his own. However, Momin has a son, and his daughters are already married. Momin however does not discourage Gopal taking a little drink. In fact Momin was in a way responsible for inducting Gopal to this habit. Momin does not think that Gopal would be an addict. He thinks that Gopal is an intelligent chap and he would be able to control himself. Momin says that he himself was also a child labour and became responsible husband when he became a family man. To Momin, all these are usual. He tried to impress upon the present worker that poverty is the cause of child labour and addiction is the consequence. since poverty is a fact one cannot possibly wish away the addiction of child labour in professions where the clients are also addict. He

said automobile garages and engineering industries where the labour is very intense and work is to be done in utmost haste, such addiction is not unusual.

Gopal does not want to go back to the school. He does not believe that there can be any arrangements of their rehabilitation. Because the Governments do take care of the interests of the rich. Even if there is a change of Government, there would be no improvement in their lives. He loves seeing video-film and also visit cinema shows which are little costly for him. Moreover, he has to work six days a week and on Sunday he is to visit his friends and play in the afternoon. He is acquainted with the activities of a Non-Government organisation working for the development of slum. He does not know why British Government would think of their good while Bengal Government can not or do not. He is scornful about his neighbours who sit on high places and stay in big houses with VCR and Colour T.V. sets. According to him the behaviour of the olders are strange and may be illogical. He thinks that he has responsibility (atleast partial) towards his sisters and brothers. So he brings money home and give it to his mother. He wants his younger brother to be taught in good school and in good environment. He plans to be a lathe machine man but unfortunately he will have no certificate for his hand-on training. Momin bhai told him that a I.T.I. trained person would be easily earning Rs. 4000/- per month in a Government job. He has no such scope of procuring a certificate from I.T.I. although he can easily out-smart a certificate holder while working in a lathe machine.

The owner of this enterprise is indifferent to any of the worker except that he is dependent on Momin bhai regarding his business. He thinks Momin bhai does only good for him even when he rebukes him very often atleast thrice daily for real or unreal omission or commissions. The relationship between Gopal's father and Gopal is gradually being strained. But the relationship with mother is still very cordial. Gopal loves his brothers who are at school and the tiny sister who should be sent to school in due time.

Case - 3 :

Sk. Miskin : (Male, Age-11, Muslim , Urban Child Labour, Place of Origin - Diamond Harbour , South 24 Parganas.)

Miskin is a new entrant into the labour force. He was born at a village near Diamond Harbour in the same block of 24 parganas (South). His father had two children of which Miskin was younger. Miskin's aunt (sister of father) was a widow and would be staying in Miskin's family. Both the brother and sister were very affectionate to the aunt (*fufa*). She would take care of their feeding , bathing and also of other necessities and their mother could remain free of the children's responsibilities. Miskin's father Sk Alauddin was a sturdy man but a landless labour working in other's fields during both the seasons of the year. To the utter misfortune of the whole family, Sk. Alauddin died in an accident while travelling from Diamond Harbour to Amtala where they had a relative. Miskin's mother, although wife of a landless labour would not have to work in the fields and would do some petty trades in the local market if and when possible. She would be taking some dress materials from a shop and would sell those in retail on the basis of some commission from the shop owner. So during Sk. Alauddin's life-time the family could somehow make both ends meet. With the death of Sk. Alauddin the whole family broke down like a cardboard house and children witnessed unnecessary accusations of each other among their elders , viz., *amma* and *fufa*. Miskin does not remember how but somehow they would be getting only one meal a day. They would see the penury and reproaches to which their *fufa* would be subjected to. The children could take no side as their mother was a party to the quarrel and to them the mother seemed to be the bread earner. Within one year and half of Sk. Alauddin's death the children came to learn that their mother would be doing 'sanga' (the remarriage with one 'mian') of the neighbouring village. The children witnessed many unpleasant exchanges between *fufa* and *amma* when the news was broken in the family. But somehow inspite of the children's hesitation they

were placed with their fufa with a shelter but without food. Their mother went to her new house leaving her children here. She would however keep in touch with them while Miskin and his sister were in the village. The hunger was intolerable and fufa decided to go to the town to work as a maid servant. Muslim maid servant were generally not accepted in Hindu families and there were no wealthy Muslims in their village who could employ their fufa. With a reference from some persons in the village they came to Park Circus area to work in a wealthy Muslim family. But that family did not accept the children and refused to provide them food and shelter in the family although they would be paying a "good" salary to their fufa. Fufa therefore, had to hire a room in Tiljola Pub Para Slum. The owner of this house in which they were staying at Tiljola was a trader. He would trade in rags. The sister would look after the household as their fufa would be going out of the Slum (slum) early in the morning so that she could make bed-tea to the members of the family for whom she was working at Park Circus. She would have to reach the house of her employer by 6 in the morning walking all the way (2 Kms.). Miskin would spend the morning mostly in bed as getting up from bed would mean the desire for some food immediately. After paying house rent and many other expenses like clothes, medicine etc. they would have very little amount. So they had to take very frugal meal once in the day time i.e., at around 11.00' clock and once more at night when their fufa would also be there with them. The "good" salary of fufa was not good enough for three persons' two square meals a day. The house owner would sometimes threaten their fufa to vacate the house if they would be paying rent on a date beyond the schedule. Once the house owner suggested to Miskin's fufa that she should not encourage Miskin in spending the whole morning in bed. He said that he could provide some money to her nephew in exchange of the child's work for his trade. In course of time Miskin joined the army of Rag pickers. The sweepers would dump the waste at around 8 in the morning and the rag pickers would go right at 8 to fight for their shares in better rags like Plastic bottles, polythene glasses and bags, broken glasses, aluminium foils, tin, waste shoes, broken iron. You name one. They have all kinds of rags in the dustbin.

The main investment of each of rag pickers is a sack and a small stick. Miskin joined this work at 10 and by now is an expert rag picker.

He would be getting about Rs. 20/- a day on an average. But payment is never daily. The trader makes a payment once in every week and informs Miskin's 'fufa' the amount of money paid to Miskin. In every week Miskin would be handing over Rs. 150/- to his fufa. In the first week of the month the rent for the house had to be paid by his fufa. The amount would be a little greater (Rs.175/-) than the week's earning of Miskin.

How much money Miskin can spend for himself ? Nothing. He gets Rs. 2/- per day as pocket money from her fufa but on unusual days he would be getting some more money. The common accident which Miskin faces is the cut or some kind of injury from waste iron and glass. When he would show such wounds to his fufa, she would give him the price of a Tetvac. (anti tetanus vaccine) or medicine like Nevasulf. During 'Id' (religious festival) he get not only new clothes from 'fufa' but some more pocket money on the days of those festivals.

Why does he give all the money to fufa ? Because, fufa knew his income and he loved his fufa. If he does not give the money, how his 55 year-old fufa would maintain their family ? He does not want his sister to go for maid servant's work and fufa was planning to give her in marriage. And how can he not remain faithful to his fufa , who was greater and possibly better than his mother ? He can not be a 'Neemokharam' (betrayer) . He hopes that he would be meeting his mother sometime when he would go to their village. But now, his stepfather may not like them to go to her.

Miskin wants to go back to his study as he was planning to do while his father was alive. He likes books and pens. He sometimes gets some pens from the dustbin

which he isolates and keeps them for himself. He has already a dozen of pens with him by which he sometimes draw picture in the paper collected by him. He plans to go back to his study especially in the evening. There is one evening school run by some *didimoni* (madam) of FOCUS¹.

But he can do so only after the marriage of his sister when his fufa would not need any more savings. Is he working for building up a marriage fund as desired by his fufa ? He said no and yes. He said 'no' because unless he gives all this money to his fufa, she would not be able to pay rentals to the house owner in time. And they would be driven out. He said 'yes' in the sense that with his earning added to family income fufa is being able to save a little. Fufa had a passbook also. she can not sign her name but opened the account by giving thumb impression. Some *didimoni* (Joly *didimoni*) of FOCUS helped his fufa to open the account in the Park Circus branch of United Bank of India. Joly *didimoni* is a good person. She always invites Miskin to come to school and he feels glad to carry her bag from school to the bus stop. But he does not attend her classes regularly. She told him that he had to have a 'pass' if he wants a job. He however does not care whether he would have a job. Because he knew some educated boys were not getting any job to their satisfaction.

Miskin's working hours for rag-picking is 4 to 5 hours a day including his participation in some household chores in the evening. The rest of the time is free. But how to spend that leisure ? He is yet to know.

Miskin was not conscious about the danger of his work. He would sometimes take his food just by washing his hand in plain water. He became ill several times. Elders in the slum advised him not to take any food without cleaning his hands and feet with a soap. Joly *didmoni* provided him with gloves used by nurses and doctors

¹ FOCUS is a non-government organisation working for slum development in Calcutta. They got some grants from the Government and some from other funding agencies. They claimed to work for the comprehensie development of the slum dwellers.

while in work. He now uses these gloves while picking up the rags. Many people and even some of his work-mates laugh at him for wearing the gloves. He sometimes do not use it to avoid embarrassment. But Joly didmoni insists on his wearing of gloves while at work.

He heard that their labour is illegal. But what can he do ? Who would give him a job ? There is no employer also. It is his own neccessity for which he works. Was he intimidated by the house owner to work as rag picker ? He could not be sure . If he does not go to work , how can he have one hundred fifty rupees a week ? He does not know.

Case 4 :

Shyamali Bar : (Female, Age 13, Scheduled Caste, Urban girl child labour, Place of origin - Chapra, Bihar).

Shyamali Bar in the eldest child of her parents. She has another younger brother who is now 4 years' old. Shymali's father Ramratan belongs to a 'Dosad' (low caste) family in Chapra district of Bihar. Shyamali's father found no adequate employment in their village and came to Calcutta in search of a job at the instance of one of his relatives who would be staying in Calcutta and working in Calcutta Corporation. Ramratan came to Calcutta alone leaving his family in the village. He was able to procure some casual work in Calcutta Corporation. He would be working about 15 to 20 days a month and would be getting the minimum wages prescribed by law. He thought the amount he was earning would not be insufficient if he would bring his family to Calcutta. That is how Ramratan's family came to Calcutta before 6 years.

After the family came, Ramratan remained at Sealdah area for sometime and would be feeling insecure especially at night during their staying at footpath. Not many of the footpath dwellers were friendly to them because most of them were not happy with 'Dosad' a lower caste compared to themselves. They may be poor but they belonged to a better caste than the Dosad. It was the physical insecurity of Ramratan's wife during her second pregnancy that brought them to the 80 square feet hutment of Tiljola Pub Para Slum. Ramratan had son preference and 'God was gracious to provide them a son' in the soil of Calcutta.

But God was not possibly kind to all for all the time. Ramratan died of gastroenteritis in the I.D. hospital at Belehata when his son was only one year's old.

The struggle began. It was a grim struggle for existence of an 'unpod aurat of dehat' (unsmart woman of rural area) in the glittering city of Calcutta. Fortunately, Shyamali's mother had some other relatives who were working in the Corporation. They brought the case to the C.I.T.U. union of Calcutta Corporation and the union leaders helped Rashmoni (wife of Ramratan) to get casual work in the Corporation. The union leader explained to her that Ramratan was not a regular worker and so his death can not be treated as a case of Death-in-harness. So, his keen can have no claim either in compensation or in job. However, she can not also get any work in her native village. The union would try to be helpful to her because her husband was a good person and was very loyal to the union. That is, how, Rashmoni became a casual worker. She however does not get more than 10 days of employment on an average in a month. With this income she had to maintain the 80 sq. feet residence of her in Tiljola Pub Para Slum and arrange for food and clothes for her daughter and infant son.

Shyamali's mother generally works in the morning and keeps herself free in the afternoon. On days-off she however stays in the house for the whole day and work for the family. In order to increase their income she also makes some paper bags on contractual basis of Rs. 2/- per hundred of paper bags. She taught Shyamali not only to cook but also to sweep, to clean clothes as well as to do all kind of household chores.

Shyamali was growing fast, every body looked at her (at least she thinks so) and she is treated as a beautiful girl by her neighbours especially by the young men. Shyamali liked pretty clothes, cosmetics and also some ornaments. The equipments and materials she needed for her make-up as well as dress were grossly inadequate and Rashmoni would be angry at her when she would demand such things. It was not Rashmoni but Shyamali herself thought of earning some money by working as house maid. There was great demand of " thika jhi " (contractual maid servant) in the housing estates of neighbouring locality. The job was also specific, bringing water from tap, washing clothes and sweeping the rooms in one family and cleaning utensils in another . These two jobs could be done in three hours between 2 and 5 in the afternoon. Shyamali would hate working in the afternoon because the afternoon and the evening were the time to walk around in the locality putting on pretty dress. But since her mother would be engaged in the morning in outdoor work, she had to take care of her infant brother and also sometimes to cook mid-day meal for the family. Shyamali would be back from work by 5 P.m.. and take at least an hour in bathing and dressing before joining her friends to have girl-talks or visit a movie show when possible. Rashmoni thinks that Shyamali's income was not indispensable in the family because whatever she earned was spent in luxury. But shyamali thinks that her income of Rs.300/- a month was supplementary to family income for which they could take two square meals a day. She does not think that expenses of her cosmetics and entertainment ever exceeded Rs. 80/- a month.

Does Rashmoni think her daughter should have been a non-working girl ? Rashmoni was hesitant. She admits that working habit for a girl like her daughter would be good in the future life. After all, they are poor people and the marital connection which Shyamali would ever have would be in a poor family . Real life was not a movie show . The work-habit would prepare her daughter in adjusting with the members of another family. Moreover, although they are in Calcutta for several years, they are detached from their own society . The re-union is very rare except once in a year during "Chhat Parab " (religious festival). In this parab also only relatives who stay in Calcutta are able to keep in touch. Rashmoni does not even dare to go back to her village because of several kinds of fear. The fear was people may blame her simply because she lost her husband. Their house site is a 5 katha plot in a barren land with no structure existing. Neighbours in her erstwhile village told her that the house structure was affected by termite and broke down during the rains. The place has now been converted into a grazing ground. Moreover, to whose house she would go with a 13 year's old unmarried girl ? That would be treated as sin in the eyes of local "dosads " . And where she would put up in the village for even a day or two in that potentially hostile environment ?

Shyamali worked as maid servant for more than 8 months. But in the recent months she changed her occupation. She began working in a Papad workshop along with her friends with whom she would be spending her evenings. This workshop employed around 40 women workers. Her friends recommended her case to the owner of the workshop. Shyamali decided to change her occupation not because she was earning less as a maid servant or disliked the kind of work she had to perform in other's households. Both her earlier employers were behaving nicely. But her problem was that of appropriate time-slot. She was more keen to enjoy the afternoon with her friends than remaining prisoner within four walls in the nice afternoons. Another problem for which she did not want to work in the afternoon was because of her younger brother. No household would allow her young brother to accompany her to the work place in the kind of work she was doing. But in the Papad workshop no such

problem was there. She would take her brother to the workplace and her mother would collect her brother from Papad workshop while coming back from her Corporation work. She would be working upto 3 in the afternoon and be back home by 3.15 P.M. to have the lunch together in the family. Now, her mother prepares lunch and takes care of the child in the afternoon. Shyamali prepares dinner for the family while her mother works for making some paper bags. Shyamali joined the child labour and changed her trade to be an artisan within the same year.

Shyamali did not think that she would be able to study either in a formal or a non-formal school. Although she is just literate, she is not very fond of spending time on study at this age. After all, she is to get married soon and possibly she has found a bride in " Biltu " according to her friends. Her income as a Papad maker has not decreased compared to her work as a contractual maid servant in two houses. But the opportunity of spending the afternoon with friends had provided the scope of interactions. Can she get back to household work again or can she adjust in a family life after her work in the Papad workshop ?

Shyamali does not think there would be a problem at all. It would rather be a cake walk.

Case 5 :

Purna Tudu : (Male , Age - 14, Scheduled Tribe, Rural child labour, Hatiasuli, Midnapore)

Purna chandra Tudu has been working alongside with his father for more than 2 years. Bikram Tudu (father of Purna Tudu) was literate and attended junior basic school at Kapgari during his boyhood. He could not however continue his studies as he would have to work from very early age. Bikram recalls that he too was a child labour. He hated the idea of inducting children into the labour force but he had to

engage his son from the age of 10 as a labour. His wife became ill after she gave birth to their second child, a baby girl. She can no longer work in other's field which she would be previously doing. Purna therefore, had also to work for the family. Purna also read upto class-I at Hatiasuli Primary school (at his own village). The reason for leaving school was the need to help his father in earning the subsistence need. Purna's sister is just 5 years' old and she too does not keep good health. In this way, Purna was transformed into a labour.

Purna learnt weeding, transplanting and some other agricultural operations while working with his father. A landless person Bivram would take his 10 years' child with him because of his help in the field. Purna would be getting food for two times (no wages) from the employer's household. Gradually Purna became skilful and would earn a wage almost 3/4th of the market wage for adult. But Hatiasuli and other neighbouring villages were predominantly mono-cropped area. Purna would be getting employment for about 60 days in agricultural work. There was however, creation of additional labour days under Jahar Rojgar Yojana and they got some opportunity of work in rural road construction, digging of pits for plantation, some forest work as well as work in house building. They would not however get any employment for about 4 to 5 months in a year. During these lean months he would be taking buffaloes, cows and sheep of other villagers to the forest located within the 2 Kms. from the village. Purna was able to count upto five hundred and could recognise all the Bengali alphabets. There was no scope of learning Santhali language in the neighbouring area. Purna did not know that Santali language have developed its own alphabets 'Alchiki'. Nobody discussed this with him. However, it does not bother himself because he had already given up his studies and joined the struggle for survival. In the work place, he is treated kindly by his neighbours and friends but that does not save him from the drudgeries of daily life. Grazing of animals and agricultural operations are the income earning activities for Purna.

Bikram also did not want to send back his son to school. He argued that many boys who passed Madhyamik or Higher Secondary examinations could not find any job suitable for them. So, even after passing Higher Secondary examinations many tribal boys resumed their work as agricultural labour. To Bikram it is therefore meaningless to send his child back to the school.

Purna does not think that his occupation involved any health hazards. They were working for generation together in the rural area and nobody complained about any diseases. He does not know and does not care whether the practice of child labour was illegal. Who would give him food if he did not work? Bikram endorses the same view.

At Hatiasuli most of the children work, except the children of well-to-do households. Child labour in the families of landless and marginal farmer is almost a rule. Political workers also do not make out an issue of it.

Purna believes that there would be no change in the near future and even his younger sister may have to join the labour force when she would be nine (9).

He is certainly interested in learning any trade if there is any scope. But he finds none. Besides agricultural work he is keen about learning use of machineries but there is no opportunity to learn the trade unless he goes to sub-divisional town of Jhargram.

For Purna it was a case of normal attachment of the son of a landless to manual work. The working hours during cultivation season is normally 6 to 7 hours in a day and when Purna goes to graze the cattle it is about 9 hours a day. The remuneration from cattle grazing can atleast assure one square meal a day. Purna is

fond of some games namely Kabadi and Football. He finds very little time to play because he has to do very hard work. He however enjoys the festive days during Makar Sankranti. He has no addiction except of course ceremonial drinking during Makar. He participates in Shikar festival (hunting) with his friends and relatives every year.

Case 6 :

Baidyanath Mandal : (Male, Age 12, rural child labour , general caste, Hatiasuli village , Midnapore).

Baidyanath became child labour at the age of 10. His working career started with carrying earthen utensils to Parihati hat (local market) twice a week. He would be getting five rupees for each trip while he was only a child of 9. The neighbouring families were generally potters. One of the potters was also an 'idol' makers. He was very fond of Baidyanath because the interest he showed in the work of idol making . Although his neighbour was an aged idol maker he was not professional and there was lack of market for the idols also. However, still some idols of Hindu Gods and Goddesses would always be available for sale. Baidyanath's father had a little less than one acre of land in two parcels. Both plots were mono-cropped, producing aman rice. But recently there was a change due to implementation of a scheme for storage and harvesting of surface water. Both the plots got the benefits of some irrigation in winter. Being advised by the workers of local Sevabharati Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Baidyanath's father attempted to grow potato and pulses in certain portion of his plot . Baidyanath also helped his father in this work besides working for wages in others' agricultural land. His father was also an agricultural labour in the main although he owns a non-economic holding. Baidyanath's mother does only household work and it

is unusual for a general caste woman to work for wages in other's field. She however, do all the household chores and helps processing the paddy that is grown from their plots.

Baidyanath's father does not keep good health and he cannot work daily even if work is available. So, the income earned by Baidyanath happens to be a very important contribution towards family income. Baidyanath works as an agricultural labour and also in all kinds of works available in the locality earning around Rs.2400/- per annum . He is mainly an unspecified labour.

Baidyanath had to give up his study mainly because of poverty. Children like Baidyanath cannot take advantage of this free primary education system. Earning bread is primary not only in case of the child of Baidyanath's family but also for other such families.

Case 7 :

Sibani Nayak : Female, Age-10, Rural girl child labour , scheduled caste, Hatiasuli village, Midnapore

Bisu Nayak (father of Sibani Nayak) inherited half an acre of land from his deceased father. Bisu would be cultivating his own land and worked in other's land as agricultural worker. After he got married to a neighbouring village girl, the income earned by him from his own land and also from the wages as agricultural labour seemed to be insufficient. The local tradition is that a girl given in marriage cannot work outdoor until she becomes mother of a child. So Bisu's wife although working as a agricultural labour during her maidenhood, could not take any outdoor assignment. When she became mother of Sibani and the baby was one year old, she began working outdoor as agricultural labour, She as well as her husband would be getting about 100 days of labour in a year. With this income they tried to subsist. But Sibani's

mother gave birth to two other children within a period of another 3 years. Though the family consisted of 3 infants and 2 adults they could not run their family well because of ailment of Bisu. The major expenses besides food in their family was on medicine for Bisu. It is therefore no wonder that Sibani was transformed into a child labour at the age of 9. What Sibani would have done in the situation prevailing ? The family would be taking at best one meal a day and two other younger daughters of Bisu would be taking two meals a day. Sibani is a beautiful girl but was very much under-nourished. A neighbour who happened to be a teacher in a primary school took pity on her and asked Bisu to keep Sibani at his house. He said that atleast food would be assured to this little beautiful girl in exchange of her working as an errand girl. Bisu had no option other than agreeing to the proposal. In fact, the teacher's wife was also very kind to Sibani. Sibani would go to local grocery shop to fetch something for the family of his employer and wash a few utensils as and when required. Her main assignment was baby sitting and taking care of bhai (younger brother) while the housewife remained engaged in different household chores. It was therefore some kind of a familial relationship which Sibani found in that teacher's family. Bisu expected that the teacher would give her some wages. But to utter dismay of Bisu it was found that although the teacher Nani babu would give Sibani good food thrice a day as well as some nice garments, he was not ready to pay Sibani any wage. Bisu would respect Nani babu and could not claim wages for her daughter's work. During Makar Sankranti (a religious festival) in last year, Sibani went to her maternal uncle's house. It was not unusual for a girl visiting her relatives during festive days. But Sibani did not return for two months to her own house. Nani babu could know that Bisu has engaged his daughter as a maid servant in a joint family of a distant village Barsole. When asked, Bisu admitted that it was so and she was being paid rupees seventy per month for her work in that household. After she joined Nani babu's family (where relation was familial on its face value) it took only 15 months for Sibani to be inducted as a regular child labour.

Sibani never got any opportunity of going to school or learning even the alphabets. But she has a nice sonorous voice and her memory was also very sharp. So, she could sing several songs which she might have heard during different occasions. The present worker thought it would be worthwhile to study the girl's activities at the Barsole household as a non-participant observer.

Sibani would get up from bed at 5 in the morning from a mat on which she would be sleeping at night as a log. She would wash her mouth in the near by-pond and then start sweeping the courtyard and then spray cow-dung solution in courtyard. She would then clean the cow-shed after the cows are taken out by older people of that family. She would then go to the village tube well to fetch water to be used for drinking and cooking. Fetching of water would cost atleast 2 hours. At around 10.30 a.m. she would clean her teeth and get one pai (250 gms) of muri (fried rice) for her breakfast. After breakfast she would have to do all kinds of work in order to help the households. This is not simply working as an aide in the kitchen, it involved boiling of paddy, spreading the parboiled paddy for drying, washing utensils and sometimes cleaning clothes also. She cannot take her bath before 2 in the afternoon, when all the male folks have returned after lunch and went back to work in the fields. After the lunch she can not get any break because she has to clean the utensils too. She gets a little free time between 4 and 6 in the evening for which she longs for the whole day. She would be visiting her friends (most of them are of her age and some of them already married). The friendship was cultivated only recently. She sometimes goes to the grocer's shop to fetch something for the employer's family. From evening onwards she feels sleepy and she is rebuked almost daily because of her " kumbhakarna habit " . In fact, she feels very tired and can not keep her eyes open. The dinner time for the family is generally between 7.30 to 8 at night. But if any relative comes to the family the dinner time may be delayed. In any case Sibani cannot be free before the completion of dinner for the whole family. She is to clean the floor and wash the dishes after dinner and then only she can retire on the mat. Sibani is to remain on her feet for working for about 12 hours a day within a span of 17

hours. She generally sleeps from 10 p.m. to 5 in the morning. Can beautiful Sibani parade her dresses to her friends ? Yes, she can, for an hour and so in the afternoon.

Sibani thinks that Bisu would be saving the money earned by her from this work for her marriage. She also thinks that she was a beautiful girl. But she does not dare thinking of being a wealthy wife as Masima (employer's wife). She knows that her fate would bring her not so well-to-do a husband. She certainly thinks that her work experience now would be helpful in her life after wedding.

Bisu thinks that since she would not be able to procure a better-off boy due to his own poverty, it was good that his daughter is being experienced in all kinds of work, indoor and outdoor. Bisu's wife took the incidence of Sibani's transformation to a labour as fait-accomplis. She did not like her daughter to be a child labour. But what was the option ? Sibani did not go to school but she wanted to learn the art of tailoring. There is arrangement of such training at Kapgari (neighbouring village) where there is school, college, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and some other Rural Development Schemes. She thinks that she may get a chance to learn the trade after she gets married. Yes, this is her dream, after all what can she do except dreaming for the better .

Case 8 :

Mosaraf Hussain : (Male, 45 years old, Muslim, Guardian)

Mosaraf Hossain was himself a child while he first had to take part in agricultural work at other's land. Mosaraf's father was a sub-marginal farmer with a land holding of less than one acre. Mosaraf's father had two sons between whom Mosaraf was older. Mosaraf's father dreamt of sending Mosaraf to school. But because of very poor status he had to abandon that dream. Mosaraf bears no malice

against his father and participated in labour both in their own land as well as wage labour in other's land when he was only a boy of 13. Due mainly to the ailment of Mosaraf's father the land owned by him had to be sold off at throw away price. Unfortunately that too, could not save the life of Mosaraf's father who died after a prolonged ailment of more than one year. Mosaraf and his younger brother became landless and looked for different kinds of odd jobs. Mosaraf personally became a van-puller (not van owner) and then again a ricksaw puller. Mosaraf's brother went to work in a Bheri (marshy land for pisciculture owned by rich people engaged in fish trade). In the meantime Mosaraf married . His marriage forced him to look for more remunerative jobs elsewhere. Mosaraf knew some persons who would be working as a supervisory labour (sardar) in a tannery located in Tangra (in eastern part of Calcutta). He could get a job as a labour in that tannery at the recommendation of his acquaintances. He left his ancestral hut and took on rent a hutment at Tiljola Pub Para Slum. From then on Mosaraf became a slum dweller. His income was a little better in his new job. In course of time Mosaraf raised a family consisting of their three children. The first child Hanif is now a child labour working in the same factory as a casual worker .Ofcourse, Mosaraf does not mind his son being a casual labour because he himself is a casual labour even after putting 20 years of continuous service in the tannery. While he gets around Rs. 900/- a month, his son Hanif (at the age of 12) now gets Rs.12/- a day for the days actually served.

Did Mosaraf want his son to be put in this situation ? No. But his income is not sufficient for a five member family. He could not send Hanif to school. His wife works hard for the family and finds little time after performing all kinds of household chores. Mosaraf therefore tried to procure some kind of employment so that their income can increase a little. According to Mosaraf atleast the money for purchasing weekly ration can be obtained from Hanif's wages . What else Hanif could do if he would not be sent for work in the tannery industry ? Hanif cannot think of going to school again because he has already shouldered the responsibility for the family.

Mosaraf tried to justify Hanif's labour by saying that he could not otherwise have a job. With so little earning and keeping the child idle at home, there would be many different problems. So it is better that Hanif worked and also earned some money to supplement the family income. Mosaraf is aware that different kinds of health hazards are involved in the work in tannery. Carrying raw skin in bulk or putting salt into the raw skin was much hazardous a work for a child of 12. The work place has most unhygienic environment. Mosaraf would have liked his son to work elsewhere even with a lesser income. But he cannot possibly find any such opportunity. Mosaraf consoles himself by saying that at least his son is in front of his eyes while both are engaged in work. Mosaraf further said that he could give a hand while his son does need some help. He was also able to train Hanif in the kind of work he was supposed to do. Mosaraf further observed that sending child to work was not uncommon to the class to which he belonged. He mentioned that uptill now very few general caste Hindu people come to work for tannery. Hanif got the chance and he should be careful in utilising the opportunity available to him. He hopes that his son would be a 'permanent casual worker', like him as soon as he becomes 18 years.

Mosaraf asked the present worker if he could procure a job for his child. He is also planning to send his second child (a girl) to work as a worker in 'Tip factory' (a cosmetic factory).

Child labour law in a country like our is meaningless according to Mosaraf. If Mosaraf would be getting a reasonable sum (as in the case of any Government run factory) he would not allow Hanif to work as a child labour. Rather he would be trying to send Hanif to a school. But their poverty remained the stumbling block.

Case 9 :

Kanai Pal : (Male, Age 50, General Caste, Employer : Caterer-cum-restaurant owner).

Kanai employees six male child labour in his shop. four of them work between 6 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon and two others between 12 noon to 10 at night. During rush hours (12 noon to 4 p.m.) he can get the service of six children together.

Kanai did not go to anybody or approach any person for the supply of child labour. In fact many people requests him to provide job to their children. The vegetable vendor, the fish vendor, even the local social worker requested him to provide job to a " deserving " child. Kanai was not very clear about the deserving criterion. They are deserving because the parents of the children do not earn much and some of whom lead a very pathetic life. So it is really a help to the needy, the deserving. Kanai does not approve of child labour in principle because he can not ask his son (who is below 14 years) to work for a living . He wants that his son should get some education and find some cosy employment . Then why does he prefer child worker to an adult ? ?The reasons are many. The first and foremost is the loyalty. The second reason is that, child labour is cheap and third is that adult person would not like such tedious and continuous job although the work is light. He thinks that if child labour laws are enforced he would have no objection of getting rid of child labour even at some cost. But where these children would go ? They would either be pickpocket or would be deying of starvation. The government never even thought of social security of the children .

'Take the case of orphan home or boys run by the government. Every alternate day the children are fleeing from those homes in search of a job. And how

many children can be accommodated in those boys' homes ? So, it is all 'politics' and nothing serious'. He does not think that the wages given to children are fair. But what he can do ? Even if one wants to hire a child labour by decreasing his income (income, not profit), he would be pressurised by the fellow employers. The children also do not want to lose their job by demanding greater wages.

Kanai thinks that if the system of child labour is to be abolished, one is to think of providing adequate employment to the parents of children. He recalls the saying of one of his relatives, a villager that he did not care how many children he produced. In any case they would labour. The government should think less about child labour and more about providing labour to the mature people, They should fight the diseases rather than worrying about the symptoms. The present worker was astonished to note that in spite of his tough talks Kanai has a very soft corner for the child labour. He takes them to the doctor not only because the child labour remain physically all right to serve him but also because these boys should get human treatment from their elders. He admits that he is to punish some boys sometimes for the dereliction of their duties. But that is also a system of education to shape them as responsible workers. Kanai himself was not a rich man when he was a child. He had also done all kinds of odd jobs before owning this restaurant and starting a sprawling catering business. Kanai does not think that government efforts to eradicate child labour is at all serious. It is rather an attempt to earn a good conduct certificate from other countries. He recalls a poem which means, the laws should be such that interests of infants and children should be given top priority for all times to come.

From the above case studies of child labour belonging to both sexes at two different settings (urban and rural) as well as from case studies of a parent and an employer of child labour, we could gain some insight into the process of transformation of a child to an immature labour.

Children of poor families are treated very shabbily not because their parents are not fond of them but because they are unable to provide food, cloth, nutrition and treatment to their offsprings.

From all the case studies above it appeared that poverty was the driving force which pushes out these young children to face the rough weather of exploitation of the weak by the stronger. Any reasonable person be he poor or rich, educated or illiterate, instinctively know that child labour is an evil and not necessary. But most of them justified the perpetuation of system of child labour as a 'reality'. Unfortunately, even the parents or the employers hardly recognise that the so called 'reality' is a man-made and administered system.

Could there be child labour if the society was equitable and just ? The answer is clearly negative. Intelligent persons with good intention would naturally demand banishment of the social sin and legal protection of children falling prey to the system of exploitation under market forces. But the fallacy lies in the fact that keeping people in hunger is the main-stay of the class divided society. The so called 'reality' is not very real but the result of crude and shrewd manipulation by the propertied classes in concentrating the wealth in fewer hands.

The above observations came out of the case histories of children. Suresh Sankar whose father dreamt of sending his child to an English school landed as an errand boy in the automobile garage, toiling for about 12 hours a day.

Gopal's father sold out his land and landed in a shanty with great difficulties. Gopal could survive by doing donkey work in a lathe machine caring little for his security.

With the death of Miskin's father and lack of family environment for Miskin and his sister, Miskin had to begin rag-picking and helping his aunt in running a new found family of their dream.

Shyamali herself a child was required to take all the responsibility of playing a mother's role to her baby brother. She became a maid servant and later an unskilled labour in a cosmetics factory.

Sibani was forced to work as a maid servant, and now tries to believe that her work for wage labour would do her good in the future married life.

One can therefore see that there is wrong understanding of 'reality' on the part of parents, intellectuals and employers. Again, there is false notion about the 'present' as well as the 'future' of the children who became deprived from their childhood. In a way, the false notion of the deprived is more dangerous than the false understanding of the 'do-good ers'.

This is how myths are treated as 'reality' where reality is being manipulated continuously as a part of the system mechanism. Institution of child labour in developing societies including our own country can only be abolished if there can be a thorough overhaul of the prevailing exploitative system. But under present system efforts should be made to provide best possible protection to children by taking advantage of pro-child laws. Awareness of the deprived is of fundamental importance for conceptualisation of a system change.

From our case studies we did not find any indication of such meaningful awareness about the menace of child labour system either from the buyer or from the seller of 'labour power'.

- Hence, there is the necessity of concentration, a task which should be willfully shouldered by committed persons and groups concerned about the welfare of the children in particular and future society in general.