

Child Labour: Can Education be a Solution?

At every dhaba, small restaurant, chai ki dukaan we can find small children working at the age when they should be enjoying their childhood. They are abused and beaten by their masters, are not paid enough and are forced to live in shabby conditions. Sometimes, children are forced to live away from their parents in a different state where they don't have anyone to confide their secrets and fears to.

India hosts the largest number of child labourers in the world today. With the increasing process of industrialisation, urbanisation and continuous increase in population on one side, greater awareness about human development is on the other side, various social problems which have so far been abandoned or unattended, have come to assume significance. A number of policy initiatives and programmes have been undertaken in this country over the last decade with the basic objective of dealing with the problem of the rapidly increasing number of child workers.

A widespread notion is that child labour is closely associated with the lack of education as a child who is in school full time is more likely not to engage in child labour. Therefore free and compulsory education is necessary for the curbing this problem.

In 11th five year plan, the education department was given the responsibility to ensure that all children in 5 to 8 age group are enrolled and retained in school so that they do not join the labour force. Through SSA, education department has to focus on the children in the 9 to 14 age groups like child labour, migrating children, street children, domestic child workers and school dropout and never enrolled children and provide for residential and non-residential bridge courses, seasonal hostels, mobile schools and work-site schools for children who migrate with their families must from the very beginning be linked to a forma government school.

But the problem is not enrolment; it is retaining those children in the school. This can be only by providing quality education. Teachers have to be recruited in adequate numbers and providing students with necessary books and equipment. Studies have shown that children who receive quality education are more empowered to escape poverty. This quality education should be provided to children during period of compulsory education that is up to 14 years to stem the flow to the labour force.

NGOs can play a very important part in this regard. They can be really helpful in educating the parents about the importance of education in one's life. They have to know that if children study now then the life of poverty and deprivation could be a temporary thing otherwise they will be stuck in the life of sufferings forever. They can also raise funds to provide these children with required books, uniforms and fees of their school which would provide children with an incentive to attend school.

Child labour is that curse to society that destroys innocence of children and their childhood. This has to be eradicated and education is surely the first step towards this.

