

GOVERNANCE IN MEGHALAYA AND GROWING CHILD LABOUR AMIDST RAMPANT UNSCIENTIFIC COAL MINING IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISATION

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ABSTRACT

The developments that we are witnessing in the internationally marketing environment of today is the trend towards increasing economic interdependence and globalisation of markets. The present driving force of the market economy is the accumulative instinct which is essentially human avarice. The changed context is crucial to understanding the problem of child labour. For some sections of the society, globalisation has come as something of a bonanza. However the economic growth does not necessarily improve the well being of child labourers. The existing trends suggest that the lot of the disadvantaged and labouring masses especially children labourers has worsened during this period in the different states of India including Meghalaya. The problem of child labour in Meghalaya is getting more and more extensive every year with globalisation.

The bulk of child labour in the state is engaged in coal mining. The magnitude of child labour is gradually growing in the deep mines. Child labourers are seen to be slogging in decrepit, dungeons called coal mines with earnings disproportionate to work loads. They work for a minimum of 12 hours per day. There is no job security. They are exposed to dangerous tasks without adequate protection. The result is disastrous. Soon, they start suffering from asthma, tuberculosis, skin diseases, besides of course even losing a limb or two while working. A research conducted by the Impulse NGO Network in 2010, claimed that 70,000 children are working as bonded labourers in the mines. BBC was the first to air this news and it attracted worldwide attention.

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Despite all the constitutional safeguards and clear cut policies to bring about the progressive elimination of child labour and stringent legislation matching it, the harsh reality in Meghalaya is that child labour in the coal mines continues to be in its most dehumanising form. The legislative framework and policy perspectives on child labour have apparently been lopsided and have failed to mitigate the miseries of children. Government of Meghalaya appears to be working in an ivory tower quite unaffected by allegations of grave misdemeanour. Very often the attitude adopted is that of nonchalance. The government can make laws against any inhuman activities but cannot implement because many political leaders running the government themselves own the mines where the children are exploited.

The participation of children in labour force, runs contrary to the whole thesis of human resource development, which is essential for the overall socio- economic development of the state. The whole system , the inequitable socio- economic – political ambience is responsible for the plight of children. In the changing scenario of globalisation the time has come to give serious thought to the elimination of incidence of child labour in specified hazardous occupations and processes like coal mining. Combating exploitation is the immediate need of the hour.

INTRODUCTION

Governance is an indeterminate term used in development to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources in order to guarantee the realisation of human rights. Governance describes "the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented".

Good governance is based on the principles such as conducting the works with all integrity, equity and fairness that must be transparent with regard to all transactions making all necessary disclosures, abiding laws of the land. Good governance should have accountability and responsibility to the nation and commitment to conduct the works in an ethical manner. Good governance improves efficiency with high standards of ethical behaviour based upon which a responsive and open government can be built. Good governance is affirming commitment and maintain transparency before the people of the nation. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure

good governance are undertaken. Therefore, good governance has become a much more demanding endeavour of the time.

Good governance is an ideal situation that has to be consensus oriented, transparent, accountable, responsive, participatory, equitable, inclusive and follows the rule of law which is difficult to achieve in totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards the ideal of good governance with the aim of making it a reality.

The government including all its institutions has a shared responsibility in good governance. In a system of representative democracy, institutions of government and officials assist to serve the interests of the public. Fundamentally, there is a level of confidence that is associated with all and the working machineries in the fray that is known to have good governance. It is the system and processes in place to protect the interests of all sections of the society.

No one can deny that 'government' as the most powerful institution in society is the major element of any system of governance. But in recent times, its position is being narrowed on the plea of deriving advantages from free market, privatisation and globalisation.

The developments that we are witnessing in the internationally marketing environment of today is the trend towards increasing economic interdependence and globalisation of markets. The policy of globalisation in brief, means the following: it means being able to manufacture in the most cost effective way possible anywhere in the world and to procure raw materials and drawing management resources from the cheapest sources anywhere in the world. It means having the entire world as a market. It is associated not only with increasing cross border movement of goods, services, capital, technology, information and people, but also with an organisation of economic activities which straddles national boundaries. The world market place and the entire global economic environment are today at one of the most profound points of change.

The proponents of globalisation of under developed countries have argued that such integration will improve the allocative efficiency of resources, increase the labour productivity, help to develop the export spheres and export culture; increase the inflow of capital and updated technology in the country, increase the degree of competition in domestic economy, reduce the relative prices of industrial and manufactured goods, improve the terms of trade in agriculture, and in general, give a boost to the average growth rate of the economy in the years to come. It is

also felt that the main effects of integration will be felt in the industrial and related sectors and cheaper and high quality consumer goods will be manufactured at home. And as there is a large domestic market for these goods, employment opportunities would expand and over a period of time, the trickle effect will operate and the proportion of people below the poverty line will go down.

The Government of India beginning from June 1991 initiated many reform measures with a major thrust on improvement of competitive efficiency of Indian industries by utilising foreign investment and technology to a much greater degree than in the past. The new reform measures ended the regime of licensing and controls and made the industry virtually independent. Liberalisation of economic policy is intended to promote the integration of Indian economy with the global economy. In the last few years, India has tried to unshackle the economy to increase its growth rate and to become globally competitive. This has brought before the business and industry in the different states of India including Meghalaya a tremendous challenge to compete aggressively in world markets and to adjust accordingly.

Although India was a late comer to embrace liberalisation, it is well integrated today in the globalised world. India has registered appreciable economic and trade growths following the integration of its economy with the global economy. For some sections of the Indian society and the Indian diaspora, globalisation has come as something of a bonanza. There has been a huge increase in salaries of senior managers, accountants, lawyers and public relations personnel working for MNC's or their local competitors. Globalisation has created more job opportunity for skilled labours. Therefore, income of skilled people or professionals has increased.

The interest of a particular section of the society need not match the real interests of all other sections. Other sections of the society may benefit only to the extent that a fraction of this new prosperity trickles down to them. Some may not benefit at all, while some may even be adversely affected. The champions of globalisation are more interested in the norms, standards, policies and institutions for open global markets than for people and their rights. With the growing dominance of market forces over social and political outcomes, the distribution of opportunities, choices and rewards is becoming increasingly unequal. As a result, power and wealth are concentrated in some select groups of people. Others are naturally marginalised. The existing trends suggest that the lot of the disadvantaged and the labouring masses especially children labourers has worsened during this period. Today the driving force of the market

economy of the country is the accumulative instinct which is essentially human greed. The changed context is crucial to understanding the problem of child labour.

The concept of child labour is directly attributed to the developments in the industrial production process. Labour and human dignity came to be considered as purchasable at cheapest possible price. Child labour has galloped in the coal mines of Meghalaya and the growth rate of child workers is faster than the growth rate of child population. The economy, keen to offer cheap labour and going all out for higher exports, continues to lower the social standard. It has been pointed out that the whole process of structural adjustment programmes has increased unemployment and has forced poor families to part with their children if they can help keep hunger away. The problem of child labour in the coal mines of Meghalaya has spiralled out of control and is getting more and more extensive every year with globalisation. Globalisation it is assumed, increases the demand for export products and in its insatiable thirst for higher profits, industry replaces adults by cheaper child labour. Though in the organised and Unorganised sectors there is no dearth of adult labour, employees prefer hiring children as they are more amenable to discipline, too young to organise themselves and fight for their rights, can be paid less and bullied to obedience.

COAL MINING AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR MEGHALAYA IN THE GLOBALISATION ERA

In the era of globalisation and open markets, joint ventures are an accepted mode for exploration, exploitation and marketing of minerals including coal. Coal is an important non-renewable source which plays a crucial role in the development of any country. Coal remains one of the lowest cost options for electricity generation and is the fastest growing energy source worldwide. Countries are now trying hard to develop coal production with the object of attaining industrial progress and economic betterment. Among the world's largest producers of coal are the national coal companies of Russia, Ukraine and India. Coal is continuing to play a critical role in supporting India's energy plans for considerable time into the future and Meghalaya has emerged as an important coal producer of the country.

Minerals have played an important role in the life and economy of the people of Meghalaya and the state is endowed with considerable mineral wealth. The chief minerals of Meghalaya are coal, limestone, sillimanite and clay which are of great economic value. Coal is one of the

important sources of power in Meghalaya. Coal has been used for thousands of years, and is often overlooked, however coal is very important to Meghalaya. This mineral is required mainly by railways and the cement, paper and tea industries in Assam. It is also used for domestic purposes and the production of chemicals. The mineral has been extracted substantially during the last few decades and has been contributing significantly to the income of the State. Experts say that this quantum of coal has the capacity to generate 2000 MWs of power. The annual production of coal in the state is about 3250 thousand tones. The coal reserves of Meghalaya are estimated to be approximately 1200 million tons out of which more than 1000 million tons are in Garo Hills alone. The production of coal is spread over in Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, East Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hills areas. Coal reserves were highest in Garo Hills and lowest in Jaintia Hills. Despite this, mining activities were highest in Jaintia Hills and lowest in Garo Hills.

The following are the chief coalfields of Meghalaya:

(a) Coalfields of Garo Hills: The important coalfields of Garo Hills are the west Darranggiri coalfields, Kailash coalfields and Balpakram- Pendengrei coalfields, the Siju coalfields, the Baljong- Dongreng coalfields, Hansapal coalfields and the Rongrenggiri coalfields.

(b) Coalfields of Khasi Hills

The main coalfields of Khasi Hills are the Shahlang coalfields, the Nonghyllam coalfields, Langrin coalfields, the Cherrapunjee- Laitryngew coalfields, the Mawsynram coalfields, the Pynursla- Langkyrdem- Thangjinath coalfields and the Umrilang Coalfields. Others include Shyrmang, Shella- Mawlong and Pynursla coalfields.

(c) The important coalfields of Jaintia Hills are the Bapung coalfields and the Lakadong coalfields.

The hill state has an estimated coal reserve of around 576.48 million tonnes. The coal is suitable for use as fuel for heat and power generation, in producing iron, steel and gas and to make coke for metallurgical purposes. The state produces around five million tonnes of this black diamond annually.

Hitherto, coal has been exported to neighbouring Bangladesh as it earns valuable foreign exchange. Meghalaya sells 6-7 million tonnes of coal to Bangladesh every year. The quantity of coal exported during 2008- 09 was 9.53 lakh tonnes. Coal is essential to Meghalaya as a catalyst

for economic development ,international trade and employment of thousands of Meghalayans and outsiders.

If it wasn't for coal, electricity would be too expensive to afford. Access to modern energy services not only contributes to economic growth and household incomes but also to the improved quality of life that comes with better education and health services. All sources of energy will be needed to meet future energy demand, including coal. Coal extraction has been contributing a considerable portion of net state domestic product. It may be noted that around 23% of gross state domestic product of Meghalaya comes from mining. The extraction of coal in Meghalaya has been started more than hundred years back. The available record however shows that the extraction was going on a very minor scale since 1960's, which had been very small in quantity and through surface mining process (rat hole method) with the help of manual labour. Production was primarily for meeting the internal domestic needs of the people. Large scale commercial extraction has been started on an increasing scale since 1970's and now gradually mechanical devices have been employed and we observe slight reduction in the unit cost of extraction. In Meghalaya, reduction in cost of extraction is due to mechanisation though it has been going on a very slow pace.

Though the quality of coal is not of very high standard, due to increase in scarcity in other regions of the country and improvement of communication , coal of Meghalaya is being exported to other regions where it is mixed with the good varieties for industrial use. It is the most export earner of the state of Meghalaya. It is used in fertiliser manufacturing, smokeless coke, cement, textile, paper, rubber, brick and pottery industries and partly for power generation.

With the adoption of the Meghalaya Minerals and Mines Policy in 2012, Meghalaya is talking business in the mines and minerals sector with the government deciding to facilitate setting up of joint venture missions in minerals related projects. In the face of the immense business potential in mining related activities, the government pitches for joint ventures. The government will facilitate setting up of joint ventures and a single window agency for screening of mineral based industries.

RAT HOLE COAL MINING AND CHILD LABOUR IN MEGHALAYA.

In Meghalaya mining is a private enterprise, in keeping with the customary rights of the indigenous communities. The Centre has never interfered with the traditional mining methods of the state because it knows this is tribal land and customary laws prevail. The owners still do not need environmental clearance or permission from the forest department to begin mining. Small scale unlicensed coal mining is allowed as a customary right of the people. The indigenous population engages in traditional method of mining. Since all land in Meghalaya falls under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution and is protected tribal land, the mines belong to tribal owners. Mining in the state is therefore disorganised. These have affected the population distribution, the economic activities such as mining and manufacturing and the growth and distribution of towns and villages in the state. The sector is not known for safety measures, no pollution control certificate is required and any resident is allowed exploration and mining. Coal extraction in Meghalaya remains completely unregulated and mining is practised in an unscientific manner. The absence of state regulation and the lack of strict enforcement of labour laws has also encouraged local entrepreneurs to exploit the cheapest sources of labour, children. With globalisation, the intensity of the problem of child labour is perpetuated for sheer economic interest, a phenomenon that has destroyed the future of children.

Meghalaya is also known for rat hole mining where small 1-2 feet holes lead to mining tunnels. The mines are known as the rat mines after the narrow and crude holes which are narrow in diameter dug into the hills where the children risk their lives daily with no proper medical facilities or safe drinking water. Due to the size of these tunnels, only children or small built adults employed as miners. Children are scrabbling around under the rocks looking for coal. Actually most of them prefer to use their hands rather than tools, for the crawl hole is so narrow that it has little room for any extra movement, that is why the name, rat hole mining. Rat hole miners, typically entered a one- metric hole and dug on and away to uncover layers of coal. When the hole ran dry, they dug elsewhere. Entire hillsides are crisscrossed with such holes and tunnels. Tunnel collapses aren't uncommon. Most accidents just go unreported. The safety measures for coal labourers have not been implemented by the coal mine owners despite the increase in the number of deaths of mine workers. Apparently, even after nearly three decades of massive unscientific and unregulated coal mining activities in many parts of the state we can never expect to see the light at the end of rat holes.

There are several child workers who are slogging in coal pits in Meghalaya. The government does not even bother to keep count of them. Almost all the child labourers engaged in the coal mines and coal depots are migrants or trafficked from the neighbouring states including Nepal and Bangladesh. Child trafficking for forced labour remains a serious problem in the region despite the government's commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the National Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 and the Juvenile Justice Act 2000. As trucks cross the border to Bangladesh with their cargo of coal, they return with children who have been lured by false promises, sold to middlemen or abducted from their homes. Such children are eventually forced into bonded labour. According to Impulse estimates, the children are bought from anywhere between 50 and 75 US dollars. They are then forced to work for free in dire working conditions in the coal mines. Their work is considered repayment of the debt they owe- the price at which they were bought. They were promised that they will only work over ground of the mines, but instead they were forced to go deep inside the mines to extract coal. Frequent accidents take place in coal mines which claims many precious lives. Majority of such cases go unreported. Children labourers continue to perish in the coal mines. They die when the cave where they are digging coal caved in. They often die after inhaling toxic gas at the coal mines. Several others were drowned inside the mines.

Thousands of underage workers as young as 8, lured by wages, leave school to work in coal mines under perilous conditions. These children, work in virtual hell holes, where words like hygiene and safety mean little. They end up severely compromising their physical and mental development. The country officially upholds mining safety standards and forbids child labour, but loopholes in state laws allow widespread abuses. The young miners descend on rickety ladders made of branches into the makeshift coal mines, scrambling sideways into rat hole shafts so small that even kneeling becomes impossible. Lying horizontally, they hack away with picks and their bare hands. Human labour here is far cheaper than machines. Children's day holds no significance for numerous children who are working as labourers in coal mines in Meghalaya. These children are shouldering responsibilities far beyond their years. But what is worse is the negligence of the authorities concerned towards these children who are left to toil and fend for themselves in hazardous conditions. In the absence of an efficient and rigorous inspection machinery, nothing prevents the employers from flouting the legal provisions in the full knowledge that the child workers themselves will become willing accomplices in covering it

up. The antiquated and out dated method of manual extraction , not only involves more time, labour and cost , but also constitute health hazard and risk to human life. Human rights here are violated with impunity.

Local and migrant child labourers constituted the labour force of the area. Local workers are rural people coming from surrounding villages, while migrant workers are those who come from outside the state and even foreigners. Most of these temporary workers are undocumented. The working and living conditions of the child labourers in the coal mines are unregulated, and as such, found to be very poor. There is no safe drinking water , no electricity, no latrines, no health care, etc. It is seen that child labourers often suffer from malnutrition because their diets do not match nutritionally with the kind of hard labour extracted from them. Also, they tend to suffer from injuries resulting from carrying weights too heavy for their ages and stage of physical development. Some do suffer from severe back pain. Children are easy prey to diseases like malaria, Tuberculosis and respiratory illnesses. It was mentioned that a sizeable number of children died due to malaria. They observed that HIV cases are on the rise. Coal labourers continue to perish in the coal mines with many labourers having lost their lives in the deadly coal mines across the state in the last one year.

That child labour in the mines, is firmly rooted in poverty is irrefutable. It is grinding poverty that forces children to seek employment to supplement low family income. Besides, extra earning, school dropouts, orphans etc., are reported to be the other causes of the spiral growth of child labour in Meghalaya. The problem of child labour is directly linked with education and poverty. Unfortunately the poverty alleviation programmes do not see the trichotomy between these three, the vision is narrow. They do not analyse and link them with the broader context of economic environment in families, poverty related policies, processes of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The extent of child labour in the state as a whole is not exactly known. Children of the age group of 8 to 18 years are involved in mining activities. Child labourers are seen to be working with earnings disproportionate to work loads. They work for a minimum of 12 hours per day. There is no job security. They are exposed to dangerous tasks without adequate protection. Many are involved inside the rat hole for extracting coal. They are engaged in side cutting work and cutting coal seams inside the rat hole mines. The child workers dig the coal inside the rat hole and fill it in the trolley. The trolley is pulled by adult workers. Earlier some child workers were involved in loading the coal onto trucks. Now only

adults do this work. In transporting, some children(boys), especially from the local community, work as handymen. Some children are indirectly linked to coal mine work. They do lighter work such as cooking, washing utensils and fetching water. The general situation with the study of child labour in Meghalaya is that it is difficult to get accurate or exact data. Estimates of the number vary considerably with regard to the actual figure.

GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA'S RESPONSE TO CHILD LABOUR IN THE COAL MINES.

The whole concept of child labour is psychologically disastrous and ethically wrong. The question of child labour in the coal mines of Meghalaya has been in the news for quite sometime. It became a major issue in December 2010 with the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC). The NHRC took suo motu cognizance of a media report alleging that about 70,000 children mostly from Nepal, Bangladesh, Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand were working in the private coal mines in Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya. Since then similar media reports have been appearing every now and then, the latest one in the New York Times on 25 February 2013. These media reports provide various estimates of the number of child labourers and give descriptions about them. The National Commission for protection of Child Rights deputed a team to visit Meghalaya in 2011 taking cognizance of various news and complaints received on the alarming problem of child labour in coal mines of Meghalaya, it expressed concern over the situation of child labour in the coal mines of Meghalaya. Expressing discontent over the dismal situation of children, the Commission has urged the Meghalaya Government to evolve appropriate remedial measures for promoting research and advocacy on child rights and matters relating to children in need of special care and protection. The region has only two labour inspectors, according to Impulse. Between October 2006 and April 2008, only 24 inspections were carried out in the whole region. This lack of vigilance demonstrates a failure by the government to uphold its legal obligations on child labour. Following the publication of a press release by Impulse and the Asian Human Rights Commission on the issue in November 2009, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons has taken an interest.

RTI finding from the Ministry of Coal shows that all mining laws are applicable to the State of Meghalaya. The finding from the Directorate of Mineral Resources, Government of

Meghalaya reveals that all mining laws are applicable to the state. And a finding from the Ministry of Labour and Indian Bureau of Mines shows that all mining labour laws (Mines Act, 1952) regarding safety and health of workers are applicable to Meghalaya. There are several violations of coal mine laws in Meghalaya. The major violations with regard to labourers are the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, the Mines Act, 1952.

After some 80 years of unregulated mining, mostly coal, Meghalaya adopted a mineral policy that aims to organise the lucrative sector and boost its performance. The state government was forced to act after it was punished by the Guwahati High Court twice. Last year the Court fined the State Rupees 50,000 for not having a mining policy, and Rupees 5 lakh earlier this year for not regulating rampant mining.

Meghalaya cabinet on Friday October 5, 2012 gave a nod to the much awaited mining policy even as it ruled out doing away with the unscientific rat hole mining in the state. The state will overtime switch to a more scientific method of mining. The 25 paragraph policy hand scientific provisions for proper and scientific mining operations of minerals in the state. The policy would allow the government to step in and regulate mining activities in the state. The policy contains many provisions for the workers such as housing facilities, health facilities and safety measures. The major challenge is to translate this policy into action. Government support and backing is required to tackle the problem. The Child Labour laws shall be taken fully into cognizance in this policy. The Government in the meantime has accepted the policy of rat hole mining of coal practised predominantly in the state. The Government reiterated that there will be war between the stakeholders, miners and the government if the rat hole mining practices are done away with. However, the policy would provide scope for mining of minerals in a more scientific and sustainable manner taking into account the interest of the state and its people.

The Meghalaya Mines and Mineral Policy, 2012 has been formulated with an aim to facilitate systematic, scientific and planned utilisation of mineral resources and to streamline mineral based development of the state, keeping in view, protection of environment, land, health and safety of the people in and around the mining area, to develop and exploit mineral resources in a scientific and sustainable manner, taking into account the interest of the state and people, to safeguard the rights of miners, mine owners and mining industry, to ensure that the mine owners follow the statutory and administrative guidelines, ensure stringent safety measures

for workers, precautions to be taken through use of technologies to prevent accidents. Mine owners would be required to provide proper health care, education, drinking water, safe and hygienic condition of living to the mine workers and their families. The government shall make all out efforts through its administrative machineries or otherwise to prevent any type of child labour as envisaged in the prevalent Acts and Regulations in the country on the subject. The Joint Action Committee Coal Miners and Welfare Association issued a public notice asking the coal businessmen in the area not to recruit any under aged boys and girls.

On policy implementation, the government said it would ensure that all mine owners/ developers follow the policy guidelines latest within one year from the date of notification of the policy. An empowered committee, headed by the Additional Chief Secretary, will be constituted to monitor and periodically review the implementation of the State Mines and Mineral policy, 2012. The Meghalaya government is working on a rehabilitation package to help the children working under hazardous situations in the coal mines of the state following a direction from the NHRC. The Labour Department has initiated steps to check and contain this menace if not eradicating it at one go. The Government will ensure that the recommendations of the State Mining Policy are implemented for the welfare of the labourers working in coal mines across the state. There is a large mention about labourers welfare in the policy. The concerned officers are urged to ensure that the recommendations of the mining policy are implemented in its best spirit for the welfare of the labourers. The concerned officers should be sensitised to ensure that the safety and welfare of the labourers are looked into as a special focus. Therefore, adoption of modern methods of mining would increase the safety of workers and reduce accidents.

Since the ultimate aim is to make a difference in the life of child workers, it was felt that the emphasis should be on intervention rather than on collecting general data. The data compiled so far is anything but reliable and hardly depicts the true picture of the magnitude of the problem. While the history of mining in Meghalaya showed that the state government has never accepted the reality of the existence of child labour in the state, the mining issue is a public secret because everyone is aware of its existence but no one wishes to accept or speak about it. The extent of child labour is either exaggerated by some reports or played down by the government. There is a breach of clear legal rules, because many things are happening illegally. Legally, no children below the age of 15 should be allowed to work, but that is not properly implemented in coal mine areas. But ethically, there is much ambiguity about child workers. Despite Meghalaya

having a mining policy, the implementation of various welfare provisions for the child labourers is yet to become a reality.

CONCLUSION

The government has adopted the western industrial development model even if the conditions in the two cases vastly differ. But while western countries, confronted by the industrial working classes created safety nets in respect of social security and labour welfare, all such schemes in India are mere pious wishes, as they fall flat in implementation.

The participation of children in labour force, runs contrary to the whole thesis of human resource development, which is so essential for the overall socio-economic development of a nation. The whole concept of child labour is psychologically disastrous and ethically wrong. But they are employed nonetheless. In the changing scenario of globalisation the time has come to give serious thought to the elimination of incidence of child labour.

The Indian Constitution specially protects child labour from exploitation of any kind. Article 24 of the Constitution lays down that “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”. This important legislative provision on employment of children relates to the minimum age of employment, working hours, health certification, work on dangerous machines etc. Mines Act of 1952- The Act prohibits the employment of children below 18 years of age in a mine. Despite laws enacted in 1952 prohibiting employment of people under the age of 18 in the mines primitive coal mines in Meghalaya using child labour were discovered and exposed by the international media.

The National Policy on Child labour was formulated in 1987 which apart from enforcement of legal provisions to protect the interests of children, envisages focussing on general development programmes for the benefit of child labourers. This policy aimed firstly to prevent exploitation of children as well as to ensure bare suitable rehabilitation in case of their withdrawal from prohibited areas of employment. Secondly, to formulate and implement project base plan of welfare and development programme for the child labourers. In 2006, the Labour Ministry issued notification, to ban employment of children from October 10, 2006.

But despite these constitutional safeguards and clear cut policies to bring about the progressive elimination of child labour and stringent legislation matching it, what is the harsh reality? Child labour continues to be in its most dehumanising form and some of the hazardous occupations are even beyond the purview of the existing legal provisions. The legislative framework and policy perspectives on child labour have apparently been lopsided and have failed to mitigate the miseries of children. The programme formulated for their betterment under the National Child Labour Projects, remains on paper for want of adequate funds and political will. In the absence of an efficient and rigorous inspection machinery, nothing prevents the employers from flouting the legal provisions in the full knowledge that the child workers themselves will become willing accomplices in covering it up. Studies that have been made show a marginal shift in the employment pattern of children from agriculture and services to industry sector. It implies that with the expansion of economy and globalisation, child workers are being pushed from safer household enterprises to the hazardous industrial sector. Despite planning, welfare programmes, legislation and administrative action in the past few decades, a large majority of children of the age group of 5- 14 years continue to remain in distress and turmoil. It is difficult to say an exact figure for the number of children engaged in child labour. A difficulty in obtaining accurate data maybe that individuals fail to report child labour participating during survey, for fear of legal action. Moreover, all these estimates fall short of the actual figures of definitions, different methods of computation, diverse sources of data, lack of information on the vast unorganised sector of the economy. This difficulty is also attributed to the fact that the Government has been negligent to collect and analyse the relevant data regarding the incidence of child labour.

Sometimes government appears to be working in an ivory tower quite unaffected by allegations of grave misdemeanours. But such allegations tend to erode the credibility of the government. Very often the attitude adopted is that of nonchalance. It's like saying the government draws flak from one quarter or another every single day so how many such allegations can it respond to. Well there are allegations and allegations. Some are of a general nature and may not affect the government this way or that. This is not the way Governments run their affairs. Indifference to allegations of a serious nature followed by an attitude of non-responsiveness are hallmarks of a dictatorship, not a democracy.

Just as 'unequal growth' of the world is not sustainable, so also the on going unequal development of only a small segment of the Indian population is not tenable. Development has to have an egalitarian basis to be sustainable. The present rifts in Indian society, arise essentially from the high degree of economic disparities . In this context, one of the new maladies which afflicts the country is the rapid increase in 'selfishness' with attendant lack of concern and consideration for fellow citizens—which is now the new creed which has taken ascendancy with 'globalisation'.

Our primary concern here is : Where does Meghalaya go today? Fortunately, all that we need to do is to strictly adhere to the principles laid down in the Constitution of India, complete with the Directive Principles Of State Policy. Economic policy needs only be informed by the principle of egalitarianism, which implies: (a) that there must be a minimum living for all,(b) that, in order not to hurt the self esteem of any individual, all able bodied citizens willing to work must have opportunities of gainful employment ,and (c) that the above principles should have precedence and priority over every other objective of economic policy. These are not purely idealistic wishes. The objective is attainable, provided that we give precedence to social welfare and social concerns over the principle of maximising merely the over all growth rate, provided that concerns of social welfare have priority over the concept of every individual maximising his or her welfare through a free market system. That, in a sense, must finally be the guiding principle of economic organisation.

At the present stage of economic development, eradication of the problem of child labour is not feasible. It would be naïve to advocate any drastic step such as banning child labour altogether without first looking into the real issues involved that have contributed to the continuance of this inhuman practice to this day. It is not possible to eradicate child labour in one go because the child labourers will lose their earning which might put their existence in jeopardy. What is required, therefore, is to make the working conditions of child labourers better until we are in a position to gradually eliminate the evil completely. Banning child labour altogether is a long term measure, but combating exploitation is the immediate need. It will release children from dangerous occupations or bondage and their reassignment in safer and less tedious tasks. The only way to ensure compliance with the acts of the government is to make punishment for violations more stringent and incorporate a provision for surprise checks and

establish a separate vigilance cell. With regard to the workers' interest, it should be made mandatory for all employers to take steps for the intellectual, vocational and educational well being and upliftment of a child worker. Simultaneously government resources, along with those of companies willing to contribute, should be channelled to finance schemes that improve work conditions of children as related to hours of work per day, wages and basic facilities at the site, health coverage, nutrition programmes, compulsory primary education and vocational non-formal education. There is a need to bring a strong public opinion against exploitative form of child labour. The International Labour Organisation itself felt that complete eradication of child labour is not possible, but reduction to a certain level is possible. Child labour in hazardous industries should however be eradicated. Certain steps like restricting work hours to five hours a day will enable children to take to schooling. Economic rehabilitation of rural families to prevent migration to urban areas is also necessary.

The 'Structural Adjustment' that is required is the transformation of the production system with steadily improving condition of child workers. We have to remember that trade is a means, not an end in itself. All exchange is capable of leading to increased welfare, provided that the gains from the exchange are shared, provided that the exchange is not entirely one sided. What is most important for the government at present is to achieve equity domestically before we can achieve it internationally. The call for global egalitarianism, the call for developed countries to share their advantages with the less developed ones makes sense and will have an impact if the latter are more egalitarian within their borders.

Good governance is the key to growth and social justice. A better administration strengthens the delivery machinery while a defective system produces hindrances in the growth plan. Accountability of all institutions is also an important need. With true accountability, a true interface with the consumers or with the public, can be achieved. India needs a development strategy which is broad based, which will especially benefit the presently deprived segments of the population.

We need a more inclusive debate about globalisation, one in which more voices are heard, and in which there is more focus on the social dimensions of globalisation. Human concerns should be at the centre of the debate. Though globalisation has been overzealously propagated and passionately implemented in the preceding decade, its advantages have not been shared by all sections of the society. Its benefits have been so unevenly shared that the term

globalisation has acquired a pejorative tinge in several quarters. Globalisation without human face is inhuman and intolerable. This is a message the world would do well to heed, lest discontent with globalisation continue to grow. While the globalisation of the world is, in part, a reality, India's efforts should be to gradually integrate with the world in a manner calculated to benefit all, rather than lead to the accentuation of exploitation of man by man.

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