

13-05-2005 - Discussion on Abolition of Child Labour Bill, 2005

Sir, I am thankful to Shri Iqbal Ahmed Saradgi for introducing this Bill. It provides us an opportunity to discuss the problem of child labour. Actually, we are discussing about the children who lost their childhood. They do not enjoy their childhood as they are thrown to places of work. It is not that they desire to do it, but they are rather forced to do it. So, it is actually manifestation of poverty, and child labour is another face of poverty.

I fully share the concern of the mover of the Bill, but I do not think that there is any dearth of law due to which child labour continues in our society. Our own Constitution says that every child born in India should be provided with compulsory primary education up to the age of 14 years. More than half a century has passed since we enacted our Constitution. If this provision was implemented, then many children in our country would have been sitting in classrooms and studying rather than indulging in child labour.

Why does it happen? It happens because they are compelled to do so. No mother or father would like his child to go and earn his bread at a tender age, when he should play and enjoy his childhood. No father or mother would like to see this happen. But, the compulsion of hunger; and of disease known as poverty compels them to do it. As a result of difficult situation being faced by them -- with heavy heart and with great sorrow -- they have to witness the tragedy of seeing their children go to work.

So, this is what is happening. Now, how to find a solution to this? I agree with those who have raised this issue and said that laws are good. Then, the mover of the Resolution has said that there are dozens of laws that prohibit expressly child labour. He also talked about the penalties. However, child labour is rampant. Therefore, we have to look elsewhere to find a solution. This is to be taken as a socio-economic problem, and a solution should be found at that level with a political determination. I think that political determination was expressed by the UPA Government when they said in their Common Minimum Programme and in their pronouncements that by 2007 they would find a solution to this. I do not know whether we are capable of finding a solution in two years. I have my doubts, but I salute their determination.

If we are to find a solution to this, then we have to have an education policy for which a lot of money is required. We have to find that money and we should provide facilities for primary education in the villages all over the country. It is not that by establishing schools alone, the children will go and educate themselves. They should be provided dresses, they should be provided food, and they should be provided a kind of stipend by which their other expenses are met. Probably, the poor people who are sending their children might have to be given some money for doing so because the hard-work of these children provides them sustenance today. That is the reality, whether we like it or not.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Teachers also.

Yes, teachers also. Now, Sir, this is not a new problem. Many speakers pointed this out, and according to official figures, something like 13 million children in our country are engaged in child labour. There are some statistics which say that the number has reduced. I do not believe in those statistics. The reality must be much bigger than this. There are certain unofficial figures which say that there are 20 million children in India engaged in child labour. It is a blot on our civilisation.

It is a problem of backwardness. In every backward country, there is child labour. It was there through ages. In the days of industrial revolution, when mankind was stepping into a new era in history, it was child labour that gave a thrust to that. It was all about the plight of those children, their sweat and tears. Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* said, "The Queens and Princesses, when they wore very soft and tender dresses and laces, it was all wet with the sweat, blood and tears of children." It was a reality then; it is a reality even today. So, in our country, today, the Government has so many schemes. I do not say that the Government is turning a Nelson's eye towards this problem, but those schemes are not sufficient. If we are to find a solution to this, then we have to find out sufficient resources by which these poor families from where children are thrown to the market of child labour, are financially supported. They are to be economically supported to see that their children are sent to schools.

In schools, facilities have to be provided, including food, dress, books, toys and everything, free of charge. For a country like ours, it will be difficult to do, I know. But we have to find resources. To find those resources it is necessary to have that political will, and give priority. We have to have it as our priority. That children in this country will be provided a happy childhood should be the priority. For that, we have to find money, resources. If those resources are mobilised, properly channelised and properly utilised, then probably we will be able to make a big breakthrough in finding a solution to this problem. There are many aspects of this that one can discuss.

The lady Member who spoke before me mentioned the child labour engaged in the cracker industry. It is a terrible thing. In cracker industry, a small spark, a careless moment can set fire to a whole factory and many children can get killed. It happens. Children are engaged in diamond polishing factories. They are engaged in the hotel industry.

We find a large number of children coming from poor areas in our country to the cities to work in hotels. This is another aspect of exploitation. When there is unemployment all around, if you employ people properly, you will have to pay more money. For example, if you employ able-bodied, experienced boys and girls to work in a hotel, you will have to pay very high salaries. So, what is the shortcut then? The shortcut is to recruit child labour. They will demand nothing. They are unaware of their rights. They are only worried about their hunger. They want some food to eat. The hotel can provide them food. Probably, they are providing only food and not even a good dress, and preventing the children from having all the enjoyment of the childhood. These children are compelled to work for ten hours, or whatever length of hours the management decides. So, it is poverty they are exploiting, it is unemployment they are exploiting, by making use of the cheap labour of children.

These issues can be talked about one by one. Primarily it is a question of finding new resources. If the Government has determination, political will, I do not think any new law is necessary to find a solution to this. We should stick to the position that the Constitutional provisions will be implemented and measures should be adopted for that. That is more than enough.

For every industry you can see, there are laws. The Mover of the Bill pointed out dozens of laws that prevent children from doing labour. All those provisions have to be implemented. It is not a question of bringing forward a single law and saying that hereafter the child labour would be abolished. It is a

question of finding better situation, socio-economic situation in the country where we decide to provide a better life to our children. That was probably the dream of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru liked children. His birthday is Children's Day. It was he who, after Independence, on his return from a visit to the Soviet Union, said that he found children to be princes and princesses in the Soviet Union.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Chandrappan, will you take long or would like to continue in the next Session?

I will continue in the next Session. ... (*Interruptions*) You are suggesting that I should continue my speech in the next Session.

MR. SPEAKER: I am not trying to stop you as such. We are towards the end of the Session. You continue with the speech in the next Session.

All right, Sir.