An asset to humanity, undoubtedly, is children. They constitute the foundation of society, deserving, therefore, the utmost care and attention. By investing on children, a country, nation or society would be actually investing on its own development, on the future of the world and on the global society. Unfortunately, most nation-states have failed to provide care and protection to the children. Millions of children all over the world continue to undergo exploitation and abuse, suffer from malnutrition, hunger illiteracy, death, destitution, disease and various other forms of structural violence. Studies have also shown that rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on Child Rights are routinely violated in most parts of the world. The Report of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) entitled, *The State of the World’s Children*, 2005, states that right of over one billion children are violated because they are deprived of at least one or more basic services required to survive, grow and develop. The report further states that millions of children are growing up in families and communities torn apart by armed conflicts and there are sharp reductions in life expectancy due to HIV/AIDS. Although, the problem is most acute in Africa, HIV prevalence rates are also rising in other parts of the world, the report points out (*The Hindu*, 10 December, 2004). The developing world is much more vulnerable to child abuse. Much of child abuses that take place within the four walls of homes remain as invisible phenomena and hence in most cases go unreported. It, too, has a strong gender dimension. In this part of the report, we propose to take up the question of security of children in general, and the marginalised children, in particular.

A large number of children are marginalised and excluded from the larger society. They are deprived and dispossessed. Here, we must point
out that the issue of security of children is yet to gain centrality in the human security discourse. Any attempt at understanding human security will remain incomplete without understanding the security of children. The security of children is linked with the question of human security of larger society. In many cases, the security of children is inherited i.e., children carry the security and insecurity of their parents, and the way they carry the advantage and disadvantage of their parents. The children of the poor families carry the vicious burden of their parental poverty. Because of poverty, children often drop out of school which in most cases, entrap them into lifelong poverty. Existing social inequalities coerce the children of the marginalised groups to suffer more. The inequalities based on wealth, caste, race, religion, ethnicity and gender, in different parts of the world; violate the rights of the children particularly those belonging to impoverished groups. These children are invariably denied their right to survival, protection and development.

Table 5.1: The United Nations Conventions of the Child, 1989

Children have the right to:
- Enough food, clean water and healthcare
- An adequate standard of living
- Be with their family or those who will care for them best
- Protection from all exploitation, physical, mental and sexual abuse
- Special protection when exposed to armed conflict
- Be protected from all kinds of discrimination
- Be protected from work that threatens their education; health or development
- Special care and training if disabled
- Play
- Education
- Have their opinions taken into account in decisions which affect their lives
- Know what their rights are


The philosophy behind UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989) was that children are equal but not alike. This calls for extension of special support during childhood in the best interest of the child. Article 3.1 of the Convention states that, “in all actions concerning children
whether undertaken by public or private, government welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration (UN, 1989). The policies of various nations also regard children as an important asset and their nurture as the primary responsibility of the nation. Despite all these, children are facing difficulties in enjoying their basic rights.

There is no unanimity regarding the definition of a child. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every human being under 18 years is a child unless majority is attained earlier under national law. The 1860 Indian Penal Code regards person under 12 years of age as a child. According to Child Marriage Restrain Act 1992, male below 21 years of age and female below 18 years of age are children. Again, Factories Act 1958 and Child Labour Act 1986 regard persons below 14 years of age as a child.

Although, a child is defined in different ways, usually a person below 14 years of age is regarded as a child. A child today is the citizen of tomorrow, and hence their nurture should be the prime responsibility of the state. However, in modern times also, children suffer from insecurities in different spheres of life. This insecurity is more among the children of poor and backward communities, as they do not get a proper environment in which they can enjoy their basic rights. From a very early age, they are loaded with family burden which results in the loss of childhood. Child labour, child abuse, violence against children, education and health are the areas that generate and perpetuate the insecurity of children. Therefore, it would be an imperative to understand these areas in more detail so as to understand the question of security, or for that matter, insecurity of children.

5.1 CHILD LABOUR

United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 sets universal legal standards for protection of child against neglect, abuse and exploitation at work and ensuring their basic human rights. Yet, millions of children are denied their right to life with justice and dignity and are forced to work under sub-human conditions because they are poor and deprived. These child labourers are exploited, exposed to hazardous work conditions and paid a pittance for their long hours of work. Child labour in India is engaged in a variety of activities and is
prone to exploitation in different ways, such as domestic labour, forced/bonded labour, commercial sex worker, industrial and agricultural labour, street work and works from the family. However, a comprehensive definition of child labour should encompass all the elements that keep children away from the activities that would lead them to normal and healthy growth. Forced to forego education, shouldering responsibilities far beyond their years, they become worldly wise and never know what childhood is all about in contradiction to their peers who are still woefully naive under the protective shield of their parents.

All over the world, a large number of child workers are in the informal sector and many are self-employed on family farms and enterprises. According to the International Labour Organisations (ILO), whole generations of children are being deprived of the chance to take their rightful place in the society and economy of the 21st century. The situation has been worsening, with one in every eight children in the world being exposed to the worst forms of child labour that endangers the child’s physical, mental or moral well being (Devarajan, 2003:6). It is stated that largest number of child workers are in Asia, followed by Africa and Latin America. There are also huge numbers of child workers in Kenya, Senegal, Bangladesh, Nigeria, India, Turkey, Pakistan and other developing countries. A significant number of child labourers happen to be below the age of 10 years, though the actual number is not known (Bhattacharjee, 2003:4). The work participation rate of children in rural areas is much more than in the urban areas. Rural children also work harder than their urban counterparts. They perform various works at home and have to work in the fields as well. By and large, the child workers belong to the poor families, who are compelled by economic consideration to join the labour force. According to an ILO survey in 1995, after Africa (26.3 per cent), Asia has the highest percentage (13 per cent) of child labourers in the age group of 10-14 years in the world. In Asia, while Bangladesh has 31.4 per cent of the children and Pakistan has 20 per cent of the children in 10-14 years age group as economically active, in India nearly 15 per cent of the children are child labourers (The Hindustan Times, June 22, 1996). According to the then Union Labour Minister, the number of employed children below 14 years of age in various economic activities in 1995 was 17 million, out of which 9.5 million were males and 7.5 million females (The Hindustan Times, March 21, 1995). Another study puts the number of working children in our country at 44 million i.e., 5.2 per cent of the total
population. About 80 per cent of these working children are from rural areas. Two-thirds of them belong to the 12-15 years age group and the rest are below 12 years. As per the Census of India, there were 10.75 million child workers in the age group 5-14 years in 1971, 13.64 million in 1981 and 11.28 million in 1991. Table 5.2 reflects the problem of child labour in India distinctively.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show the magnitude of the problem of child labour in India. Table 5.2 shows that in 1987-88 there were 1,26,738 child workers working as principal and subsidiary workers in the rural areas of India, while in the urban areas the number of such workers was 18,660. However, we can see an improvement in the picture as the number of such workers in the rural areas has decreased to 85,841 and in urban areas to 12,743 in 1999-2000. It brings to light the fact that the labour force participation rate of rural children is much higher than that of the urban children.

The evidence from the 55th round of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data indicate a high incidence of child labour with 8.4 million children active in the labour force. If the wider definition of child labour is accepted, that is, all the children who do not attend school should be counted as child labour, then the incidence of child labour is enormous.

There are various reasons behind child labour and the most important among them is poverty of the family. These child workers are considered to be necessary to maintain the economic balance in various homes. In many developing countries including India, children work in textile, carpet, footwear, glass and fire work industries. They are also engaged in gemstone polishing and limestone quarrying industries. Such industries are highly hazardous for the health of the children. But the employers and society are least concerned about that. The child workers engaged in tea, coffee, sugar and tobacco plantations suffer from frequent fever due to long working hours in humidity. A number of studies have pointed out the hazardous effects of the work that child workers perform. Children suffer due to an unhealthy work environment and long hours of work leading to malnourishment, lack of sleep and other disorders. These children carry such ailments into their adult life, thus, forming a part of the sick and under-productive labour force. For example, tobacco-dust causes burning eyes, conjunctivitis, rhinitis, mycosis, dryness, occupational dermatitis, bronchitis etc. Children are exposed to toxic substances in mines, factories and agricultural hot
Table 5.2: Child Labour Force in India – Principal and Secondary Usual Status

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2878</td>
<td>9458</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>3581</td>
<td>4377</td>
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<td>8788</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>4285</td>
<td>5002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5075</td>
<td>18246</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>7866</td>
<td>9379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54690</td>
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<td>56370</td>
<td>4145</td>
<td>9546</td>
<td>31917</td>
<td>43140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94736</td>
<td>126738</td>
<td>12169</td>
<td>18660</td>
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<td>93381</td>
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<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>99809</td>
<td>144984</td>
<td>12961</td>
<td>26526</td>
<td>80984</td>
<td>102763</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Alternate Estimate of Child Labour 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In Millions</th>
<th>% to the total child population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Children</td>
<td>228.15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Going Children</td>
<td>165.80</td>
<td>72.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in labour force</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither in school or labour force</td>
<td>53.95</td>
<td>23.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total active and potential child labour</td>
<td>62.35</td>
<td>27.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


houses. Postural disabilities are developed in jobs that require constant bending. Children exposed to lead poisoning in their work places face detrimental effects on their brains (Naidu and Kapadia, 1985).

In urban areas, the children are engaged in picking rags and hawking goods and their number is unrecorded. We can also find child workers in garages, tea stalls and various business and industrial houses. These little children work for bare survival. They are abused and beaten by their employers. Those children who work as domestic help take the overall burden of the house from cooking to washing and baby minding. These helpless kids cannot raise their voice in fear of their employers who often take full advantage of their poverty (Bhattacharjee, 2003:4).

The condition of children who work as street hawkers is very pathetic. These poor children everyday risk their life in the smoke and dust of an impatient traffic and can make just about Rs.50 a day. Besides, they have to play hide and seek with the police. If they are caught, the police beat them up and take away their earnings. Thus, in the evening they carry home not the money but the cruel remains of a day. They are fully aware of the hardships as well as the insecurities related to their jobs, but still cannot give it up being the sole bread earners of the family.

In the rural areas of India, children are often employed for grazing cattle, in agricultural activities and in home-based industries. Most of the child workers are concentrated among the landless agricultural households and are engaged in agricultural and households’ activities and in home-based enterprises such as food processing, weaving and handicrafts, bidi (indigenous cigarette) rolling, papad making industry etc. It has been estimated that business and trade absorb 23 per cent
while work in household covers 36 per cent of the child workers. Among these kids who work as child workers, those employed in hazardous works are more unfortunate. In Kashmir, the carpet-weaving industry employs small girls in neck-breaking work.

In another flourishing craft of this region—the fine hand embroidery, children are required to maintain the same posture for long hours and strain their eyes on intricate designs. This often leads to permanent physical deformities and eye damage. In and around Surat (Gujarat) boys in large numbers from early teens are engaged in diamond cutting operations, which cause irreparable damage to the eyes. The surveys of the metropolitan and mega cities make shocking revelations. Mumbai has the largest number of child labourers. Many children are working in the wood-carving industry, for 14 hours per day and getting just seven to eight rupees a day. They are also engaged in silk-weaving industry and mining sector. In most cases, children are favoured as they are docile and hence can be exploited.

In the tea gardens, where employment of children below 12 years is prohibited, girls who bring food to their working mothers are encouraged to stay back and help with the work. Again, the small boys have an important role to play in mining operations. While men do the digging work, boys carry coal to the surface. Children below 12 years are preferred because their low height allows them to walk without bending in the tunnels. Preference for child workers is more common in the unorganised sector as it is easy for the employers to circumvent laws. Children are often concealed from factory inspections. During inspection their ages are raised arbitrarily to make them eligible for employment (Ahuja, 1997:235).

The employers prefer child labourers to adults as their wages are minimal and they cannot protest. Children, on the other hand, work out of necessity as without their earning the standard of living of their families would decline further. A large number of them do not even have families or cannot count on them for support. The employers justify child work by saying that the work keeps children away from starvation and they are also prevented from committing crimes, which they would have otherwise indulged in, if they had no jobs. These child workers either supplement their parents' income or are the only wage earners in the family. Whatever may be the reason for child work, it is very touching to see these workers, because at an age when they should have played with friends and learnt lessons in the classroom, they are
Children

Children toiling for a bowl of rice. Child labour has adverse effects on the society also. These workers live in total darkness and they lose their childhood before time. They also lose their innocence and get immersed in all sorts of vices. Many of them become loafers, pickpockets or drug traffickers. Again, child labour keeps the child out of school and thus it is a major barrier to the development of society.

Child labour is inextricably linked to bonded labour. In Andhra Pradesh, 21 per cent of the bonded labourers are under sixteen. A study shows that at the time of entering bondage, many labourers are as young as five years old. In Orissa, one common way of clearing debt is to sell daughters, eight to ten years old, as maid servant to the creditor. In various parts of the country, bonded fathers, over 40 years old, free themselves by depositing their sons into bondage (Ahuja 1997:235). This practice among poor families, of pledging their child’s work against a loan, is seen by parents as a useful form of training; a source of security and a way of fending household expenditure (Gangrade and Gathia, 1983:120; Nieuwenhuys, 1994:939).

A large number of children work in dangerously polluted factories. They have to work near furnaces, which burn at a temperature of 1400° centigrade. They handle dangerous chemicals like arsenic and potassium. They work in glass blowing units where the work exerts their lungs and creates diseases like tuberculosis (Ahuja, 1997:236). Moreover, carpet-weaving, embroidery, silk-reeling, fishing and metal work lend them to a long period of apprenticeship in which a child is made to accept long hours of work and low pay in the hope of becoming master (Morice, 1981). Some of them work for nine to ten hours, including night shifts. After working for such long hours, their bodies ache, minds fog, hearts cry, but they cannot disobey the order of their employer.

Children in both rural and urban areas work as unpaid family helper in employer’s home or in families having own farms. These children get no recognition or money for the work done at home. Usually, work done at home is considered to be less exploitative but many a time child abuse and long hours of work in different conditions take place within the family. Again, there is more and more evidence that poor children who are not employed perform crucial work often in domestic arena, in subsistence agriculture and in the urban informal sector (Campos et.al. 1994; Gangrade and Gathia, 1983; Mile and Shiva, 1993). Thus, servicing the immediate household is a mandatory task for
the young children. They may also be sent to work as domestic help for the wealthier skin (Caldwell, 1982; Morice, 1982; Salazar, 1991). Besides, a large number of child workers are confined in small rooms under inhuman conditions and in the most unhygienic surroundings. The hazardous conditions take their toll. Some are injured in fire accidents. Thus, many of them become unemployable even at the age of twenty.

Thus, poverty is regarded as one of the important causes of child labour. However, Maggssasay award winner, Shanta Sinha, is of the view that poverty is not the root cause of child labour. Her argument is that in many villages, children of very poor families are in school, while their relatively better off counterparts are working. Therefore, according to her, it is not economic condition, but tradition, ignorance of illiterate parents, lack of access to alternative facilities at school discourages parents to send their children to school (Venkateshwarlu, 2003). But, one cannot deny the link between poverty, child labour and illiteracy. The problem of child labour emerges out of an inability on the part of the poor to access the right quarters and to articulate their demand effectively.

There is a belief that schooling is the best antidote to child labour. However, sometimes children's work is often combined with going to school. For example, in Kerala, where attending school is mandatory for children, they spend much time for earning cash for books, clothes and foods (Nieuwenhuys, 1993:100-09). Around the world, children undertake all kinds of odd jobs not only to help their families but also to defray the fast-rising costs of schooling, be it for themselves or for a younger sibling (Boyden, 1991; Hallak, 1990; La Fontaine, 1978 as cited in Nieuwenbuys, 2003:947). These young children who join the labour force at a tender age, damage their health before they actually grow up.

The government and various NGOs are putting effort to stop child labour. But these efforts failed to remove the problem from the society. According to ILO, the whole generation of children is being deprived of the chance to take the rightful place in the society and economy of the 21st century due to the worst form of child labour, which endangers children's physical, mental and moral well-being. Legislations of different countries link child labour quite arbitrarily to work in the factory and exclude a wide range of non-factory work. It, therefore, sanctifies unpaid work in the home or under parental supervision regardless of its implications for the child. Although the jobs like helping in family
Children

farms or in shops and hotels are not strictly prohibited both children and public feel it to be exploitative.

Various legislations have been made to regulate the employment of children and their hours of work. The first such act was the Factory Act of 1881. Then, Child Labour Act, 1933 was passed prohibiting employment of children below 14 years of age. The Factory Act of 1948 provided some safeguards to child labourers. In 1986, the parliament enacted the Child Labour Act, prohibiting the employment of children in certain jobs and improving the conditions of work in hazardous occupations. Indian constitution also makes provision to protect children against all kinds of exploitation. Notwithstanding all these measures, children continue to be abused, exploited, employed and harassed. Now, the government has realised that just by passing Acts, the problem of child labour cannot be wiped out. Therefore, it is making provisions to improve their working conditions, like reducing working hours, ensuring minimum wages and providing facilities for health and education. The Union Government set up a National Authority on October 2, 1993 to eliminate child labour in hazardous industries by the turn of the century. The plan aimed at rehabilitating the child workers; giving them education in 15,000 schools in different parts of the country and providing compensation to families whose children are withdrawn from hazardous jobs. However, the seriousness of the government appears to be doubtful. This is because the government does not have a clear idea of the magnitude of the problem. Again, the figure of rehabilitating 2 million child workers in servitude every year is a tall claim.

The Supreme Court in a judgment given on December 10, 1996, aimed at preventing exploitation of children and safeguarding their economic, social and humanitarian rights, banned child labour on hazardous jobs and ordered setting up of a Child Labour Rehabilitation Welfare Fund. Offending employer would have to deposit Rs.20,000 as compensation for each child in the fund. With regard to non-hazardous jobs, the Court directed the concerned authorities to see that the working hours of the child do not exceed four to six hours a day. In spite of all these efforts, India has the dubious distinction of being home to the largest workforce of children in the world. The government has acknowledged that 3 per cent of children work for wages and 2.6 per cent without wages adding up to a total of 11.3 million child labours in the country (The Hindu, 2003b). The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 has not been implemented by the concerned
governments although the Labour Ministry in 1987 regarded it as an essential component of national policy.

Thus, the enactment of the legislation has proved to be ineffective in providing a measure of protection to children. They are forced to earn their living because of rural impoverishment as well as struggle for existence in urban areas. Without removing poverty from society, problem of child labour cannot be solved. Hence, if children are employed, it is necessary to have certain safeguards against their exploitation and provision for educational and recreational facilities. It is very sad that children have to work in conditions dangerous to their health. Working hard in dangerous conditions, these small kids have accepted exploitation as a way of life. Their childhood is snatched by the harsh realities of life. Most of the child workers have no shelter, no food and education. Diseases easily catch them. These little children are susceptible to exploitation by the employers or parents or even by the common man. The child workers are abused in our society physically, mentally and sexually and are easy targets of drug pushers. Since they are growing up in such an environment, there is little hope that they will become good citizens in the future. Hence, the State should provide such opportunities to the children so that they can develop in a healthy manner with enough space for freedom and dignity.

To eradicate the problem of child labour completely from the society, the common people must come forward. Though in small number, such instances can be found even in Indian society. For example, in larger parts of the Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh, entire village communities are saying a firm ‘no’ to child labour and are opting to put their children in school. As a result of these, children of landless labourer of this area are now attending school instead of applying their labour to augment a meagre family income (Wazir, 2003:5225). Such efforts of the people will help in solving this problem permanently.

It would be erroneous to look at the question of child labour at the national or at the South Asian regional level alone, child labour in ultimate analysis is rooted in history, poverty, culture and global inequality. Lloyd-Evans has pertinently pointed out in his study,

Although the fundamental reason why children work is poverty, there are other important factors which deserve consideration. Whilst global institutions argue that the incidence of child labour will decline as a country’s per capita GDP rises, child labour is also seen to be a serious
consequence of neo-liberalism and unequal trade resulting from economic globalisation. The negative consequences of globalisation are centred round the exploitation of workers, including child, in the new international division of labour where developing countries are pressurised to compete global export economy. (Lloyd-Evans, 2002:215)

There is another dimension to the issue of child labour i.e., the issue of child trafficking. Majority of the prostitutes in India are girl child. These girls are either forced into prostitution through the lure of a job, a false marriage or simply forced into prostitution. Not only are the prostitutes themselves but it also their children who are victimised. The children of the prostitutes find it difficult to get admission in schools. They are debarred from interacting with the children of the rest of the society. Further, there is every possibility that the children of the prostitutes may be forced to take the profession of their mothers.

The problems of children do not end here. In India, many children are sold for a few hundred rupees because of poverty. The parents themselves sell their children, particularly the girl child, during the time of crisis, such as acute poverty caused either by famine, flood, drought, cyclone or a bad harvest. Children also become victims of violence during natural disasters such as the recent tsunami attack. Media reports have claimed that many children in South-East Asia have been abducted, abused, raped or killed by miscreants during the course of rehabilitation efforts after the tsunami attack.

5.2 CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse refers to any child who receives non-accidental, physical and psychological injury as a result of acts and omissions on the part of his parent or guardians or employers. This definition of child abuse also includes verbal abuse, threats of physical violence and excessive physical punishment, which do not require medical attention. Child abuse may be of three types—physical, sexual and emotional. By physical abuse, children are hurt physically. There may be burns, fractures, lacerations and abrasions, abdominal injuries and human bite marks in their bodies. Such abused children are wary of contact with adults, show aggressiveness in their behaviour and may be afraid to go back home. Emotional neglect refers to negligent treatment of child, under certain specific age prescribed by the society, by a person who is responsible for the child’s upbringing.
Child sexual abuse refers to the involvement of dependent and immature children in sexual activities they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent (Kempe and Kempe, 1978:127). It must be pointed out that in child sexual abuse; an adult is essentially exploiting the child for sexual purpose (Ennew, 1986). Anthony Giddens observes about child abuse in Britain:

Incest and child abuse more generally, are phenomena, which have been ‘discovered’ only over the past ten or twenty years. Of course, it has long been known that such sexual acts occur, but it was assumed by most social observers that the strong taboos that exist against this behaviour meant that it was extremely uncommon. This is not the case. Child sexual abuse has proved to be disturbingly commonplace. (Giddens, 2002:195)

Child sexual abuse is widely prevalent in the entire South Asia; India is no exception to this trend. Very often, we come across such disturbing news.

All over the world, millions of children are denied of basic services and their right to childhood. They are exploited and abused in different fields and in different ways. India has the dubious distinction of having the world’s largest number of sexually abused children with a child below 16 years raped every 155th minute, a child below 10 every 13th hour, and 1 in every 10 children sexually abused at any point of time (Krishnakumar, 2003). The National Crime Records Bureau statistics of 1993, (Government of India, 1993) show an increase in sexual assault against women irrespective of age. The percentage of child victims below 16 years, as compared to the total numbers of rape victims, was 27.8 per cent, which means 2 out of 7 rape victims were children below 16 years in 1993. The increase in the number of child victims below 10 years has been tremendous. What has become more dangerous is that there is an increase in the number of paedophilia. Recently, it has been found that Goa has made a transition from a laid back resort to a paedophile’s paradise. Hundreds of Europeans, British, German, Dutch, French and Swiss people visit Goa to seek children for sexual gratification. These paedophiles come to Goa because it is easy and cheap to sexually abuse a child here. The government despite having knowledge of this debased crime and alerts from international agencies kept silent for a long period as it was earning good amount of revenue from the foreign tourists.

One estimate by Child Relief and You (CRY) indicates that over 10,000 paedophiles visit Goa every year. According to field data collected
by national and international child rights organisations, a paedophile in Goa sexually exploits at least 20 children during his or her visit. It is difficult to quantify how many pederasts travel to Goa for the specific purpose of exploiting children sexually. A large number of children enter Goa during the tourist season and become easy targets of paedophiles since they are emotionally needy and mentally deprived. Thus, Goa no longer remains a place for people to come and relax; instead it has become a destination for pederasty. Earlier, Thailand and Sri Lanka provided such destinations. It has been almost a decade since Interpol declared Goa as the upcoming paedophile destination. But the government has ignored them. Now it has been estimated that Goa is one of the three areas of the world's worst hit child sex tourism. The "End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes Report 2003" admits Goa's transition to a haven for child sex tourists. Again, this year's annual, "Trafficking in Persons Report", of the US state department categorically asserts that India is a source and destination of children for sexual and labour exploitation (Tehelka, August 14, 2004).

However, there is a positive development in this regard as Goa Assembly passed the Goa Children's Act of 2003 prohibiting paedophilia. The foremost objective, behind the conception of this Act, is the urgency of the need to control all forms of commercial exploitation. According to the provisions of the Act, persons who reside with children not related to them by ties of blood are required by law to disclose the same to the Directorate of Women and Child Development. There are also significant incentives for school attendance such as a ban on corporal punishment and provision for participatory evaluation in place of the much dreaded conventional examinations (The Hindu, 2003c).

New advances in information technology have increased the risk children face today. In modern times, the video cameras are increasingly used to produce child pornography. Computers equipped with scanners and access to internet is used to disseminate child pornography worldwide. Cyberspace is used by paedophiles to transmit child pornography. It is reported that in Denmark, where pornography is not illegal, the paedophilias have created an "India file" on the bulletin board in the internet that is accessible to an interested paedophile anywhere in the world. The file is said to contain 100 pornographic pictures of Indian children in various sexual acts with adults (Panicker, 1998).
It is very unfortunate that although UN Convention on Child Rights has provided the right to protection to the children, many of them are yet to enjoy these rights. It is also surprising that despite knowing about sex crime perpetrated by foreigners in Goa, the government has overlooked the matter in quest of more tourist revenue. Thus, child abuse is growing at an alarming rate. There are numerous cases where girl child are becoming pregnant as a result of repeated sexual exploitation by their employer. Here, we can cite the example of a girl child of 11 years who gave birth to a child as a result of sexual exploitation in Assam in 2003. In another incident in Tripura, the principal of an educational institution raped a minor girl in the hostel. Among 761 rape cases in Assam in the year 2001, 343 concerns rape of under-aged victims. It shows children are worst victims of rape cases. (Pathak, 2003:4)

Child trafficking has become a billion-dollar business with an estimated 1.2 million children falling victim annually in the world. In India more than 20,000 women and 40,000 children are reported missing every year. It highlights a clear link between trafficking of women and children and those reported missing. Trafficking of girls into prostitution has been a long-standing concern in South East Asia, where a profitable network may involve police, relatives and guards each receiving their own slice of profit (International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 2002:32–33). Again, the Assam police have also disclosed the fact that more than 50 girls, between the age group of 15 to 25 years, are being sold to brothels outside Assam and the country each month. It has also been reported that the girl children of economically poor families of the interior villages become easy target of such activities (Debroy, 2003).

Every year millions of children are directly experiencing or witnessing increased violence and abuse at their homes, neighbourhood and schools. The children of broken homes, abandoned and destitute are easy targets of unscrupulous elements. The tender age, innocence and lack of experience of these children add to their vulnerability. The statistical analysis in the Crime of India 1997, discloses that there has been a gradual increase in the incidence of child rape in 1993 to 1997 followed by kidnapping, abduction, exposure and abandonment and procurement of minor girls. Besides that, infanticide, foeticide, selling and buying of minor girls are other forms of child abuse.
Besides sexual abuse, child abuse also includes sexual aggression, beating and extracting hours of labour from children who should be in school or at play. Studies made so far show that children are victims of substantial abuse of a physical, psychological and emotional nature. The study conducted in Rajasthan in 1990 on child abuse by G.S Kewalramani states that among 167 cases, 124 were cases of physical abuse, 103 of emotional abuse and 23 of sexual abuse (Kewalramani, 1992).

The abused children mainly belong to poor and marginalised section of the society. The children are abused at work and within their homes, where their earnings become the property of their parents. The children of the poor families take the burden of physical work before their bodies are ready for that. They are also subjected to beating in different situations. Child beating is common both in lower middle-class and upper middle-class families. However, causes of beating vary in different classes of society. While in the middle-class families, parents give punishment to the children for non-compliance with family norms and standards of discipline, the poor parents often beat their children for their unwillingness to work. The routinely abused children start hating their parents and become more obstinate and few even run away from home. It has been found from the study of Kewalramani that boys are more battered than girls and the school going children run greater risk of being physically abused than those who do not go to school. Again, a large number of the abused children belong to poor families with an income of less than Rs. 500 per month. This shows that there is a significant relationship between poverty and physical abuse (Kewalramani, 1992).

With regard to sexual abuse, the findings of the study indicate that girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than boys. Besides, a high proportion of children become victims of sexual abuse when they are 14 or above 14 years of age. There is a strong association between sex and the number of abusers. Males are usually abused sexually by one person, while girls are generally assaulted by more than one person. The victims of sexual abuse are generally from the lower strata of the society in terms of socio-economic conditions. Again, whereas the victim’s age distribution is more homogenous, the assaulter’s age distribution is more heterogeneous. A significant percentage of child sexual abuse occurs outside the family and boys are generally the
victims of employment related abuse while girls are generally the victims of acquaintance related abuse. The study also reveals that school going children are a little more maltreated than non-school going children (Kewalramani, 1992).

The study done by ‘Crimes Against Women Cell’, Delhi Police points out that of the 381 rape cases registered between January and August 1997, 270 or almost 75 per cent of the victims were in the age limit of 7-18 years. Most of the rapists were immediate neighbours, 10 girls were being raped by their fathers, and 3 by their step-fathers (The Pioneer, 28 September, 1997).

Thus, various studies make it clear that girl children are more disadvantageous than the boys. The society assumes that girls are inferior, physically and mentally weak and above all, sexually vulnerable. The figures mentioned above indicate the sexual vulnerability of the girl child inside and outside their home. Girls are safe neither inside nor outside the home. They are subject to consistent neglect and discrimination in the family as well as in the society. From various observations, it is clear that irrespective of class and caste, discrimination against girls can be found everywhere. As a result of this, a girl child grows up with the sense of severe insecurity, marginalisation and powerlessness, which further inculcates vulnerability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 5.1: Two Children Sacrificed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In two ghastly incidents reported from as diverse places as Durg in Chatisgarh and Jagadhari in Haryana, two children were ‘sacrificed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman hacked to death her 12 year-old nephew and drank his blood, allegedly as a part of black magic ritual, at Dunda village in Durg district in Chatisgarh...</td>
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<tr>
<td>In other incident, an eight-year-old boy was killed by two of his relatives allegedly as a sacrifice to a goddess to gain psychic power in a village in Yamuna Nagar district in Haryana... (The Hindu, 18th March, 2005)</td>
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5.3 INSECURITY OF CHILDREN IN EDUCATION: COERCION, DROP OUT AND EXCLUSION

Universalisation of elementary education is expected to play a dominant role in reducing child labour and improving conditions of children. Child labour is the main obstacle for children in receiving education, which forces them to drop out from school. To develop his or her own potential, a child has to be free from hunger, neglect exploitation
and abuse. One of the basic rights declared by United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child is Right to Education, which includes right to both formal and non-formal education. The Convention also provides for the right to a standard of living, which is adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. (Storer, 1994). In India, the Constitution also provides universal, free and compulsory primary education for children. However, this constitutional obligation has not yet been fulfilled. Education as a basic developmental right is being denied to the 25 million children who are not enrolled in schools.

As per official statistics, there has been progress in the education sector of India. During 1990-91, 99 million children were enrolled in school. But out of this, only 52 per cent reached the fifth grade. However, the impact of this increased enrollment would flatten out unless other special efforts such as improved school infrastructure, quality education, mid-day meals, crèches and health care are made to accelerate primary education and literacy backed-up by the reduction of mass poverty. Otherwise, for the starving people, retention of children in schools would remain a distant dream. Again, studies have shown that school dropout rates are higher for girls and children belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities (Shukla, 1994). Hence, it can be said that it is the children of poor, marginalised and depressed classes who face difficulties in the attainment of education and thereby, suffer a lot in the society.

As far as government is concerned, it is increasing the financial outlay for education. But it does not guarantee increased enrollment and retention level in primary and elementary education as in most cases, the money will be under spent or under-utilised (Panicker, 1998). In recent years, demand for compulsory primary education for children is growing. The underlying belief is that, schooling could be an effective strategy in eliminating child labour. To meet that objective, government should take measures to impart quality education to the children; otherwise there will be high percentage of school dropouts.

Although enrollment in school is increasing, still we find a large number of children out of school. A survey conducted in 2004 by Assam Sarva Shiksha Abhijan (Assam Comprehensive Education Campaign) reveals that there are almost 13,756 children in Guwahati city alone who ought to be in school but are not. So far, educational policies of Government of India are neglecting these children. But with elementary
education now declared a fundamental right, no government can afford to exclude these children, if the goal of universal education is to be achieved. The problems of children deprived of education in the urban areas are different from their rural counterparts. The problems of these children require highly local solutions (Mahanta, 2003:4).

In order to eliminate illiteracy and dropout at the school level, the Government of India started massive campaign though the Sarva Shiksha Abhijan in 2000-01 with a provision for a governing council chaired by the Prime Minister of India. Four years after the Government of India adopted the “mission mode” to universalise the elementary education through the Sarva Shiksha Abhijan, only 47 of the 100 children enrolled in Class I reached Class VIII. This puts the dropout rate at as high as 52.79 per cent, which, according to the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh “is unacceptable” (The Hindu, February 22, 2005).

Chairing the first meeting of the Governing Council of the National Mission for the Sarva Shiksha Abhijan, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, attributed the high dropout rate to “lack of adequate facilities, large-scale absenteeism of the teachers and inadequate supervision by local authorities.” Reaffirming the government’s commitment to universalising the elementary education and referring to various deadlines set for achieving this, he said: “We give dates that have lost meaning. We need education for all today” (The Hindu, February 22, 2005).

On the same day (21st February, 2005), the Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh told that the dropout rate at the elementary level (Class I to VIII) was 52.79 per cent with that at the primary level (Class I to V) being 34 per cent. Among girls, it was 53.28 per cent at the elementary level and 33.72 per cent at the primary level. Among boys, the rate stood at 52.28 per cent at the elementary level and 35.85 per cent at the primary level (Ibid). These latest data, too, unmistakably point to the reality of very high rate of dropout of children from the educational system. The system as a whole failed to retain a desirable number of children within the orbit of elementary education.

Since, children are the very foundation of the nation, it is the duty of the society to make all possible efforts for providing them proper guidance. Education should inculcate certain ideals in the minds of the students, enabling them to realise that there is only one caste, that is,
caste of humanity, one religion that is, religion of love and only one language, that is, language of heart. However, schools have negative impact also. Illness, lack of support at home, or homework, makes poor children's performance often inadequate and dropping out becomes common. Competition in the classrooms helps breed a sense of inferiority and personal failure in poor children, turning their work assignments into a source of shame. The high costs of schooling, including the need to look respectable in dress and appearance, incites poor children to engage in remunerative work, which contradicts the belief that compulsory education would work as an antidote to child labour (Burra, 1989; Fyfe, 1989; McNamara, 1968; Weiner, 1991).

Moreover, research in the field of education has also shown that out of 100 children enrolled in class I, only 50-60 students reach the 4th standard. Most of the children fail not because they are weak or poor, but because the teaching that is being imparted does not make sense to the children. Besides, the children may find teaching boring, the books full of abstract concepts and the school building completely unattractive. To make it more interesting education should be child-centric. Focusing on every child, keeping all these in view, the Sarva Shiksha Abhijan of Assam with the support of UNICEF, launched a programme called ‘Bidyajyoti’ (light of knowledge) to impart quality education to the children. Again, education must give due consideration to both mental and physical aspects to make a child a complete man.

Sometimes, it is found that school children are overburdened with their workload. Education and schools are supposed to shape a child's intellect and personality. But it is strange that often reputed schools refuse to take the students till they are convinced that children and parents possess what it takes to be trained by them. For parents it is a difficult task to get their children admitted in a reputed school. Hence, battle for space begins very early for these little kids. Admissions are only the beginning of an uphill task. For many students, school is all about mugging up dates and trying to remember names that seem to have no relevance. With scoring becoming more important than learning, the schools have lost its very purpose. Now, this has been realised and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has taken the initiative for a change. According to the new circular, no homework is to be given to students of Class I and Class II. Such efforts will lighten the burden on the children and will make education attractive to them.
Primary classes are often the building ground where students are first told that they cannot fail. Parents are no longer happy with just good marks. Cry for more marks increase with parents comparing their ward with a bright sibling or the boy next door, making matters even worse. Usually parents are very ambitious and want their children to learn too much too soon. Therefore, parents are often seen as the culprits who put too much pressure and ultimately turn their children into victims. There are instances where student commit suicide out of pressure or mental anxiety. With marks being the sole decider of a child’s intellect, it still does not matter what the children are good at. If the system is not changed, education in schools is likely to be a right that students only read about and not quite enjoy. However, the ever increasing weight of school bag or curriculum load is not taken seriously by schools. Moreover a majority of schools follow the traditional method, turning holidays into special classes and giving loads of homework. While all agree that students are under increasing physical and psychological pressure, no one seems ready to take responsibility for it. As a result, they are shouldering the burden and in many cases, collapsing. Many, on the other hand, believe that what we have today in the name of syllabus is a monstrous burden, which does nothing to mould the children. Very often children go from one tuition class to another to get extra coaching that would help to score more marks. They are targets of verbal and physical abuse from their teachers and sometimes school management. The parents expect the children to perform better, as a result of which, pressure on children increases both at home and in school (Kannan, 2003).

Therefore, it is evident that children are not even secure in the schools. Again, corporal punishment as an acceptable part of schooling is deeply entrenched in the Indian social psyche. In schools, many rules are misinterpreted and the guilty teachers often argue that they are only trying to discipline a student. Such retribution contravenes the Convention on the Rights of Child adopted by UN General Assembly and acceded to by India in 1992. Article 28 of the convention provides, “State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity.” But Indian education system often overlooks this point (The Hindu, 2003d). “In the modern time, education is highly competitive and lucrative business where schools compete to produce better results.
even by resorting to corporal punishment. Bodily punishment at school can affect a boy or girl for life. Research has revealed that corporal punishment is not merely ineffective but also makes children defiant, rebellious and hostile. These children develop a dwarfed personality and begin to believe that might is right and violence is the answer to all problems” (The Hindu, 2003e).

There are many instances of corporal punishments having negative effects on the children. Because of such punishment a student has to bear physical as well as mental torture. On June 12, 2003, Ramu Abhinav, a Class X student of Chennai was found hanging in his home. When the cause of suicide was investigated, his mother told that before the day of the incident his mathematics teacher beat him for scoring low marks, which hurt him a lot (Kannan, 2003). In another incident, an eleven-year-old child was hit by his teacher on his face for scoring low marks and he lost one of his eyes. Type of punishment varies from school to school. In one school, punishment for children was to walk on their bare knees in scorching sun, as a result of which some of them got boils with infection. Another such inhumane incidence of violence and humiliation in a school is that, the children of Class VI were warned that those who cannot recite one English poem would be paraded naked in the Assembly. One student, unsure of his performance, set himself on fire that very night. Thus, the psychological impact of punishment is quite damaging. There are three reactions to punishment, viz. fear, hatred and anger. All three have adverse effects in the long run. Instances are not rare where small children become unconscious and mentally disturbed after getting such punishments. Such children are terrified of going to school. Knowing it fully well that corporal punishment is a brutal form of punishment, teachers use it for disciplining the students. In a different incident, a XII standard girl killed herself as she was falsely accused of copying and hence punished. She thought that it would be difficult for her to face her peer group on the next day. So she committed suicide. Thus, in the globalised market education has become a mere skill and even a pretence of perceiving it as value-based knowledge does not seem to exist. (Sivaraman, 2002)

Children, mostly of middle and upper class families, have to undergo the inconvenience and strain of attaining education at a very early age. Such practice, warn pediatricians, is injurious to children’s long-term interest. Early education overloads children with books and
home works, thereby pressurising them both physically and mentally. Besides, fear of rising early in the morning causes constant anxiety; exposure to bitter cold dawns results in upper respiratory tract infection; and forcing food early in the morning leads to irregular food habits. All these unhealthy practices and daily traumas seriously harm the health of the child and consequently, lead to poor concentration in studies.

Dress code is another weapon to victimise children. Unable to protest, these small children are brandished with rules by school authorities. Some schools make it mandatory for small children to wear short pants even in winters. Therefore, it can be seen that small children, of primarily the middle and upper classes, are under constant pressure. They have to perform better even if it means strangulation of childhood exuberance. A hectic schedule devoid of play is planned and imposed on them, which is very much to their disliking.

In today’s world, education is regarded as the salvation for poverty. Poor as well as middle income people, rural as well as urban dwellers are willing to do anything to send their children to school. A recent public survey, Report on Basic Education in India found that nearly 98 per cent of rural parents believe that it is important to send their children to school. However, few schools in the public stream have proper access to drinking water, electricity, and toilets, play ground, furniture and proper buildings. All these led people to seek private solution to public deficiencies. Consequently, private schools are established which may be regarded as teaching shops. Most of these schools also lack security. The Kumba Konam school tragedy (The Hindu, 16 July, 2004), which claimed 93 lives of children raises serious questions about the state of basic education, including safety in schools (Frontline, August 13, 2004). It is also surprising that no teacher of the school came forward to rescue the children. When students caught by fire, were battling for life, the teachers preferred to stay safe and not to rescue them. The whole incident is very tragic because it would have been easily averted, if only basic safety procedures and building regulations had been adhered to. This shows that the schools run by the government and local bodies are woefully poor in infrastructure and teaching personnel and cannot provide security to the children.

Apart from the problems of these children, the blind and the physically challenged children have different problems. All Assam Blind Students Union and Guwahati Blind School accused the government of turning a blind eye to the sufferings of blind children.
Children

They started agitation, demanding redressal of their grievances, on 26th May, 2004. The 1998, UN Convention on Rights of Child, states that disabled children have the right to achieve participation in the community and their education should lead to the fullest possible social integration. To fulfill this objective, the government should take measures for educating these physically challenged students.

Government, on the other hand, has taken certain measures to increase the enrollment of students in schools. One such measure is provision of midday meal scheme for primary school children. From various surveys, it is found that the programme has led to higher school enrollment, narrowing of gender inequality, and improving of nutritional status of children. This scheme has brought an end to classroom hunger. The programme provides school children of poor families with a meal which they may not have otherwise managed at home. It will also end caste prejudice as all students belonging to different caste groups have to take food together.

However, there are some problems in implementing this scheme like lack of infrastructure for preparation of meals and irregular funding which delays payment of staff. Question also arises regarding quality of meal. In a survey, it has been found that 10 per cent of children had fallen ill after a meal at school. This calls for remedial measures to improve hygiene and prevent the serving of undercooked or otherwise unsafe meals. Considering the immediate benefits a school meal programme yields, in the form of higher school attendance and improved nutritional status, there can be no case for the centre not to provide food grains from its food stocks and the states not to meet supplementary budgets.

Therefore, society, family and the government have a vital role to play in moulding these future citizens. They should provide the children an enabling environment to live in dignity. Government on its part should spend adequate amount of money to educate the children of all classes and communities. By attaining education, children can enjoy their development right. All forms of violence against children should be condemned outright. Nothing can be crueler than beating a child who is often helpless in the face of adult might. If the students commit suicide after being abused by the schoolteacher, it only shows a sadistic tendency among a class of people entrusted with the welfare of the children. Such acts of teachers, who push their students to death, indicates a serious malady in our society. The rights of the children
cannot only be implemented through legislation alone, but will depend on a society’s commitment to improve the quality of life of these children. Besides, children coming from various marginalised groups, including the disabled children, deserve special care and attention.

Notwithstanding six decades of independence, unfortunately, India has failed to build up adequate infrastructure of primary education. Most schools in the government sector lack adequate infrastructure, manpower, facilities, monitoring and accountability. Though the system expanded significantly, it failed to cover all the children. However, private schools have been expanding both in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. Compared to urban areas, rural areas are experiencing severe deficit in primary education. Even the urban areas now experience severe negligence from the state. “The first learning experience for most children in the Capital Delhi seems to be anything but inspirational. With 4,254 vacancies for primary teachers pending in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi-run schools, almost 1,70,000 students are without teachers. The United Progressive Alliance Government’s commitment to allot top priority to education sector seems to have failed to tickle down to the capital” (The Hindu, 6 March, 2005).

The Hindu report further observes:

Apart from denying the children their fundamental right to education, the civic body is unable to provide even the basic amenities in schools... Shockingly 30 schools do not have drinking water...16 others have no toilets,... 494 schools need roof repairs,... over 300 schools need repairs to their toilets ... over 200 have choked septic tanks which desperately need to be cleaned. (The Hindu, 6 March, 2005)

If above is the situation of government primary school in India’s capital Delhi, one can well imagine the situation in rural India.

5.4 INSECURITY OF CHILD HEALTH

Another area where children need special attention is health. According to the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), survival right is a basic right of the child. The survival right includes the right to life and right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable (Storer, 1994). Yet, all over the world, a large number of children are suffering from ill health due to some deficiencies.

India claims to have a large health care infrastructure. According to official statistics 100 per cent of the urban population and 80 per cent of the rural population have access to health care facilities. Despite
having such medical facilities, Infant Mortality Rate of India is at 79 and under 5 years mortality rate is 119 per 1000 live birth. Out of 25 million children born every year, 2 million die before reaching the age of one. A majority of these deaths are due to avoidable infections and malnutrition. There are variations of the Infant Mortality Rate in different states/regions. While in Kerala the rate is 17, in Orissa it is 114 (India Today, 1994). With regard to nutrition, while 250 million people presently suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition, children suffer the most as 43.8 per cent of children suffer from moderate degrees of malnutrition. About 30 per cent of all babies born have low birth weight, 2.2 million children are afflicted with cretinism and 6.6 million children are mildly retarded. The reason of high Infant Mortality Rate is not that children are not given ORS when they suffer from dehydration, but children become susceptible to diarrhoea as they are malnourished due to scarce food in the family. For the poor, malnourished and pregnant women, it is a vicious cycle beginning from a childhood of under nourishment and lack of proper health care, who then grows up to be under nourished anaemic adults and ultimately giving birth to underweight children.

It has been also found that one-fifth of the pre-school children are suffering from clinical signs and symptoms of protein energy malnutrition. About 60,000 children become blind every year due to deficiencies of Vitamin A and protein energy malnutrition or Vitamin B complex deficiency. Iron deficiency and anaemia is a very common nutritional disorder among children and it varies from region to region. The National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau Report of 1988-90 shows that, only 10 per cent of children aged 1-5 years had normal weight for their age and 90 per cent were malnourished when measured against largely acceptable standards. This report also states that Vitamin A deficiency clearly increases the risks of child mortality of not only malnourished children but also among adequately nourished children. In Maharashtra, 316 tribal children died between July and September 1993 because of endemic malnutrition. It happened when the wheat based nutritional supplement, which was distributed under integrated child development services, was abruptly withdrawn (Economic and Political Weekly, 1993:2626).

Endemic malnutrition, resulting in various dietary deficiencies, obviously means greater vulnerability in the face of massive epidemics. In Gujarat, three years of consecutive drought had preceded the outbreak
of cholera and gastroenteritis in the epidemic form and the lack of nutritious food had decreased the resistance power of the people against the disease. Out of 691 deaths, 366 children up to 5 years of age and 87 between 5 to 15 years of age died. An important cause for their deaths had been under nutrition and malnutrition. The maximum number of deaths took place among the poorest Muslim and Schedule Caste families who lived in small and congested houses where diseases spread fast (Dogra, 1988). Because of inadequate health facilities and proper nutrition, children also suffer from malnourishment. In various areas, lack of access, poor health care and complete failure of Integrated Child Development Services scheme have worsened the situation. InMaharastra's Nandurbar district where 66 per cent of population is Adivasi (indigenous), in 1998-99 between 100 and 2400 children have died every year and the infant mortality rate has been increasing from 37.6 in 1995-96 to 59 in 2003-04 (The Hindu, 25th July, 2004). From this incident, it is evident that the children of depressed communities are the worst sufferers. Malnutrition death is very common among other Adivasi communities also. In Melgat, 75 per cent of the population is Adivasi and 80 per cent of them are below the poverty line. Ashish Satan of the Tribal Health and Research Project, Gharni says “malnutrition begins in the uterus as the mother gets insufficient calories in the last trimester of her pregnancy. As a result low weight babies are common” (Menon, 2004:13).


The World Health Report 2005 puts India in the list of 51 “slow progressing” countries as far as infant mortality and maternal mortality rate is concerned with an estimated 1,36,000 maternal and 1 million newborn deaths, and newborns suffering from pregnancy birth-related mortality and where morbidity continued to take toll on the lives of Indian women and their newborns.

According to the report, “one in every three world' malnourished children lives in India and about 50 per cent of all children deaths in India are attributable to malnutrition.

The report launched in India to draw attention of the Indian Government towards the issue. “Maternal and child health is a human rights issue of women and children. It is politically important to care for maternal and child health, and the present situation is unacceptable” said Joy Phumaphi. Director General, Family and Community Health, WHO, said. (Aarti Dhar, The Hindu, April 8, 2005)
However, it is strange that those who make laws and implement them cannot see the link between nutrition and disease. Thirty children died in a Kolkata hospital, 22 in Adiwas area near Mumbai. The authorities do not take responsibility for that, as they believe that the children died not of malnutrition but of superstition, which is only a social problem and not an administrative problem. The underweight children and the under-age mothers cannot survive for long. These families, because of poverty, cannot arrange food for them or cannot visit a doctor in time. Many children succumb to infection, as safe source of water and sanitation is not available in various areas.

Many policies of government have also failed to eradicate the diseases from the society. National Polio Eradication Programme of 2003 also failed to achieve its goal. This is because of inadequate coverage of routine immunisation. The reported coverage of Pulse Polio Immunisation seems to have been false. A cross-checking of records revealed that, 10 to 15 per cent of houses marked immunised were not immunised at all. Again in 2002, 61 per cent of the polio-affected children belonged to the Muslim community, suggesting that the immunisation coverage of the minority communities was worse. Besides, the rural children suffer a lot from various health problems, as the public health facilities are inadequate in those areas. In spite of having planned development in India, the rural-urban disparity is increasing over the decades. In the area of health also, this disparity can be clearly seen. In the rural areas, infant mortality rate is 77 per 1000 but in the urban areas it is as low as 45 per 1000.

Thus, children suffer from various health related problem which stand as an obstacle in enjoying their basic survival rights. According to UNICEF's report on The State of World Children, 2003, millions of children under 5 die each year from diseases easily preventable by vaccines. With poverty a major factor, 150 million children in developing countries are under weight, thus increasing their risk of death. Again, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report on The State of the Worlds' Children, 2005, describes poverty as the root cause of high morbidity and mortality. It further states that over 16 per cent of children under the age of five lack adequate nutrition, consequently, leading to low health status (The Hindu, 10 December, 2004). To check the number of death and to improve the health condition of the children, the government and the society should take active part. It is
only when the health condition of the children is improved, can they enjoy their other rights with the survival right.

5.5 STREET CHILDREN

Street children are those children who have no homes and who live on pavements. A significant number of child labour in urban and metropolitan areas consist of street children. In most cases, children run away from home because of the harsh living conditions in the rural areas and the domestic conflicts. The runaway and destitute children are the most vulnerable group of child workers.

There are a large number of street children all over the world. It is estimated that in Delhi, out of 22 lakhs children, approximately 4 lakhs are working children and of these, about 1.5 lakhs are street children. Various studies have shown that most of the street children come from large families with low family income. Violence is also stated to be an important reason for leaving their homes. They usually sleep on pavements or on railway platforms. Everywhere there is an addition to the number of street children. By a rough estimate, 1500 odd children live at Delhi's railway stations and the chief reason of their leaving home is abuse by parents. Again, the latest estimate put the number of these children at as high as 100 million (Sirrano, 2002) all over the world. The problems faced by the street children are different from those living with parents. Some of these children who work on streets return to a family at night. However, majority of them are far from the protective and nurturing reach of the family. Many may have never experienced their family home as a heaven, since child abuse is often a key factor in their decision to leave home and take to the streets.

These small children living on streets are deprived of their basic rights like right to survival, development, protection and participation. These street children are more at risk on every count from malnutrition or HIV infection to being dragged into the under world. There is nobody to look after them even if they are ill. Because of poor nutritional status, diseases easily attack them. They are also deprived of the access to basic health care, safe drinking water and education. Everyday they have to struggle for their survival, and education is a distant dream for them. These children without the protection of their family are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many of them become child prostitutes and
are subjected to sexual, physical and emotional abuse by the adults in the society. They are rarely treated as individuals, and there is no scope for them to participate in the affairs of the state or to voice their opinion and redress their grievances. These children always find themselves in conflict with authorities and usually choose the wrong path to earn their living.

5.6 NEGATION OF CHILDHOOD

The dissociation of childhood from the performance of valued work has been increasingly considered a yardstick of modernity. But surprisingly, even in the modern time, a large number of children are forced to work and to take the burden of the family. The working children find themselves clashing with childhood ideology that places a higher value on the performance of economically useless work. Working for money entails sacrificing childhood that exposes children to the negative aspect of life. This sacrifice of childhood results in the loss of innocence of the children.

The poor children who work as labourers, who live on streets and who are abused by others are deprived of their childhood. Again, those children who are the victims of emergency situations like armed conflicts, environmental disasters and displacement are also deprived of their childhood rights. Children in the emergency situation get minimal access to basic services. Apart from the children facing natural and manmade disasters and calamities, parental and societal deprivation of the children are rampant throughout the world. Orphanage total or partial, either is a loss of father or mother, early separation from them in house or outward absence of company for long hours and neglect at home are common everywhere. Besides, children also suffer mentally for the divorce of their parents, as they have to live with single parent, while most of them want both. The parents on their part take the decision of separation in a very selfish way by neglecting the likes and dislikes of the children. The children of the broken homes suffer from mental trauma which is often overlooked by the adults. Because of their family environment, they mature before age and thus lose their childhood. In the middle and upper middle-class families, children are deprived of childhood as they are sent to school at a very early age. Besides, they are under continuous pressure to score more marks and to perform better. Therefore, they are left with no time to enjoy their childhood.
The government, the society and the parents should make an effort to understand the problems and necessities of the children. India is one of the most disaster prone countries in Asia and here a large number of families are displaced by armed conflicts and different development projects. Hence, the children of such areas need special protection. According to an estimate, 22 million people have been displaced by development projects in India of which at least 40 per cent are children. In the seventies, 80 per cent of world's drought victims and 70 per cent of flood victims were living in India (Sen and Balagopal, 1994). Besides, a large number of children are affected by riots and armed conflicts in different regions of the country. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report on the *State of World's Children*, 2005, has also regarded armed conflict as the major cause of violation of child rights. As civil strife proliferates and civilians become its main causalities, millions of children are growing up in families and communities torn apart by armed conflicts. Since 1990, conflicts have directly killed as many as 3.6 million people; tragically, more than 45 per cent of these are likely to have been children. Hundreds of thousands of children are caught in armed conflict as soldiers, are forced to become refugees or are internally displaced, suffer sexual violence, abuse, exploitation or are victims of explosive remnants of war (*The Hindu*, 10 December, 2004). In Assam alone, there would be more than 10,000 children who have been orphaned or displaced in the two decades of insurgency or ethnic strife (*The Assam Tribune*, 12 May, 2003). These victims of violence are deprived of proper education with many such families leaving their villages to resettle elsewhere. These children are frightened entity without an atmosphere of freedom, laughter and peace and thus lose their childhood. In those places where violence is a regular phenomenon, children are deprived of attending regular schools as many schools are occasionally used for relief camps and accommodating security forces. Frequent *bandhs* (strikes/work stoppage) further disrupt their daily routine.

Sometimes the children may be directly affected by terrorist activities. Sixteen school children, including nine girls were killed and forty others were injured in Dhemaji district of Assam on 15 August 2004, when militants of banned ULFA triggered a powerful blast. The blast took place at Dhemaji College ground when children gathered there for Independence Day celebration (Talukdar, 2004). This is a brutal act of killing innocent children where they become the direct
victims of terrorist activity. Besides being such victims of violent activities, children also suffer a lot as they are forcefully recruited into the terrorist activities. One such example is the children of nomads in the Pir Panjal ranges of Kashmir who are being forcibly recruited into terrorist outfits. Children belonging to the Gujjar and Bakerwal families are increasingly vulnerable to inductions in the terrorist outfits due to lack of security mechanism and collapsing education system in the hills of Pir Panjal. Living away from the spotlight, the residents along the heights are now fighting a battle to save their children from joining the ranks of the terrorists (Puri, 2004). The government and non-governmental organisations should come forward to help the child victims, so that they are not deprived of their childhood and enjoy a normal life to be grown up as a normal individual.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets universal legal standards of protection of children against neglect, abuse and exploitation at work as well as guarantees them basic human rights. The convention contains 54 articles that cover children's civil, economic, social, cultural and political rights. Yet millions of children are denied of their right to life with justice and dignity and are forced to work under sub-human condition because they are poor and deprived. They are children without childhood. The United Nations Convention of 1989 has been ratified by governments all over the world except Somalia and USA. It shows that government of different countries commit themselves to ensuring that children can grow up in safe and supportive conditions with access to high quality education and health care and a good standard of living. Therefore, children are the starting point of any development strategy. India's National Policy on Children (1974) emphasised that children are nation's supremely important asset, and declared that the nation is responsible for their nurture and solicitude. It also states that children's programme should find a prominent part in our national plans for the development of human resources so that children grow up to become robust citizens, physically fit, mentally alert and morally healthy, endowed with skills and motivations needed by society. Therefore, equal opportunities for development of all children during the period of growth should be the main aim.
In 1975, a National Children Board was set up to ensure planning, monitoring and co-ordinating of child welfare services i.e., nutrition, immunisation, health care, pre-school education of mothers etc. at the national level. There is no dearth of legislations in our country having direct or indirect bearing on child welfare. The Constitution of India in its sections 3 and 4 has made several provisions for the care, protection and prevention of exploitation of children. Juvenile Justice Act and Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 have wider implications to children's rights. National Child Labour Policy, 1987 also makes provision for government action plan in terms of legislative action and general development programme for benefiting the child. The State's commitment towards the development of young children can also be seen through the national programme of Integrated Child Development Services Schemes. Similarly, the nutrition programmes for rural children and mid-day meal programme for school children are also going to benefit the children. The National Human Rights Commission of India has been working to expedite the amendment of the laws regarding child labour and set a time frame to achieve free and compulsory education for the children.

Despite all these policy measures, child labour remains familiar and inimitable. The situation has been perpetuating with one in every eight children in the world being exposed to the worst form of child labour. The extent of child labour in India is at an all-time high compared with the incidence worldwide. The girl child is even more insecure. Child mortality rates are higher for girls due to neglect and discriminatory treatment in terms of food, nutrition and health care. School dropout rate of girls is also higher than the boys. The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) has expressed their concern for the future of girl child and suggested for the enlargement of the definition of the child to include 14-20 years age group as adolescent girl. The SAARC countries have also declared the 1990s as the Decade of Girl Child to achieve a universal coverage of education and health services for children and ensure their survival, growth and development. But, in spite of having all these laws, policies and programmes, which address the specific concern of children, a great deal still remains to be accomplished in terms of fostering a right-centred approach to child issues.

The children of many countries are still in abysmal state. As discussed earlier, they are denied of their basic rights. They have the
freedom of expression and thought and access to appropriate information, conscience and religion (UNICEF, 1995). Article 12 of the convention on the Rights of the Child also states that, state parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely. However, adults often miss the points. Seventeen years old Khairul Azmi, who was a Malaysian delegate to the UN special session on children, said that when a child considered skillful enough to contribute and participate actively is not given opportunity to participate, he would not acquire the skills (The State of World’s Children, 2003, UNICEF). It is surprising that in the poor families, children are expected to contribute to the family income and at times even support the family, but their opinion are rarely asked for or considered in decision making by the family. The education system is also not right as it puts much emphasis on academic performance and there is absence of children Panchayats in schools and decision-making groups for self-expression. Therefore, the existing rules have to be radically amended to address the different problems of the children.

Children, who are the important asset and future citizens of the nation, should not be allowed to grow up as illiterate, frustrated and unhealthy citizens. The children who work in a very unhealthy and insecure work conditions remain illiterate and sickly build. They may resort to anti-social activities at a young age. Thus, they spend their childhood in despair and in the long run may become destitute children. There is always a possibility that children witnessing violence may become the rebels of tomorrow. Hence, the problem of children needs to be tackled by awareness through education. Provision of social security and education in the unorganised sector can help the battle against child labour and also tackle population problem. Effectiveness of the legislations depends ultimately on the extent to which it is enforced effectively. The government has not lagged behind in terms of enacting laws in compliance with the United Nations convention, but their performance has been found clearly wanting in respect to their enforcement. To make the laws concerning children a reality, poverty and unemployment needs to be eliminated and awareness must be created among the people.
References


UN. 1989. UN Conventions in Rights of the Child.


Newspapers


