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### Child labour in India: Morality

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#### Abstract:

*A holistic development of our society is still a far cry though there have been immense advancement of science and technology. India even after seven decades of independence has been facing the menace of child labour owing to population explosion, poverty, superstitions etc. As per data recorded in the process of 2011 census, the number of child labour is around 10.1 million. Child labour is a menace which is detrimental to the physical and mental health of the victim child. It also is an obstacle to the prosperity of a nation. What is the way out we may be looking forward to?*

*Legal measures in this regard may be a necessary, though not sufficient condition to overcome this evil. What is the crying need of the day for all concerned is to attain a moral standard. The society at large should have a proper ethics and morality to understand the damage being done by the menace of child labour.*

*We all are morally obliged to contribute to prepare every child as ideal citizen in future. It is our morality to raise our voice with firm determination to eradicate this social evil.*

**Keywords: Child labour, Morality, holistic development, Ideal citizen, ethics.**

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**Introduction:** Certain pre-emptive deliberations are needed at the outset to have clarity with regard to moral questions in connection with the issue of Child labour afflicting the society at large. No supernatural entity ought to be referred to get into the root cause of the issue in question. This sort of exercise to sort out moral issues in terms of any so-called super-natural entity will definitely obscure the problem rather than getting us anywhere around the solution. What is required, therefore, is a sincere recognition to the effect that Child labour is exclusively a mundane issue.

Any sincere endeavour to get into the root of Child labour menace must refrain from any mythical and mystical explanation of divine distribution of curse or blessings as common in religion.

#### **Objectives:**

- 1) To highlight the menacing existence of Child labour in an independent country.
- 2) To point out the indifferent attitude of society at large.

- 3) To draw attention of the authority concerned to set priority in addressing the burning socio-economic issues.
- 4) To emphasize on the commitment all concerned should have to the society.
- 5) To prove the immorality of the phenomenon of child labour.
- 6) To explain the factors responsible for the existence of child labour.
- 7) To establish that a Nation cannot prosper with the menace of child labour.

**Research Methodology:** The methodology of any research depends on the nature of the subject concerned. Sincere efforts and initiatives notwithstanding, any research endeavour is bound to fall short of its desired goal unless the precise methodology is resorted to. The present work, basically thematic one, aiming at the moral aspect of the menace of child labour. Some of the major standards of morality has been dealt with. The upholders of those standards, as much as feasible have been gone through to extract the core. The negativity inherent in the phenomenon of child labour has been deliberated in the light of the moral standards dealt with. Owing to the thematic nature of the work certain research papers, contextually connected with the papers, have been consulted to get the subject further elaborated.

**Child labour -- from Marxist point of view:** The question of Morality in the context of Child Labour issue is quite a significant one to be dealt with in reference of economic, political, social and cultural structure of a given society. Morality, often misgiven as having its origin in religion, is integrally related to the socio - politico - economic reality of the contemporary time. The celebrated base - superstructure theory propounded by Karl Marx may be referred to in this context. Moral questions owe their origin exclusively in the hard socio-economic reality of the contemporary time and the satisfactory answers too of the questions can never be had independent of and without reference to this hard reality. No fanciful idea will do in this regard. Any sort of deliberation on the moral aspect of the Child labour issue is to be linked with the pertinent social reality.

That human beings have their footings on the socio-economic reality is the basic proposition with regard to any deliberation on the moral aspect of the Child labour menace. In *Capital*, the section on the “working day” makes long references from labor studies of English factories during the 19th century. Marx reports horrid stories of young children working over 12 hours at a times, given little education, and how they were kept awake with drugs and alcohol in order to be kept barely lucid and operate dangerous machinery. (htt) Every Human being irrespective of the social stratum he or she may belong to has right to lead a life with dignity with adequate access to the basic amenities including proper education and worthy hygienic living condition. In addition to that everyone is entitled to betterment in every respect. A modern welfare state worth calling ought to comply with these parameter.

**Child labour -- from Kantian point of view:** Pre- Renaissance mediaeval view that Ethics and Religion do have an integral relation, (wherein god rather than human being is held to be the sovereign authority), has long before been dispensed off. Modern ethical

approaches, having sharply departed from the mediaeval ones, are out and out mundane in nature. Immanuel Kant, the great German Philosopher can be regarded as having pioneered the trend of human sovereignty in the sphere of morality without any "divine intervention" as far as the assessment of the quality of human conduct is concerned. Man as a rational agent can ill afford to be guided by anything beyond himself. The spirit of Kantian moral philosophy stands sharply against the menace of Child labour. Human persons are "persons because their nature already marks them out as an ends in themselves- that is, as something which ought not to be used merely as means- and consequently imposes to that extent a limit on all arbitrary treatment of them (and is an object of reverence)" (Kant, 1964, p. 96). Here, Kant firmly justifies his contention on human value by reiterating the nature of man, rationality, as the prime factor by which every man should be considered as the finality of all actions. Man, in virtue of his/her reason, is the end and not as a mean which leads to his/her dignity. (htt1)

Kant's advocacy for human autonomy, suggesting every rational agent to be a member of the kingdom of end, is a noble contribution in the field of moral philosophy. A human Child, engaged as child labour, is denied this autonomy. Kant categorically emphasised on the point that, human beings under no circumstances ought to be used as means towards any end. But, ironically enough, a huge number of hapless Children, supposed to go to school and be rollicking in playground, are under compulsion to be engaged as money earner for their families. These ill-fated kids are used by their parents for money and the employers as low priced labourers. This socio-economic reality is awfully in contravention to what Kant had upheld as human autonomy. Kant's moral philosophy is all about sovereignty of human reason which alone is to be referred to. Human beings, in any manner, used as means to an end is tantamount to human beings relegated. As a matter of fact, the employment of children is about the instrumental use of cheap labour and not for the end in itself or the establishment of dignity, rather the opposite. (Daniel Krummel, 2021) Nothing short of dignity based on unconditional autonomy, according to Kant, can be desired by human being for a life with moral worth. Any deliberation from Kantian perspective, the phenomena of child labour is out and out immoral. A human society worth calling can ill afford to withstand the menacing existence of the phenomenon as derogatory as Child labour due to its incompatibility with human reason. So, it's morally obligatory for the society at large to get rid of this evil. The Kantian theory of morality is assertive of the way human thought and, thereby, human civilization wades its way to progression. Any socio-politico-economic and cultural phenomena that fails to get through the test of reason, has to get aside to pave the way for the newer. Future of a nation can never be expected to be bright if all concerned stand indifferent with little concern for the evil of Child labour. The onus in this regard can't be left exclusively for those at the helm of affairs. It is socially obligatory for even the common people. The moral aspect of the child labour issue is to be judged absolutely in terms of reason. Kant's uncompromising stance with regard to the discordance between emotion and morality is clear assertion that the any sort of initiative out of emotion will add no moral value. According

to Kant absolute elimination of the Child labour menace is an imperative for all concerned only because this phenomenon is universally in disharmony with our rationality.

**Child labour -- from John Stuart Mill's Point of view:** Similarly the issue of Child labour is not in congruence with the Utilitarian theory of morality advocated by John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism, as a moral theory is in the similar mundane spirit, upholds its moral theory based on what is known as Psychological hedonism which is of the view that it's quite normal for human beings to seek material contentment. That there is no ethical merit in any sort of denial of this contentment is strongly advocated by the Psychological hedonism. Based on this foundation, Ethical hedonism was developed. Ethical hedonism upheld the stand that we human beings ought to seek contentment in a better way. John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism, one of the forms of Ethical hedonism had advocated for Maximum Happiness for Maximum Number. The resources available, generally embezzled or misappropriated by the "fortunate minority", ought to be meant for maximum possible number because, according to this theory, it's not feasible to make anything available for all. So it's morally obligatory for all concerned to maximize contentment or happiness is What J.S.Mill had upheld. Individual rights and can be used to privilege the preferences of the majority. Overall, it is a useful tool to evaluate how moral decisions can be made, and that can be seen by how it actively informs decision frameworks used by governments and corporations. (2023) The moral status of the Child labour issue is to be interpreted from this maximization principle. A modern and democratic society has it for each and every citizen the entitlement of equality. John Stuart Mill himself, being the outcome of the European Renaissance, was a staunch supporter of equality. Every citizen must have adequate access to the resources which, often, is monopolised by privileged ones. The obvious implications of Mill's approach is that no one should be unduly deprived of what one deserves; Similarly no one should enjoy anything what one does not deserve. The logical implication is that resources, if not enough for all, must be distributed according to merit. But the fact unfortunately stands that merit is often overpowered by undue privileges. The concept of modern welfare state had developed in between seventeenth and eighteenth century, on the basis of Principle of maximum happiness for maximum number. The Child labour menace can be addressed in terms of this ethical perspective. No parents, unless under compulsion, can be willingly ready to get their children engaged for money earning work at tender age. It is the misery caused by deprivation which put these hapless families to be under compulsion to get their children engaged as child labour. The Child labour menace is a clear aberration of justice. Social structures with a huge number of children under compulsion to stay away school and playground is evidently an unethical one. A society where child population are deprived of access to the basic needs must go for self-analysis and self-criticism. A rationalised distribution system ought to be resorted to ensure this sort of deprivation. In this context, Mill's famous dictum may be quoted. "It is better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied". An all-round qualitative development of all, as far as practicable, was what Mill had meant by this saying. The implementation of this objective according to Mill's Utilitarianism is morally obligatory for all concerned.

State is to be held responsible to prioritise its agenda in order that this gross impoverishment in terms of deprivations of its child population. The Central government of India, by virtue of enacting the Right to free and compulsory primary education as one of the fundamental rights has taken some great initiative towards this noble direction. The Government of India, in its bid to stand by girl children coming from needy families, has introduced "Beti Bachao Beti Podao"(Teach girls Save girls). The mid-day meal distributed free of cost across entire country is another step taken in this regard. The government of West Bengal has a number of welfare programmes meant for the children from financially distressed families. These include Kanyasree, Sobujsathee and others which are introduced with a view to extending assistance to those who cannot afford. All such initiatives on the part of the government - state or central - can be attributed to the maximization principle of John Stuart Mill.

A nation cannot prosper unless the leadership in particular and the society at large do have a moral obligation and accordingly have orientation for people's welfare. Those who are at the helm of affairs must have a commitment to the people. To put the matter precisely, the government must be well aware of the hard realities of unfair distribution of social wealth which generates a parasitical privileged class in the society. The vulgar distinction between 'haves' and 'have nots' must be taken note of to assess the situation to chalk out the plans and programmes according to priority. The Child labour evil is an inevitable outcome of the unethical system of distribution and negligence coupled with inadequate redressal of the problem. Apart from the official administration, the citizenry too do have a moral obligation in this regard. Lack of morality and prosperity worth calling can't go alongside. The civil society can play a conscientious role to keep the power that be in the right track. The citizenry equipped with rational approach and moral courage can play the role of watch dog. However, exploitation and abuse of children can be controlled with changes in societal attitudes and strict implementation of legal and protective measures. Various government agencies, paediatricians, other professional bodies, persons of faith, community leaders and all civil society need to work together to demand child rights and stop their exploitation. (Srivastava, 2019)

The factor responsible for the Child labour menace is morally reprehensible. The fall out of this menacing phenomenon too is no less reprehensible. The evil consequences of this menace need to be addressed. The Child labour menace, truly speaking, is not itself the disease. It's rather the symptom of a chronic disease caused by several inconsistencies left unabated. With the bottom-line of moral obligation on the part of all concerned, the reality could have been better. Certain factors can very well be identified: rampant corruption in every sphere of the society, improper Planning for development, distorted sense of development, failure to identify the area of priority, inadequate budgetary allocations for education and health of common people. What is unfortunate is that these questions often get suppressed under vulgar nationalism. The prominent political parties, instead of going

for long term benefit of common people, often get carried by the calculations of immediate benefits in electoral Politics.

**Factors responsible for Child labour:**

**Corruption:** In India corruption has become a deleterious phenomenon to a carcinogenic extent damaging almost every sphere of human life. Sacrifices of the great freedom fighters for the Independent India they had dreamt for have turned out to be an irony. Corruption like any other social evil has a huge negative impact leading to a moral disaster in the society at large. A society which already stands vulnerable to and ensnared by consumerism can do little to resist the allurements of easy money, if available. Lack of consciousness among average people about their lawful rights too is further worsening the conditions. Common people prefer bribing for what they are legally entitled to rather than pursuing the due process. Corruption all around to such an alarming degree will definitely adversely impact on the children belonging to the below poverty line families.

**Improper Planning for development & Distorted sense of development:** 'Development' has become a blanket word frequently and cunningly used for political motive. Development in the true sense of term must, in the spirit of inclusiveness, cover the poorest, marginalised section of people of a society. But the fact of the matter ironically stands that these section of people, in spite of huge pomp and grandeur, do have their fate sealed without the slightest ray of hope. The basic anomalies in the economy is to be held responsible for this deplorable reality. The model of development, currently and prominently perceptible is not meant for all. Illiteracy, starvation, malnutrition -- all at an alarming degree - are corroborative enough in this regard. Development worth calling has to be an inclusive programme covering even the marginalised ones. The much trumpeted development, nowhere around the social justice, can do little to bring welfare to common people. The on-going political regime and the big capital houses across the globe are at each other's service. It requires sincere willingness on the part of political dispensation to implement programmes aiming at social justice. Until and unless the anti- people model of development is scrapped, the menace of Child labour will wreak havoc. Development without common people having adequate access to the basic needs is of no significance.

**Inadequate budgetary allocation for education and health:** The concept of welfare state has in it the provisions for adequate budgetary allocation in order to accommodate the downtrodden people. But the fact of the matter stands quite in contravention of the principles and spirit of Welfare state. The idea of welfare is often trampled in the name of democracy as the "rule of majority" which sounds sheer mockery when majority of the population, haplessly, live in destitution. The budgetary allocations for defence and internal security, ever since independence, have always been much higher compared to common people's health and education...the problem of child labour to some extent can be solved by compulsory primary education. . (Das, 2014) Unless this scenario changes, eradication of the evil of child labour will remain a far cry.

**Failure to identify the area of priority:** People at the helm of affairs often are inclined to get immediate political mileage for their narrow vote bank interest. A government, if pro people, is supposed to set its programme keeping in view the long term interest. But unfortunately what happens instead is that populist measures taken by the governments irrespective of their political ideology. These popular measures serve no true interest of common people. Doll politics by and large has turned out to be the controlling factor of our parliamentary democracy. The political dispensation ought to address the basic socio-economic issues and set their agenda accordingly. All citizens of an independent country have the right to live with dignity. A government is duty bound to create opportunities for employment according to eligibility. This approach alone can guide a government to set its agenda according to priority. The less there is Poverty, the more a nation move forward to a society free from the evil of Child labour.

**Conclusion:** The moral questions interwoven in the phenomenon of Child labour have been dealt with in terms of the socio-economic reality which, unless based on Justice, will keep aggravating. A society where majority of people remain apathetic with no concern for others is definitely a degenerating one. Prosperity of a human society depends on inculcation of human values. Material prosperity alone makes no human society worth calling. The degree of moral value prevailing in a society is what determines the quality of human society. A mere human conglomerate is not to be a worthy human society. Human beings are not destined to confine themselves in mere biological and physio - chemical activities. The glory of human life is to be attributed to the ethics and culture reflected in the society. *Tomoso maa yotirgomoya, mritormaa amrito gomoya* lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to life. These are some of the precious lessons from the Upanishads which have a Clarion call for mankind to transcend the limitations. From this standpoint human life is not meant for sensual living which is why mankind is preached to rise above sensual living. Human beings are here for something big and noble which shall elude as long as sensual gratification continue to be the goal of human life.

An egoist way of living exclusively independent of and/or indifferent to others can never be a sustainable human life. Ever since pre historic time, human life has been proceeding on and on and optimistically will keep proceeding absolutely collectively. Any deviation, however negligible and apparently inconsequential, is adversely significant. Little such deviations on the part of individual person, day in and day out, will turn out to be perilous for human society. Herein do the moral issues pertaining to the evil of Child labour arise. If Child labour system is a social problem, then whosoever to be held directly or indirectly responsible can't also evade moral responsibility. People at the helm of administrative affairs are directly responsible on account of their failure to set pro-people agenda and /or lack of positive willingness to set priority according to need of people. Common people too are responsible, albeit indirectly, because it is by virtue of common people's voting right, political parties have access to power. In addition, we common people ought not to stay quite indifferent to the burning socio-economic and political issues. In a democratic set

up, conscious citizens ought to create pressure upon the government to go for pro people policies. But ironically the fact often stands that people are not at all concerned with their duties. The children engaged as child labour are our co citizens. It's unbecoming of a nation claiming itself to be practising democracy and boasting for modernity to have a huge number of its child population, away from school and playground, under compulsion to be engaged as child labour at a tender age. This shameful and despicable reality does not stand in compatibility with human reason. So it's a moral obligation for every human being to work for doing away with the system of child labour. A human society worth calling must guarantee its child population a healthy upbringing consisting of parental affection, access to school and playground etc. No matter how hard India tries, child labour always will exist until the need for it is removed. The developments of India as a nation is being hampered by child labour. Children are growing up illiterate because they have been working and not attending school. (Dr.Mitesh V.Badiwala, n.d.) That will transform this mundane world into a 'new heaven' where our 'Little Angels' will keep rollicking on and on.

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