

## Child Labour and Literature



Suman Kumari  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
L.N.Mithila University Darbhanga,  
Bihar, India

The kind of labour that snatches childhood from the children is known as Child Labour. The employment of children in those sorts of work which are dangerous for their physical and mental health as well as growth are considered as Child Labour. It's a curse which deprives the children of their basic or birth rights such as — Right to Survival(to life, health, nutrition, name, nationality), Right to Development(to education, care, leisure, recreation, cultural activities), Right to Protection(from exploitation, abuse, neglect), Right to Participation(to expression, information, thought, religion).<sup>1</sup>

According to the ILO (International Labour Organization):

Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour that is to be targeted for elimination. Children's or adolescents' participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling, is generally regarded as being something positive. This includes activities such as helping parents around the home, assisting a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays. These kinds of activities contribute to children's development and to the welfare of the families; they provide them with skills and experience, and help to prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life.<sup>2</sup>

Childhood is the spring of life; it is considered as the golden period of one's life. But millions of children, all over the world, are being tricked out of this golden period and the spring of life. It is quite evident that in spite of many strict laws, regulations and programmes against child labour, it is still in practice. Around 150 million children – 63 million girls and 87 million boys – are in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide. Nearly half of all those in child labour are made to do work which are potentially dangerous and pose great threat to their health and overall development. It is true that the rate with which the children were being employed has diminished over the decade, but we still have a long way to go.

It is not that child labour is something that has emerged ten or twenty years back. It is persistent since centuries, around the globe. As literature mirrors the contemporary society, we can witness this grim reality in old literary works also. Earlier the child labour was synonymous to slavery. Now also it can be considered as a slightly less intense form of slavery. Less intense, as still child labour is in practice, still basic rights of those children involved in it are being denied and still they are forced to work in inhuman conditions, but the difference is that, earlier it was not seen by the masses as something illegal and there were no such laws preventing child exploitation. However, it was considered to be something immoral by some noble souls, such as literary giants of those times. The transitional poet, William Blake(1757-1827), paints the pathetic picture of child labour, during his times, in his famous poem entitled "The Chimney Sweeper":

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry "weep! weep! weep! weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.<sup>3</sup>

Charles Dickens, who himself had been a child labourer once, has presented the condition of child labour during the Victorian Age, in his masterpiece, named *David Copperfield*. His pains can be felt through his words from the same novel:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul.... and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more;<sup>4</sup>

It is also considered to be his autobiographical novel. At the tender age of twelve, Dickens' family conditions at that time compelled him to work in a shoe mending and manufacturing factory, at a very minimal wage. That is why he used to empathise with the underprivileged children and presented their trials and tribulations through his various works.

Indian writer, Anees Jung, presents the modern day picture of child labour, in her book, titled *Lost Spring, Stories of the Stolen Childhood*. In it, she talks about the deprived children whose poverty and helplessness force them to work at the time when they should be studying, playing, and leading a carefree life, under the sheer protection of their guardians, in a cosy and comfortable environment rather than unknowingly harming their physical and mental health as well as their lamb-like innocence. Many litterateurs around the world have raised this issue from time to time and censured it to bring about a drastic change; and things have changed also to a great extent, but calling it a drastic change would be an exaggeration.

In India, child labour and exploitation of children is one of the main problems which hinders not only the proper growth of the child under exploitation but also, in a way, it impedes the proper growth of the country. In India, apart from working as waiters and labourers at various shops, children are employed in hazardous works such as beedi, crackers, pencils, matchsticks and bangle making. As a result, every year, hundreds of children suffer burns, many end up losing their eye sights partially and some fully, many suffer from various respiratory problems and many problems remain unexpressed. Indeed there are laws prohibiting such inhuman exploitation, but there are big loopholes also in their execution and implementation, because of which such practices are persisting.

Child labour is the by-product of unawareness, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. In Below Poverty Line families children are considered to be an extra earning hand. Hence, by the time their children reach the age of ten or eleven, they start making them work somewhere, because of their pitiable economic condition. Sometimes, poor children are forced to work as a bonded labourer in order to pay off the debt of the family. Many a times, parents send their children to work as household worker in some well off family at a very tender age. For them, spending money on education of their children is useless investment, as they fail to see its profit in near future.

The present state of many futures of the world is in pathetic condition. So, it becomes the responsibility of all the adults of the world to make this world a better place, not just for the advantaged children, but also for the deprived and underprivileged ones. Therefore, only making stringent laws will not do, the authorities and governments must ensure strict implementation of the same. It is the duty of common individuals also to make the authorities aware, if they find such malpractices happening around them.

#### REFERENCES:-

1. About Child Rights, [cry.org/child-rights](http://cry.org/child-rights)
2. International Labour Organization(ILO), What is child labour Defining child labour, [ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm](http://ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm)
3. Blake, William. (1988) Erdman, David V. (ed.). *The Complete Poetry and Prose*. (Newly revised ed.). Anchor Books. p. 10.
4. Dickens, Charles: *David Copperfield*. Ch. 11. p. 234.