ALL THAT YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILD LABOUR



YOU ARE JUST TEN QUESTIONS AWAY FROM A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING ON CHILD LABOUR

Mr. Kailash Satyarthi is world's most acclaimed antichild labour activist and the initiator of the world-wide movement against this crime. In a freewheeling discussion with a group of journalists and an inquisitive audience he talks about the causes of child labour, debunks myths surrounding the subject and suggests possible ways of its elimination as a tangible step towards a child friendly society. In this succinct tête-à-tête, Mr. Satyarthi comprehensibly answers all the 10 questions that one may pre-empt about child labour.



If children in the poverty stricken families are not allowed to work, how would they survive? Who would look after and bring up such children, whose parents are old, ailing or handicapped?

I appreciate your concerns. Allow me to address the issues in detail. One must understand that if poor children continue to work as child labourers, then they would always remain poor, illiterate and deprived of all opportunities for their development and growth. Child Labourers grow up to become weak and hapless individuals completely trapped in the vicious circle of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and physical ailments. Their future generations wouldn't be any different either.

Secondly, parents of child labourers are usually jobless or underemployed. India has a dubious distinction of being home to around 60 million child labourers and 65million unemployed adults. Employers prefer children over adults because they are docile and are cheapest source of labour. It is important to take cognizance of the fact that a child normally works in place of an adult. This fact has been brought to the fore in various studies time and again. . The Indian scenario is not very different from other countries across the globe. There are 215 million child labourers in the world while 200 million adults continue to remain unemployed. In view of the statistics, there is absolutely no merit in employing children and making their parents run from pillar to post in search of a job.

Adult employment rate drastically plummets in regions where child labour is rampant, because employers find it lucrative to employ children in place of adults as children do not command high

wages and often agree to work for free in lieu of food and shelter. In such a situation parents of these children are unable to find suitable employment and enter the vicious circle of poverty. It is important to debunk yet another myth that a child works to send money back home for supplementing the household income. Under abject exploitation many a times the child is barely able to make his ends meet, let alone extending any help to parents whatsoever.

It is equally important to know that only 3 out of 1000 child labourers are orphans, therefore one cannot generalize that children work primarily because their parents are not alive. As far as few orphan child labourers are concerned, does it not become the responsibility and obligation of the state, civil society, religious institutions or corporates for that matter to take care of their education and well being? If this minimalistic support cannot be extended to such children, what is the use of having so many charitable organizations and governments in the first place? Such children must be guaranteed their basic needs of survival coupled up with all the opportunities and constitutional rights that they are entitled for. It should be noted that there are several welfare schemes available for disabled, old and those who fall below the poverty line. Would it not be more appropriate to work for the implementation of such schemes rather than justifying child labour?

By the way, answering your question, I am yet to

see a 70 year old father having a10 year old child. It is really very unlikely that very young children can have very old parents and therefore we cannot generalize it as a fact. I would like to draw your attention towards the perils that child labourers are exposed to. Children are more prone to injuries and occupational hazards than adults. Prolonged exposure to dust, chemicals, pesticides and heat

makes them vulnerable to incorrigible diseases. Children working in stone quarries and mines are often injured carrying heavy loads, while the ones at the agricultural fields acquire respiratory disorders on account of inhalation of toxic fumes while spraying pesticides and insecticides. I have come across many cases where children are crippled by the sharp tools that they work with without supervision or necessary safety measures. I have rescued children

from claustrophobic workshops and therefore hailing from my experience I can tell you that working under unregulated conditions for almost 12-14 hours in a day formidably affects their eyes, livers, kidneys, lungs and tender limbs. Ailing child labourers more often than not end up spending a fortune on their treatment for the rest of their lives. Many children that fall ill owing to occupational hazards are mercilessly turned out by their employers who find them of very little or no use. Hence it is clear that a child who is used as an asset for reaping profits suddenly turns into a liability for the rest of the life.

Many a times people tend to think that it is absolutely normal for poor children to work and beat hunger at home. A common perception prevalent among illiterate and poor communities is that more children tantamount to more working hands. This perception fuels the innate desire of having more children that further exacerbates poverty, hunger and child labour.

It has been established through demographic analysis that the population growth rate is much

> higher in child labour prone areas and potential source areas of child trafficking as compared to

other areas.

I would like to apprise you about the child and bonded labour rehabilitation schemes run by the Central and State Governments. In addition various land mark judgments have been delivered by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and other High Courts against child labour. The families of bonded child labourers that are rescued under the Bonded

Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 are entitled for a statutory compensation of Rs. 20,000 sponsored in equal proportion by Central and State Governments, Besides the aforesaid benefits, the parents of these child laboures are given preference during allocation of government jobs and welfare housing schemes as well. In addition to this the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act stipulates for a recovery of Rs. 20,000 from the employers for every child that is rescued by the Labour Inspectorate. This fine money is deposited in a Child Welfare Fund that caters for the expenses incurred over education and other benefits accruing to the rescued children. A proactive civil society can ensure that child welfare laws are appropriately enforced in the best interest of children.

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Is it possible to eliminate child labour till poverty is eradicated from our country?

Poverty and Child Labour share a chicken and egg relationship. It is extremely difficult to pin-point which precedes the other. Child labour fosters a vicious circle of poverty because such children remain uneducated and keep performing unskilled repetitive tasks that erode their employability in future. Here I am not suggesting stopping working towards poverty alleviation. All

that I am trying to say is that it is equally important to target both the issues simultaneously. Poverty cannot be eliminated till child labour is eradicated; similarly it is not possible to end child labour completely without addressing parental poverty.

Considering the floor wages a child labourer works for as low as Rs. 15 per day. 60 million child labourers would earn Rs. 900

million in a day which is approximately one fifth of our country's total earnings. An adult in place of a child could possibly earn nearly 8 times as much. An employed adult therefore can easily foot the daily household expenditure and at the same time could provide education to his/her child. This would not only curb the rising unemployment and associated poverty but would also ensure a brighter future for the children. Additionally, it would foster a sense of social justice and equality in the society. In a larger context the inter-related issue of child labour and education could be best

understood by considering the example of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh – two states with almost similar incidence of poverty in the past. While Kerala has nearly 100% literacy rate, Uttar Pradesh languishes way behind with almost 1/3rd of its population unable to read and write.

A recent study conducted by International Labour Organization, a specialized

agency of the United Nations suggests that every single rupee invested towards elimination of child labour today would reap seven rupees as profit in the next 20 years.

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What are the main reasons behind child labour?

In my opinion, apathy and lack of respect towards childhood are the biggest drivers of child labour. This attitude is reflected through many manifestations including low level of social responsiveness which emanates from lack of concern towards poor and neglected children. The second reason is lack of political will which is a clear fall out of inadequate enactment of social protection schemes and weak enforcement of the labour laws that already exist.

Governments do not allocate necessary funds towards education, health and elimination of child labour at the time of formulating the annual budgets. Thirdly lax enforcement of rural development and poverty alleviation schemes, non-ascertainment of minimum wages for the adult, farmers not getting fair price for their

produce and absence of free and quality education also promote child labour. Social aberrations like gender inequality and caste biases further foster this crime.

Unmindful of the harm that child labour causes to children, the society continues to employ them. Children can be seen working on ancestral lands in the villages to support livelihood. Children are preferred over adults for reasons more than one. Besides being the cheapest source of labour they keep working under inhuman conditions without a whimper. Unlike adults children do not unionize to exert pressure on the employers. It is easy to

coerce children to work for long hours or even during the night at little or no pay at all. It has been commonly observed that child labourers are treated as inanimate objects and are forced to stay in the very workshops where they work.

It has also been observed that areas that are afflicted by natural calamities like flood, famine, earthquake and conflict turn out to be hotbeds for child traffickers

to operate. Such children land into prostitution and beggary by gangs involved in child trafficking.

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neglected children.



So, it is fairly clear that the causes of child labour are extremely difficult to address. In such a situation, how could it be eliminated?

I would beg to differ over here. About a century ago child labour was a serious problem in almost all countries including the industrialized ones like England, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany and Japan. These countries realized that child labour was detrimental for re-instating social justice, ensuring education, enhancing productivity and accentuating economic stability, therefore they systematically worked towards eliminating it. Awareness, social security, welfare schemes, stringent laws and quality education steered them towards a child labour free society. Countries like Turkey, Brazil, China & South Africa, Sri Lanka have also made exemplary progress towards eradicating child labour. Let's take the example of Kerala in India where almost all children attend school. This remarkable achievement in the state is the fruit of strong political will, social awareness, and impetus for free and quality education by the Government. States like Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are also making steady progress towards elimination of child labour. Bihar is also making substantive efforts in this direction for that matter.

It is interesting to observe that incidence of child labour is comparatively lower in states where schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, Mid day meals and those related to rural development are being efficiently implemented. Active trade unionism has been able to contain child labour to a fairly large extent. From a global perspective, it is important to note that the unorganized sector and informal

economy are key breeding grounds for child labour. If honest, collective and progressive efforts are made towards tackling the issue of child labour, it would not be impossible to uproot this crime.

I would like to cite a few examples. Some years ago the Government of Brazil had introduced a welfare scheme called "Bolsa Escola" which was further expanded in its scope and outcomes to be termed as "Bolsa Familia". The Bolsa Familia has three main pillars which are cash transfer, the associated terms and conditions and the complementary actions. The cash transfer provides immediate relief to the country's poor population on account of income inequalities, the associated conditions reinforce the population's access to their basic social rights like education, health and social security, and the complementary programs' objective is to assist families' development with positive incentives to send and keep their children in school and making sure they have appropriate healthcare as a way to reduce future poverty. The overall aim is to break the pattern that if you come from a poor family you will necessarily be poor as well.

As a direct fall out, nearly 6 million children have already been withdrawn from work and enrolled in schools. This phenomenon has been extremely successful in Mexico, Peru, Tanzania and Sri Lanka. Making child's education free and improving the quality of the same, countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi have been able to significantly reduce the incidence of child labour.

Distribution of food grains to poor children in Bangladesh's schools, Mid-day meal schemes at Government aided schools in India and encouraging the girl child by conferring scholarships and providing incentives like bicycles have yielded significant results.

I would also like to highlight the impact of consumers' awareness and action towards goods

produced by child labourers. Consumers are more aware than ever and do not hesitate boycotting goods produced by children in the developing world. Similarly media has played a significant role by exposing the tyrannical conditions under which children in the global supply chains work. As a result of enhanced consumer awareness and active media intervention, the corporate sector was forced to acknowledge the violation of human rights in its supply chains and in turn enforced codes of compliance in the premises of their international suppliers at least in few cases. Although a large number of corporate

houses do not take the initiative of ensuring that the code of compliance is adhered till the last point of their supply chains, but it is for a fact that segments of the supply chains that are well monitored are less likely to falter on account of human rights' violations.

For instance, a decade and a half ago about 300thousand children were working in the carpet manufacturing belt of Banaras, Bhadoi and Mirzapur of Uttar Pradesh, with most of them trafficked from Bihar and adjoining areas of Nepal.

These children used to work as bonded labourers in the carpet weaving units. Bachpan Bachao Andolan has launched and spearheaded a consumer awareness campaign across the globe and invented a social labeling mechanism "Rugmark" (now known as Goodweave). Under this initiative every rug that was produced was accredited with a child labour free label. This

endeavour coupled up with other actions like raid and rescue and social mobilization resulted in reduction of child labour in this belt by nearly 80%. This scheme of labeling was rolled out in South Asia where about 1 million children in the carpet manufacturing sector of India, Nepal and Pakistan had been working. As a result of the interventions under Rugmark, the number of child labourers in South Asia has gone down by almost 70%.

At another occasion Bachpan Bachao Andolan with the help of school children ran a nationwide campaign against child labourers employed in the fireworks industry. Many

children were known to be working under extremely inhuman conditions in the fireworks factories at Sivakasi and Virudunagar. This intervention significantly brought down the number of child labourers in the fireworks sector. Non Governmental Organizations and Trade Unions across the world are engaged in elimination of child labour and are actively working towards the cause in the fields of knowledge, policy and practice.

Let's take the example of Kerala in India where almost all children attend school. This remarkable achievement in the state is the fruit of strong political will, social awareness, and impetus for free and quality education by the Government. States like Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are also making steady progress towards elimination of child labour. Bihar is also making substantive efforts in this

direction for that matter.



You have emphasized upon education. what is the use of education that fosters unemployment? If children from poor families choose to work and earn money for beating hunger, why should they attain education in the first place?

Your question stems from a deep rooted social misbelief. Unfortunately this cognitive misconstruction is the biggest reason of injustice in our society. We conveniently develop different perspectives and adopt dual standards for

different sections of the society. We apply them in such a way that further fuels inequality and discrimination. We fail to understand that in all fairness the norms that apply for the children belonging to poor sections must be no different than the ones that apply for our own children. If you so believe that education fosters unemployment then why do you spend a fortune towards your own child's education? Rules of the game cannot change that drastically across different sections of the society.

This is an era of globalization which thrives on information and technology. The notion of education has undergone a complete

change over the last 25 years. Earlier the rhetoric was "Education for Employment". Today it stands at "Education for Empowerment".

In this age of knowledge economy & capitalism,

education is the most important tool for sustaining one's identity and existence. We must not forget that education is an internationally acknowledged human right. In fact education is the key for all other rights. Denial of education is outright denial of all human rights.

I would like to clarify over here that quality, social concern, equality and human values are often ignored in our existing education system. I strongly recommend a four pronged education system that is free, compulsory, equal and useful in

terms of social responsiveness, quality and employability. If you have any objection to what I just said, please let me know.

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society..



Your explanation is convincing but can you give some concrete examples?

I will surely attempt to explain using some more examples. For instance in India, I do not attribute the economic prosperity completely to the government and political leadership. The credit

also goes to handful of bright Indian Youth, which has excelled in the fields of medicine, software, information-technology and many more fields of advanced knowledge doing the country proud. Today any discussion on the global economic landscape cannot be imagined without including countries like India, China, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and South Korea. This has been possible only on account of knowledge and education. I would like to share the findings of a few economic researches.

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earn later in life by 5-15% for boys and even more for girls. For each additional year of secondary school, an individual's wages increase by 15-25%. No country has ever achieved continuous and

A single year of primary school increases the wages people earn later in life by 5-15% for boys and even more for girls. For each additional year of secondary school, an individual's wages increase by 15-25%. No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without first having at least 40% of its adults able to read and write. A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive pass the age of 5 years. Another study has shown that Seven million cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented in the next decade if every child received education. rapid economic growth without first having at least 40% of its adults able to read and write. A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive pass the age of 5 years. Another study has shown that Seven million cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented in the next decade if every child received education. Education is imperative for enhancing agricultural productivity, increasing transparency in governance, inclusive development, sustained growth and promoting active public participation towards an efficient democracy.



Kailash Ji, I would like to change the topic of discussion. India is a secular country. The holy men across all religions, epics, temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras together keep spreading the message of humanity. If child labour were such grave a sin, would it not have been eradicated long ago?

I was wondering how you could miss out on such a pertinent question. There is a strange correlation between religion and children. Babies are born without a religion. It is we the adults who give them distinct religious identity and further compartmentalize them by performing rituals like baptism (in Christianity), khatna (circumcision in Islam), tonsure, etc (in Hinduism) etc. to connote affiliation of a child to a particular sect or religion. In my opinion, the moment a child is labeled or tagged with a religious identity, humanity looses out on its yet another precious member.

There are about one billion poverty stricken children across the globe. About 210 million children work at the cost of their health and education. Globally ten children die out of malnutrition every minute. 70 million children have never seen a classroom. Nearly 150 million children are compelled to leave school before completing the primary level.

Tens of thousands of children as victims of trafficking land up in sex trade. Many of them are abducted and their organs are sold in the market. Children away from their parents work in bondage at the fields, factories, kilns and brothels. 500 thousand children are either employed as soldiers against their wishes or find themselves in armed conflict in one way or the other. At an age when they should be playing with toys, these children are left with lethal weapons like A.K.-47 and A.K.-56.

In spite of sermons by churches, mosques, temples and other religious institutions the problem of child labour still exists in its worst forms. Though I fail to understand the apathy of religions in eliminating child labour, it may be an offshoot of the influence of rich and elite who are essentially responsible for this age old crime. Seldom do these institutions work for safeguarding the rights of the children.

In Hinduism, child is equated to God. A girl child is worshipped by Hindus. Hindu epics reveal that there was no gender inequality in the ancient times. The religious childhood tales of Lord Rama and Krishna are an integral part of Hindu culture. In Gurukul, Prince Krishna and Poor Sudama stayed and studied together without any discrimination or prejudice. There was complete equity in education, irrespective of gender or economic background.

Let us now talk about Christianity. The Bible shows that children were very dear to Christ. Christ in this holy book says "Let the children come to me and do not forbid them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these". One must understand that it's not just the baptized children that Jesus calls upon but he clearly reckons all children irrespective of their caste, creed and religion. More importantly, he accords the priority to life for those who believe in him by putting "children on the centre stage".

There are umpteen numbers of examples in Islam

that prove that children are the most cherished possession of mankind. Prophet Mohammad himself had only one child – a daughter. He said that that daughter is a divine gift. Islam reiterates the importance and necessity of education for all.

The holy Quran teaches that dignity of a child should be respected in every aspect, for example children must have their identity and should be introduced in the society with a deep sense of

respect. My own tryst with Islam happened through a cleric who used to live in a mosque situated adjacent to my ancestral home. Since he was a naïve old man and very friendly to children, as a child I was attracted towards him to learn Urdu. He used to recite stories and teachings of Islam. One thing that I would never forget is that Allah - the God is incorporeal and assumes no shape or form, but one can certainly feel His aura radiating from the smile of a child sitting in the lap of his mother.

Now let's look into the reality. Many people who worship a girl child feel no shame in raping even a one year old.

53% of girl children in our country are victims of sexual exploitation in one form or the other. Female foeticide and infanticide are at an all time high. Girls are sold and bought for prostitution and slavery. Young boys & girls are recruited in institutions like Madarsas (seminaries) in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan etc to

learn religion, but on the contrary to it they are brainwashed to become terrorists and even human bombs to massacre humanity and demolish the great teachings of Islam.

I still remember rescuing a seven year old boy from a glass bangle factory in Firozabad (a small industrial town in Uttar Pradesh). He used to blow molten glass for manufacturing bangles. The child's skin had turned black due to unbearable,

> smoke heat and dust. He was a bonded child labourer who was working for a ruthless employer. The child was often beaten up even for small mistakes at work. One day while the boy was at work, molten glass accidentally dripped on his palms grievously injuring him. The hot liquid pierced through his flesh and bone like a bullet. His employer instead of taking him to the hospital mercilessly started beating him. I was petrified hearing his woeful tale. When I asked him his name, he innocently replied "Mohammad". His employer, a muslim communal leader of the local Babri Masjid Committee did not for once hesitate torturing a child

whose name coincided with that of the Holy Prophet.

I am reminded of yet another horrific incident that took place in Mirzapur. We raided a carpet factory unit to rescue twelve young girls who were trafficked from Sarguja district of Chattisgarh

Many people who worship a girl child feel no shame in raping even a one year old. 53% of girl children in our country are victims of sexual exploitation in one form or the other. Female foeticide and infanticide are at an all time high. Girls are sold and bought for prostitution and slavery. Young boys & girls are recruited in institutions like Madarsas (seminaries) in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan etc to learn religion, but on the contrary to it they are brainwashed to become terrorists and even human bombs to massacre humanity and demolish the great teachings of Islam. (erstwhile Madhya Pradesh) and brought to a village in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh. They were held in bondage for about two years at this place. During the rescue operation, eleven girls happily came out of the factory with our activists but one fourteen year old girl was still missing. Along with a lady Magistrate, I walked up again into the small factory unit and was shocked to see that girl weeping incessantly facing towards the wall.

We told her that she had been freed and that she would now be re-united with her parents. Hearing this, she started crying even louder. Upon consoling her when we asked her the reason, she screamed in anguish "I have lost all face to go home". Later we learnt that she was raped by her employer and was carrying his child. She did not want to go back home. When we asked her name, she replied "Sita" - a pious name coinciding with that of Lord Ram's wife in the Hindu epic "Ramayana". More shockingly her employer was a local Hindu leader, with communal slogans prominently inscribed on the door of his factory demanding the restoration of "Ram" Temple at Ayodhya. Could there be a bigger paradox than this? How would you have felt, had you been in my place?

We have been facing huge problems in rescuing trafficked and enslaved children from certain Muslim dominated localities of Delhi. Some of my colleagues and I were attacked by a communal mob in mid 2011 at East Delhi when we had organized a secret raid in a cluster of zari embroidery units. These factory owners had lured away about 3 dozen young muslim kids under the garb of madarsa (seminary) in collusion with some clerics. These children were held in bondage. The employers created a mass frenzy by profusely

shouting and instigating others that a madarsa was being attacked.

It is quite evident that these incidences have no relation with any religion in any way whatsoever, but is it possible to ignore instances where some people exploit the poor and hapless in the garb of religion?

On various occasions it has been revealed that the situation of children in many charity institutions like seminaries, missionaries, orphanages, shelter homes run by various faith groups is astonishingly shocking. The children are found to be sexually abused, physically tortured and exploited. They are bereft of all dignity and protection. Even incidences of sodomy and rape are not uncommon at some of such places.

Most of the social evils and vices prevalent in our society continue unabated in the name of religion. The heinous crime of child sacrifice has not been eradicated yet. Traditionally considering sons as the natural heirs, daughters are out rightly discriminated across families and societies. One of the manifestations of this mindset is rampant female foeticide. Another reflection of this mentality surfaces as child marriages which are most commonly practiced in rural India. It is indeed shambolic that nearly 50% of girls are married off at an age when they should be enjoying their childhood and attaining education for shaping up their future.

In my opinion socially responsive citizens like you should insist all believers and in particular the holymen & clerics across all faiths to condemn child abuse in all forms and variants and to uphold the rights and dignity of the child. People from all religions and cultures must earnestly work towards protecting the rights of the children.



Kailash Ji, I am deeply touched by your stories and arguments. I am rather shocked. Could you please throw some light on what our Constitution and laws have to say in this regard?

In my opinion, child labour and exploitation are worst violations of human rights. India has signed various international conventions and promulgated many laws against child labour, but unfortunately these laws are openly flouted.

According to the Constitution of India no child below the age of 14 years should be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment. Our Constitution is against all forms of forced labour, human trafficking and exploitation. Additionally, right to free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years is also guaranteed in it... We have strong laws like Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, and Child Labour (Prohibition and

Regulation) Act, 1986. In addition to this Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act, 2000 stipulates that whoever ostensibly procures a juvenile or the child (an individual less than 18 years) for the purpose of any hazardous employment, keeps him in bondage, withholds his earnings or uses such earning for his own

purposes shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall be liable to fine. These laws are periodically amended as well. Any sort of victimization/ exploitation of children, bonded labour, child

> labour (in listed occupations and processes) and child trafficking are legally punishable offences. Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and other High Courts have delivered landmark judgments for elimination of child labour. These judgments stipulate arrest of errant employers, sealing of workplaces where children are found working and recovery of fine money of Rs. 20,000 from the employer per rescued child. The judgments also accord for effective

rehabilitation of children from exploitation to education. Lack of legal awareness on the part of citizens, un-accountability of government officials, political & administrative corruption, shortage of able and trained labour inspectors, and influence of black money often come in the way of law enforcement.

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Kailash Ji, sorry for cutting you short. Black money and Corruption are hot topics of discussion these days? Are you somehow not linking these issues with child labour?

I am glad that you interrupted. Black money and corruption breed child labour to a large extent on one hand. Child labour generates black money on the other. I would like to explain this in brief. According to Non Governmental estimates there are nearly 6 crores (sixty million) child labourers in our country, however the official estimates claim that there are 12.67 million child labourers (as per Census 2001). According to the authorities, on an average each child is paid about Rs. 15 (30 cents) per day. This means that all child labourers put together would earn Rs. 90 crores (US \$ 18 million) in a day. If these 60 million children were to be replaced by an equal number of adult workers and assuming an average floor wage rate of Rs. 115 (US \$ 2.30) per worker (although this is less than the stipulated legal

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The employers conveniently fudge their books of account showing Rs. 115 (US \$ 2.30) s p e n t to wards the remuneration of every adult worker and are able to save Rs. 100 (US \$ 2) per worker. Rs. 1, 20,000 crores (US \$ 24 billion) thus generated is nothing but black money which is partially used to bribe police and politicians. This further augments the ever burgeoning parallel economy in our country.

minimum wages), they would earn about Rs. 690

child labour.



This discussion has been an eye opener for me Kailash Ji. I am completely against child labour now. Could you please tell me as to what could people like me do in their individual capacities to eliminate child labour?

Many thanks for the acknowledgement. This change is rather inevitable. It's time we collectively worked towards bringing about this transformation in the society. In your individual capacity, you must firmly resolve that you would

never engage any child either at home or at work. Please do not accept any kind of hospitality whatsoever, not even a glass of water for that matter at the homes of your friends and relatives who employ domestic child labourers. Be resolute for not availing the services of restaurants or commercial establishments that employ children. Do not buy from shops that employ child labourers. Boycott things that are made by children. Please try inculcating these habits in your friends and relatives as well. Try persuading parents of child labourers to start sending their children to school.

Warn those who employ children and if required, do not refrain to complain against them to police, labour department officials or child helpline. This could be done by making a call, sending an sms, writing an e-mail or filing a written complaint. As a socially responsible citizen do not cast vote in favor of a candidate who does not condemn child labour or does not have a structured plan to eliminate child labour from his or her constituency if voted to power.

It is heartening to see that child labour has become a topic of discussion in the media. If you come across any incidence of child labour, sit up and take notice. You must approach media so that your message could reach out to the masses in

■ Please do not accept any kind of hospitality whatsoever, not even a glass of water for that matter at the homes of your friends and relatives who employ domestic child labourers. Be resolute for not availing the services of restaurants or commercial services that employ children. Do not buy from shops that employ child labourers. Boycott things that are made by children. Please try inculcating these habits in your friends and relatives as well. Try persuading parents of child labourers to start sending their children to school. minimum possible time and the impact could be enhanced manifold. Use social networking sites like face book and twitter for spreading awareness about child labour, citing importance of education, emphasizing on a sound federal budget for implementing anti -child labour programmes, advocating for effective implementation of child labour laws and spearheading anti child labour consumer campaigns. You could work with the volunteers of Bachpan Bachao Andolan or

similar organizations to take up the issue of child labour head on.

I would like to call upon everybody to do whatever one could possibly do to end child labour. We cannot and must not wait for others to act before we do. Procrastination would only worsen the issue. As socially responsible citizens of India we must do all that it takes to eliminate child labour, lest we should not be able to justify our existence to the future generations.



Our concerted efforts would be fruitful in eliminating child labour from the society. We solemnly pledge to work towards ending child labour and are very hopeful that together we would be able to bring about the much needed difference.

If you have no further questions, let me end this discussion with a short story which I read in my early childhood days. It comes from some old Indian epic. One day Lord Shiva was wandering in Himalayas along with his wife Parvati. Parvati suddenly noticed that many ants were getting crushed under the hefty feet of an elephant that was passing by. Seeing this she could not hold herself back and shouted "Oh Lord, please stop this elephant to save these poor ants and punish him for this massacre". Shiva without paying heed to what Parvati said kept on walking. This annoyed Parvati and she loudly asked Lord Shiva" Why don't you stop and punish the Mahout for the sin that he has committed?" Lord Shiva still kept walking without reacting. Getting no reaction from Lord Shiva, Parvati went furious "Lord I cannot understand as to why are you silent in spite of my repeated insistence. If you do not want to punish the elephant or mahout, please kill these innocent insects, so that they may at least attain

salvation!!!" At this Lord Shiva stopped and stared angrily at Parvati. He said "Lady be prepared to be punished yourself". Parvati was scared but Shiva went ahead explaining that "being an animal, the elephant does not have that sense of morality. Mahout sitting on the elephant's back is unable to see the ants getting trampled on the ground, but you were the first one to notice this wrong and did nothing about it. Instead of being proactive and taking initiative to turn it into right, which you could have done easily, you opted to wait for me to take action. Therefore you are the only one who deserves a punishment in this case".

Dear friends, most of the people in the society are like innocent ants, some are like elephants and mahouts and there are many who are like Parvati who do nothing but to complain and wait for others to act. If we do not act now, we will fall in our own eyes forever.