



For no fault of theirs...

children 21.4.02

Asim is not yet fifteen years of age but he has been living the life of an adult for the last many years. He knows what amount of money is needed to make up for the budget of his family of four brothers and sisters and parents. His father is an illiterate who knows no skill and works as an occasional labourer. He is the second last child of his parents. Today he is the pride of his family as he works as an apprentice in a nearby motor workshop. His elder brother is more interested in playing cards with the friends of his like than even thinking of earning some money. So much so that he often depends on Asim for some money to spend on the 'pursuits' of his choice. They reside in a poor locality where it has become quite a norm to send their child/children to earn some money. The teenagers aged between eight to fifteen and more have today become the victim of the necessity of earning at the very early age.

A lot has been and is being written on the issue of child labour but this is grim reality that very little attention has been focused on the child labourers themselves. We feel ourselves elevated to a high pedestal on rejoicing in the fact that we are 'conscious' and 'aware' on this issue. We can even write and raise our voice to the very distant listener. Is this enough on our part as we proclaim to be the 'civilised' citizens of this global world? Unless the causes of this practice which germinate in our social system are eliminated there is no possibility of a better future for our youth. Now there is a need more than ever to expose the reasons of this practice and suggest concrete measures to make a dent in the present situation which is almost the same in the South Asian countries.

One of the main reasons for spread of pushing the kids in their early teens to work at workshops is the financial constraints, low positive exposure to the positive elements of

ATHER NAQVI says that though much has been said and little done on the issue of child labour there is still enough room for positive steps



the outside world for example education and healthy activity of life. Life at a workshop is a different world. There is no kind-hearted mother of yours to connive at one of your many mischief. There is no father with whom you can visit the market and do the shopping of your choice. No sisters or brothers to play with either. Instead what a boy finds there is living in a constant mental pressure. The owner 'Ustad' of the workshop is not an affectionate person to deal with these teenagers. He wants things done as he likes them to be done. A boy's mind then learns to cope up with life in a totally different situation. A boy, as a result, develops a strange immature personality.

Proper school education and the time to play do not fit into the type of life he is living. He certainly loses more than he gains or does he gain anything? Those who pose themselves to be realistic and pragmatic say that by joining a workshop and learning some skill a boy's future is secured. By the time he will grow into a full man he would have become a perfect motor mechanic. They further opine that this, for the time being at least, remains the only option for the poor families to secure the only possible future for their kids. Yes this seems true when we have a look at the

dismal financial position of the families. But then a still better argument could be that Is it the only option we have got? Is this the fate of our future? How long would we be resorting to such excuses to overlook the damage that we are doing to the youth? This is a very poor excuse indeed, though a reality on the ground, that it is the financial crisis that make the parent think this way.

Now what we have to say about the girls who happen to be the members of a poor family? Child abuse does not only confine itself to boys only. Though there is a difference between child abuse and child labour but I think one should regard them equally bad for our children. So the girls, as we know, do not go to a workshop. They accompany their mothers to the posh area to find some work in a house. What a difference. A girl is doing A' Levels while the other is still learning to read 'A'. The boys in the child labour, in certain cases, are relatively less sensitive than the girls who develop mental abnormalities. Many of them suffer the whole of their lives from the inferiority complex.

This can be changed off course but how is a process that involves planning at the government level. Nowadays there is a tendency to ignore the responsibility that lies on the government's shoulders. The non government organisation (NGOs) have also a very big role to play. A recent positive step in this regard has been taken by a pop singer Shehzad Roy from Karachi whose organisation has offered the needy kids a sum of money regularly if he or she comes to the school and studies. This is a very commendable example to be followed. ■