

## CHAPTER – FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study is concerned with the socio-economic background of the child labourers in Siliguri City of Darjeeling district. The majority of the children in this study has been male. The highest number of children doing the work has been found to be in 12 - 14 age group. Most of the respondents have been from Hindu families. Overwhelming majority of the cases has been encouraged by their parents to join the various works. Inadequate income of the family and large family size have been the major reasons behind the respondents' coming for work. The children are not trained for the works they do. The majority of the respondents have been in a particular work for one year. The children belonging to general caste category are more in number in this study. Hindi-speaking people are more among the respondents. Only two female respondents got married at the time of this study. Inter-state migrant child labourers are numerically high in this study and they have migrated here with their parents. In the year 1970-75 majority of the families migrated to Siliguri for their economic problem. In this study children are employed in different types of works. They are gleaner, restaurant or hotel workers, tea stall workers, maidservants, garage workers, sewers, helpers, rickshaw or van pullers, sellers and wage labourers etc. Absentee in work is the common characteristic of the "child labour". It is because sense of responsibility has not fully developed in their immature mind.

The earnings of the workers have been for inadequate to enable them to make their both ends meet. As a result of this, the mass of the workers are kept at starvation level. The actual wages differ from workers to workers depending on their degree of skill, age and performance. These workers are subjected to economic exploitation by using various corrupt devices. The data indicate in this study that so far as the monthly basis wages are concerned there are 33.33 per cent child labourers belonging to Rs. 250.00 - 300.00 monthly income group. The lowest percent i.e., 1.89 children belong to Rs. 550.00 to 600.00 income group. The length of hours of work has direct impact on the physique and

health of children greatly determining the efficiency and productivity of labour. Most of the child labourers are found to work seven days in a week.

In hotels and *dhabas*, the child labourers work during summer from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. with a recess of two hours for two time meals and one time tea. During winter they work from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. with the same recess break. Thus the spread of hours of work during summer and winter is 15 and 14 hours respectively. The domestic servants usually start their work at 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. in a day and some other start their work when all the family members are in their beds at the dawn. They do get certain hours of recess after preparing and serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. In Siliguri town those child labourers, other than the domestic servants, are working under employers, have to do work six days a week because they enjoy one weekly holiday and sometimes they enjoy special off day at the time of general strike. They also get one holiday at the time of DURGA PUJA, the great Hindu festival. Maidservants employed in houses do not get any holidays; they can only pray for leave to their employers. A few child labourers have the opportunity to go to cinema and gamble by the evasion of work or at the leisure time. Most of the child labourers handover their total income to the head of their family and a few child labourers handover the major portion of income to the parents and keep some money for their own expenses, for tiffin, tea, cinema etc. Negligible percentages of children who earn very little do not handover their income to their parents, because nothing is left over after their personal expenditure.

Child labourers and non-schooling children have a significant linkage among the poorer sections of the population. Many children work because there is hardly anything else to do. Many children do not have easy access to schools. Schools are either too expensive for them or not available to them. To many, schools are not at all attractive or interesting. A good number of children from backward classes, particularly female children, discontinue their studies to look after the younger brothers and sisters at home when their parents go out to work. There is also discrimination in educating female children. In Urban slums, in many cases, parents themselves are illiterate and do not realise the importance of educating their children. They are unaware of the injustice done to the children by making them work instead of sending them to school. Employers of child labours are generally rude and rough, negligent, unsupportive to the emotional needs of

children. Their employers sometimes physically, emotionally and sexually abuse working children.

Child labourers are engaged in different types of works in Siliguri town, mainly hotels, restaurants, house works, wage labours, gleaners, etc. Many of them are working under some employers and many others are doing work independently. They live in different slums. These working children exchange their labour every day from morning to night. It can be clear from the overall view that more or less all have to lead a common life style.

The worst impact of child labour is that it leads to physiological and psychological deformities in the child. Longer hours of work, bad and unhygienic working conditions lead to retarded growth, orthopaedic diseases (like Kyphosis, scoliosis etc.) respiratory problems, cardio and gynae problems (in case of female workers). A great majority of children have reported that their parents have sent them to work in order to supplement their earnings, which are too meagre to support their large family. Most of the child workers are found to be drawn into the work places, as there is no adult wage earner in their families. By taking jobs at a tender age children play the role of a family supporters. Another reason for the prevalence of child labour is found to be illiteracy and ignorance of parents. Some of the child labourers, forming a small minority, attribute child labourers to their desire to satisfy their personal needs. Inadequate family income cannot provide them anything beyond to bare subsistence needs. Some of the literate child labourers find bleak employment opportunities, which is one of the important reasons that prevented their parents from sending them to school.

One of the striking features of child labour in this study area is the pitiful and exploitative condition under which children work. Children generally are paid very low wages in almost all occupations. In many occupations children are paid at piece rates. This places an undue strain on them. There are also unjustified deductions. Numerous studies indicate that children are found working in some works long and even excessive hours without sufficient break for rest and leisure.

Child labourers always remain in the mental and physical pressure. They spend their total income for their family. Most of them do not have any imagination about their future. It is very clear from their overall opinion in this regard that they do not think minutely about future life.

Family is the main institution in shaping the child's personality. Therefore the form and character of the family is of utmost importance for developing the child's personality. It is found during the study that the average size of the family is large. The main reason is that they have the viewpoint that family planning is prohibited by Islam and they also believe that they need extra hands to earn and contribute to the family income. The average size of the respondents' family is eight per family. The average number of siblings of the respondents' families has been four per family. The percentage of respondents' father being illiterate is predominantly high. 88.89 per cent of the respondents' mothers are also illiterate. Most of the heads of the households are casually employed persons. None of the families surveyed have the income above rupees one thousand per month, the health of the majority of the child workers has been very poor. Among the child workers who provide answer regarding the question as to their diet and its quality, it is found that the majority are deprived of their full diet and good quality food. The vast majority of child workers either depend on the leftover food or the food bought from the market. To conclude, it can be said that the overflowing drains, big heaps of refuse, congested and crowded living dwells, absence of toilets etc. are harmful for the child workers and their family members. The above discussion makes it clear that female child workers have lesser time than male child workers. In between the working hours they also have to assist their own families in household activities.

Many children in Siliguri town today are working under hazardous conditions and it is noticed that their mothers and fathers have expired. A large number of children of tender age are being exploited, are compelled to work for long hours for low wages and under conditions damaging their health and physical, social, psychological and mental development. It is clear that one of the major causes of child labour is said to be illiteracy and ignorance of parents. This leads to a lack of appreciation of education on the parts of the parents and also limits the outlook towards life. Such parental handicap is at once reflected in the child, as it is primarily in the family that the early socialization of the child takes place.

Most of the parents are employed in occupation requiring little or no skill. Most of them work in unorganised sectors. Unorganised sector has been defined as that sector which has not been able to organise itself in pursuit of common objectives. Casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy on the part of the workers, small size and scattered

nature of establishments and superior strength of employers, are some of the characteristics, of unorganised occupations. One of the major causes of child labour is low income of the family and general poor economic condition. The family income comprises the income of the head of the household and income of the earning dependants, that is, of wife and children or of any other person in the family. In this study it is observed that their family income is not sufficient for the maintenance of their family and they are not able to save any money. They consume their total income. The problem of child labour is basically an offshoot of the problem of low income of parents to support a large size family. With inadequate income even for the maintenance of children at subsistence level. These poor parents are forced to fill up the deficit of their family budget by the little wage earned by their children. Many parents argue that they are forced to send their children to work at their tender age because the present system of education being incapable of providing vocational training alongside the academics is full of danger in making their literate children unemployed.

Child labourers are easily exposed to biological disorders. Uncleaned and unhealthy working conditions prevailing in unorganised manufacturing units, contaminated drinking water and polluted air destroy immune competency and general ability to work. Viruses, bacterias and parasites easily enter into their body and affect - digestive system and cause diseases like diarrhoea, typhoid, malaria, jaundice etc. In addition to their hazardous work, they are engaged in different addictions i.e., *beedi*, tobacco, alcohol, *ganja*, *bhang* etc. which affect their body system and expose them to different diseases and early death. Addiction problem is the major problem among the slum dwellers. Most of males of the slums are habituated to taking alcohol, *ganja* or other kinds of sedative drugs.

Child labourers under this study live in the slums developed on public and railway land. The houses of the child labourers are constructed in the slum without proper drainage system; congested houses without ventilation system cannot protect them from rain, cold and heat. They use common latrine and common place for bath. They have in their houses electricity, which they have drawn from electric line of the streetlight. They use the corners of their houses as kitchen place. Poor income of the parents forces the children to be absorbed in various types of low paid occupations. Almost all of the parents are ignorant about the Child Labour Acts; a few parents are aware but cannot reply to the question related to the Acts properly. The employers feel that child labourers are essential because

children can easily pick up works with their delicate hands. Child labour has given rise to a number of socio-economic problems. It is beyond doubt that children are forced by circumstances to labour hard in their tender age when they should have been in schools. A large majority of employers defend child labour employment on the ground that it lowers down the cost of production, as they are cheaper in relation to adult workers. Some employers argue that they employ children to help the poor and downtrodden families. The children are employed because they have low bargaining power and, hence, can be hired at lower wages and made to work for longer hours under bad working conditions. Child labour is commonly interpreted in two different ways. First, as an economic practice and secondly, as a social evil. In the first context, it signifies employment of children in gainful occupations with a view to adding to the labour income of the family. It is in the second context that the term child labour is more generally used. In assessing the nature and extent of this social evil, it is necessary to take into account the character of the job in which children are engaged, the dangers to which they are exposed and the opportunities of development which have been denied. All the employers are not completely aware of the Child Labour Act. Most of the employers are partly aware of this Act. To this question they only argue that below 15 years children are prohibited to be engaged in occupations or works. To save themselves from this Act, they argue that they treat the children as brothers, nephews or as family members, but not as a labourer.

In the concluding part, it is to say that child labour is neither entirely a new phenomenon nor special to India. Infact, it exists in many countries of the world with varying degrees and magnitude. Children continue to constitute an important source of cheap labour. They are either required to help their parents in domestic work, grazing cattle and farming, or earning for their parents in labour market where they work in various places. The advent of high technology and economic development brought no change in the employment of child labour, which prevails now, in developed, and developing countries of the world. Child labour has become a common feature in many third world countries to which India is not an exception and despite adequate efforts in the direction of relief and rehabilitation, the problem continues to grow in an alarming proportion. The fact is that, this social evil is inextricably intertwined with other common problems making it a vicious circle. However, child labour in the developing countries cannot be combated without making primary education compulsory besides ensuring that the parents of

working children get adequate income. Child labour is basically a working class problem. Many a working class family, when faced with poverty and starvation, send their children to work so that they too may contribute to the financial needs of the family. Many employers prefer children for certain categories of work as they provide cheap labour and are more submissive. Consequently, these children are deprived of their opportunities of education. Further excessive demands of labour impair their health. On growing up they have no alternative except joining the ranks of unskilled workers with low wages and in turn, are forced to send their children to work. Thus, the working class is caught in a vicious circle and child labour becomes a permanent reality in the society. The present study makes a detailed analysis of the problems faced by the children in Siliguri town. The study has been made under the Siliguri Municipal Corporation in five slums as the number of child labour is very high there. These children are engaged in different types of occupations such as rickshaw/van pulling, hotels worker, wage labourer, gleaner etc.

The number of child labourer in Siliguri is alarming. Although children are found in the labour force in all the districts of West Bengal, the proportion of child labourer in Siliguri is very high. The female labour participation rate is comparatively low in Siliguri. Generally young female workers are pushed into various employments. This deserves serious attention, as female child workers suffer more than their male counterparts.

A high proportion of children lack formal technical training or skills. They are employed as labourers as cleaners, waiters in restaurants, sales workers, domestic servants, cycle repairer, gleaners and in a few other types of works. Working children have various health problems. There is a strong negative correlation between the child's health and the rate of child labour participation. Almost all the nutritional surveys indicate that more than 56 per cent of the children are suffering from malnutrition, anaemia, etc. Most of the diseases prevalent among children are due to exogamic causes and can be controlled. Most of these diseases are also common among the children belonging to the poor economic stratum and children from this section are mainly found in this labour force. Due to the poor environmental conditions working children generally suffer from ill health. Such children easily become prone to respiratory and communicable diseases. In other words, child labour can lead to long-term health problems. It is clear that child labour will never be fully eliminated until the causes on which it thrives are eradicated. Child labour is the product of poverty and uneven economic development in the country. In the long term,

improving the health and welfare of poor children, especially child labourers, will necessitate a much greater degree of self-reliance. But in the short term, there must be a continuation of the fight to improve the effectiveness of legislation, education, health and welfare services. Flexible strategies are necessary because rapid changes and new hazards are constantly emerging. Hence, there can be no final and complete answers when society is constantly evolving. Adequate schemes will have to be developed, with the co-operation of employers, to provide nutritious food for their employees. As for the remaining self-employed children, arrangements may be made where by they can purchase food at a subsidized rate.

#### SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ABOLITION OF CHILD LABOURERS :

The evil of child labour exists in this country mainly because of wide-spread poverty and ignorance, and till these twin problems continue to exist, it will not be possible to affectively tackle the problem of child labour. With the present state of development in the country it is impossible to eradicate poverty and ignorance in near future. It is hardly of any use to take any step to abolish the practice of child labour which is not only unrealistic but is also likely to do more harm to the millions of poverty stricken people who are forced by their awfully poor economic condition to seek the help of their children to come out and work for their existence. To save the child labour from the greedy and crafty employers, the state government, social agencies and other voluntary organisations have a big role to play. Since the magnitude of the problem is too big and complex to handle by the state alone, the involvement of voluntary organisations becomes imperative. It is with these objectives the following suggestions are being extended which may be considered while considering the problem of child labourers by all those who are interested in it.

#### *Protective Legislation :*

To arrest the evil effects of child labour Article 24 of the Constitution of India provides for its complete eradication. But despite the lapse of about four decades the country has not reached the level of economic prosperity that would justify complete eradication of child labour. Hence, the state as an ad hoc measure, must bring the labourers under the purview of some protective legislations that would make registration

compulsory, give standard definition of child labour, regulate the hours of work, lay down the standard working condition and fix the minimum wages for the child etc.

#### *Welfare Programme :*

To ameliorate the condition of working children, it is suggested that the state must embark upon elaborate child welfare programmes, such as:

- (a) health care facilities;
- (b) grant of stipends; and
- (c) recreational facilities.

The government must, under field extension programmes, establish mobile hospitals to take care of the health problems of working children and provide them with the required medicines and treatment free of cost. Or else, every working child should be registered with the State Medical Department and be given a medical care so that he or she gets free medical treatment and medicine from the recognised government hospital.

It would be worthwhile after determining the levels of poverty of the working children to make a provision for the grant of stipends to them. This may reduce the number of child labour and increase the motivation to go to schools.

Recognising the inability of employers to provide recreational facilities to the working children, it is suggested that Sports Council of the State must draw sports schedule in such a way that the working children are involved. For this purpose, in every district of the state, branches of Sports Council should be spent to bring about the promotion of child sports like Volley ball, *Kabaddi*, Low jumping, Slow racing etc. The working children may take part in these sports during the recess breaks or at the day end after over of their works.

#### *Educational Facilities :*

The employment of child labourers denies the children's opportunity for receiving any formal education. As in view of the economic compulsions, the working children cannot be removed to the day time schools, it is suggested that the state must open morning time and evening time schools where the working children could be enrolled for education. In these schools, books and stationeries should be provided free of cost to these children. Thus children should also have access to educational opportunities, to get at least the basic

education and hopefully the basic vocational education, which would develop their potentiality to be workers and responsible citizens.

*Voluntary Organisations for Welfare of the Child Labourers :*

As the main cause of exploitation of child labourers is the lack of their own organisation or union, it will be in the fitness of things, if the child welfare activities organise themselves to ensure the welfare of child labourers. The office bearers of such unions must be drawn from among the social reformers, doctors, legal experts, religious luminaries and the human rights advocates. Only such unions can earn better working conditions for the working children and protect them from the abuse of human rights by their employers.

*Lengthening of the recess breaks :*

Sleep, rest and playing are among the important psychological and physiological needs of the child. As such, it is suggested that the recess break must sufficiently be lengthened to fulfil these needs. At present the recess break in the various activities covered under the present study are too small to allow children to sleep, rest or play. The breaks are even insufficient for comfortably taking meals or tea. The child labourers when over loaded with work do not get even a little time for rest, and hence tries to have a sigh of relief through resorting to intoxication and other unhealthy activities. Law must as such take into cognisance the need for lengthening the recess break.

*Community based meeting and workshops :*

The trade unions and social welfare agencies should organise community based meeting and workshops among the working children and their parents and guardians in their locality where they can exchange views and realise the need to take effective steps to better the lot of child labourer.

*Fixation of minimum hours of work :*

The proposed legislation should regulate minimum hours of work for child labour in unorganised sector. This will go a long way in minting the employers from taking exorbitant amount of work from the tender children. Night work should be totally banned,

the day work for the child should not exceed four to five hours a day with a recess break for rest and entertainment.

*Good working conditions and fixation of minimum wages :*

The proposed protective legislation must lay down construction of well-ventilated and lighted workhouses. The wages have a great significance for workers, than any other matter, it should therefore be in accordance with his needs and requirements. While fixing wages as such, the legislators must see to it that child labourers do not get lesser wages than that of their adult workers for the same kind and amount of work. In addition to fixing minimum wages, the law should prescribe minimum amount of stipend to the working children during the apprenticeship period.

*Public Awareness :*

It is suggested that a still more powerful public awareness on the problem should be generated through various media.

*Detailed survey on child labour :*

Detailed study will go a long way in helping the planners to have a correct idea of the nature and magnitude of the problem and consequently government can better deal with the problem.

Combating child labour is not an easy task. As it is a social evil, a social movement should be generated against this evil. Both government and non-government organisations need to develop a joint strategy and a comprehensive and pragmatic approach towards protection of working children of the world. The problem can be dealt with only through a series of short and long-term measure. The governments and the NGOs should arrive at a formula suited to the national, regional and local conditions. The governments may be more effective in using legislative measures and formulating policy to ensure strict adherence to certain minimum labour standards in the areas of employment, income and compulsory education. The NGOs can be more effective in the areas like advocacy, organising work, implementing small local projects etc. The governments and NGOs should function with in the framework of partnership. Only in this way their working may bring some good results in combating the problem of child labour.