

# Child labour and education

BY HASHIM ABRU

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lem. Child labour signifies any form of work hampering children's rights to education and health. Reports published in the national and regional press paint a painful state of child labour in our country. In the human rights movement, child labour is not a new phenomenon. The issue of child labour exploitation is a basically human rights agenda; however, human rights movement in the world could not cover this issue in an effective way. Nevertheless, in early 1990s, particularly after the adoption of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the issue of child labour has gradually taken the form of strong social and political agenda.

One of the most disturbing trends of child labour exploitation is denying the working children's right to education. Education is a right not a privilege and every child has an inherent right to education. However, thousands of children are deprived of this right. They are forced to carry hammer and sickle for their living instead of pen and pencils in their tiny hands. Like most of the governments around the world our incumbent government is committed to ensure education to children. But in reality, there is a lack of educational opportunity for working children. There is a huge number of school drop-out or pull-out rate in our country. Yes, child

Despite plethora of laws and unimplemented bodies constituted to achieve the avowed goal, thousands of children are employed in extremely intolerable conditions in various parts of the country. They live and work in most health hazardous and dangerous situations. Children are deprived of their right to physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. They are denied their basic right to education. Regrettably one can witness flagrant violation of Article 36(e) of the Constitution everywhere in the country. The Article-36(e) states, "The State shall make provision for securing just and human conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex."

Of course, views vary about the child labour. According to one of the ILO reports, children should be allowed to work in a human situation and this can be also regarded as socialisation process for children. Opponents believe that this will hamper the social transformation process and children will be stuck in servitude.

No doubt, child labour is a cause and consequence of socio-economic and political reality. This problem is closely interlinked with various other socio-economic and political problems of the country. Landlessness, poor access to resources and production, gender inequality, inequitable distribution of land, unemployment, lack of people-centered, and sustainable development programmes and environmental degradation are the underlying factors of child labour prob-

tion? Who helps us to bring the tea from garden to our house? Who is really making beautiful carpets in our country? What is the process of making carpet, which pose as the biggest source of foreign exchange in our country? Why we are not telling this sort of truth to our children?

Everyday we consume things and throw away the used materials in the garbage containers. But a number of children in the urban areas survive through collecting garbage. What happens to the garbage? We hardly teach them anything about the process of recycling garbage. Why don't we have stories of working children in our curriculum? Why not about street kids?

The fundamental objective of education is about learning the real meaning of life. The objective of meaningful education should be people-oriented, fact-based, useful, productive, participatory and accessible. Therefore, a meaningful education is one that is easily available for everyone. Once we have good education or meaningful education for children, our children won't have to live under exploitation and inhuman condition.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz cherishes a unique vision for progressive and developed Pakistan. His composite and comprehensive televised address to the nation bears a testimony to it. It is hoped concrete and immediate measures would be taken by his government, not only in words as practiced in the past, to eliminate the menace of child labour and wash out the sordid image of Pakistan in the comity of nations.

stand life, nature and the world, and further guide people to develop clear vision and mission. It also strengthens the social movement including action against child labour.

Education could be in any form. Whether it is formal or non-formal and vocational or functional, it should be productive and creative. It should be useful for life and useful for the society. Education cannot be useful unless it helps children to understand their circumstances.

Another important thing about the meaningful education is the method of teaching and availability of teaching materials. They are generally very conventional in style. There is a complete lack of children's participation in the educational procedure. In this system, we are not helping children to understand and acquaint with the social realities, but imposing our 'knowledge' over children.

Renowned activists of child labour elimination and writer Gauri Pradhan has aptly debated about meaningful education by posing this question "What is important for a child?" The date of birth of the king, the name of the queen or methods of rice plantation or cooking? Why are we not teaching them such things useful to them in their everyday life? We teach them, "tea is discovered in China", but we never tell them how to do tea planta-