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NET, IAS, State-SET (KSET, WBSET, MPSET, etc.), GATE, CUET, Olympiads etc. Essay: Human Rights Violations

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The prevention of child labor has become a crucial issue because it is not merely a question of exploitation but also creates the problem of juvenile crime. The recent legislative curbs have brought about some changes in the pattern of employment of children in the organized industry.

Child workers fall mostly in the age category between 10 and 15 and are engaged in gainful occupation which exposes them to hazardous work hampering any chance of their development. According to the Labor Force and Planning Commission, the number of child labor had gone up to 3,765 lakhs till 1995 and by the year 2000, there could be a threefold rise to 25 millions.

At the root of the problem lies the question of poverty and the very low family income of child workers. In recent years, there has been a decline in the proportion of child labor in the organized sector but it has spread its tentacles in the unorganized sectors such as road construction, weaving industry and restaurants. According to the 1981 census, Jammu and Kashmir had 10.53 per cent, the highest number of child labor incidence out of which about 85 per cent was engaged in handicrafts and handlooms.

Aristotle had compared the superiority of the educated over the unlettered and said that it was as much as the living are to the dead. The importance of education for the physical, intellectual and moral will of an individual cannot be overemphasized and its success lies in releasing the individual from the clutches of ignorance in all possible permutation and combinations.

The National Human Rights Commission NHRC has concentrated on eliminating child labor, particularly child prostitution, which in a way has become an organized, clandestine profession. The Commission has made stupendous progress in eliminating child labor in the glass industry of Ferozabad district in Uttar Pradesh.

The news of the deportation of 75 Indian children, including girls, from Saudi Arabia points the underground functioning of a powerful syndicate which sells poor, deformed children, particularly female children, from the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The Commission can play an active role by involving nongovernment organizations and creating awareness among the general masses.

It is paradoxical that while the percentage of literacy is increasing, the total number of unlettered has also been increasing. Besides, there is a tremendous difference between the male and female literacy ratio. In 1931, there were 560 male literates for every 100 literate females. In 1991, the tally was 63.9 and 39.31. Though there has been a significant improvement in the literacy rate of the females and the difference has narrowed down to a certain extent, the overall position of women has not improved much. Women workers are exploited in the private and public sectors. In certain unorganized sectors, the womenfolk, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, face sexual harassment and are denied equal wages. Concerted efforts by the NHRC and nongovernment organizations are needed to remedy the situation.

Another major challenge is the alarming population growth 16 per cent of the world's population, rendering efforts towards tackling unemployment difficult. The International Labor Organization's report on World Employment, 1996⁹⁷ says that the economies of most countries have noticed a declining trend in employment opportunities but the overall scenario of employment in India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar is particularly pessimistic. It is important that a major portion of the national resources should be used to generate more job opportunities.

A Home Ministry report, Crime In India, says that 5,692 cases of juvenile crime such as a criminal breach of trust, burglary and counterfeiting were registered in 1994, Tamil Nadu reported the highest number of juvenile offences 3,521 followed by Gujarat 703. Education can play a major role in removing these distortions and discrepancies in society. Hence, an organized attempt to impart education to even the poorest is essential.

Checking the abuse of power is a crucial strategy for maintaining human rights. On many occasions, the Army and the paramilitary forces have gone berserk while tackling terrorists and protesters. There are many instances when they have not even spared the womenfolk and children. Besides, the armed forces have also been accused of atrocities including torture, rape and killing in fake encounters. The powers given to police are enormous that incidents of custodial deaths, counter killings, missing persons and torture are increasingly being reported over the years. Besides, the prevalence of several repressive Acts is an indication of the interference of the State machinery in the lives of the people. The Terrorist and Descriptive Activities Prevention Act, 1985, originally enacted to tackle terrorists in Chandigarh, Punjab and Delhi, was extended to other parts of country. The main criticism against TADA is that the accused is considered guilty unless he proves his innocence. Under this Act, a police officer can even act as a magistrate while the identity of the witness produced against the detenu is kept secret and confessions apparently extracted under torture are permissible as evidence. Amnesty International has criticized torture by policemen and fake encounters and the inhuman conditions in jails. Police must advise a multilayered approach based on a system checks and balances to gain credibility.

The policy of transparency that the Government has adopted after NHRC urged it to allow the activists of Amnesty international to visit the Kashmir valley has been helpful in reestablishing the Government's credentials. A lot of awareness has taken place after the establishment of NHRC but there are still myriad challenges requiring a careful handling.

The growing problem of refugees has added a new dimension to the problem. The Chief Executive of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHRC, in her address to the 65th convention of the Indian women's conference titled the Empowerment of Uprooted Women has highlighted the acute problem of refugees and the violation of rights across the globe. She said that 70 per cent of the 26 million displaced people were women. Afghanistan is having the maximum number of such refugees. About 1.2 million refugees have been stranded in the war zone of eastern Zaire leading a stalemate. New Delhi has 25,000 refugees of different origins.

The problem of refugees generally makes the condition of women vulnerable. They are invariably subjected to injustice and foul play. In the past, several incidents took place in which women faced abuse and rape. Many Somali women refugees were sexually abused when they took shelter in Kenya's camps. The Chinese authorities tortured and imprisoned many Tibetan nuns who were supporters of the cause of Tibetan independence.

The fourth United Nation Conference Women has provided a platform for the promotion and protection of women's human rights by making them a core issue for international agenda. But this alone cannot yield results unless the decisions are properly implemented. Coordination between the United Nations and various women organizations will be useful.

Extreme poverty, natural calamity, violence, environmental degradation, civil war and terrorism are the main causes of the refugee problem. A humane approach, with an attitude change towards the refugees and long term structural solutions such as the provision of job Opportunities, will be of help. Cooperation between UNHRC and NHRC can yield positive results.