

## **Role of Kailash Satyarthi in Eradicating Child Labour**

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**Abstract:** *It is a criminal offence to put children in awful work settings day, rejecting their right to have minimum education and snatching away their childhood. Some studies indicate that the money they make is so negligible it may not even add to the family's welfare. Many a times it happens that economic condition is so bad that has forced the parents to make their children into child-labourers. The case study will focus on the role played by Kailash Satyarthi in initiating to eradicate the child labour from industries. The case will also focus on the initiatives taken by him on educating children. It will also depict what kind of characteristics he is having as a leader and as a social entrepreneur.*

**Keywords:** *Child labour, Kailash Satyarthi, Human Rights*

### **Introduction:**

Quotable quote of Kailash Satyarthi, a human rights activist from India who has been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitative child labor since 1981, is "If not now, then when? If not you, then who? Before going into detail on Kailash Satyarthi and apprehend his contribution to the society, it is important to know about the problem of child labour all over the world and particularly in South Asian Countries.

### **Child labour:**

As per International Labour Organisation, the term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. Children born in the poverty-stricken families turn into bonded labourers. The parents many a time cannot pay the debt due to inflated rate of interest, even some families sell their children to businessmen as they cannot provide the food. Many a times these kids are separated from their families, are exposed to severe hazards, bad working conditions, long and strenuous working hours, malnutrition and illnesses. Sometimes they may be beaten. and work even without any break. The health risks these children face are many depending on the kind of work they perform, but it is safe to say that many of these laboring children are forced to quit working at a relatively young age and so the cycle begins again when they send their own children to work. As a result these children do not get opportunity of education. They do not get the opportunity of having even the basic education. Many of these child labourers are forced to work up to 18 hours a day, sometimes even without a break. Most of them earn as less as Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 per month; sometimes for no money as they are bonded labourers.

### **Child labour in India:**

Child labour is a major problem in India. According to Department of Labor Report, Child Labor is used because they are less demanding, more submissive, ready to work for lesser amount. Even they are not protected by the law or its representatives. So factory owners can exploit them very with no trouble. There are as many as 60 million children working in India's agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors as per the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions report. As per the 68th NSS survey, India currently has an estimated 2.4 mn child workers. If we include the part time workers this number shoots up to 3.22 mn. Once again, as per the statistics of United Nations, on average, one child in every seven is a child labourer. An estimated 14 percent of children in India between the ages of 5 and 14 are engaged in child labor activities, including carpet production. Children trafficked into one form of labour may be later sold into another, as with girls from rural Nepal, who are recruited to

work in carpet factories but are then trafficked into the sex industry over the border in India. The children in the age group of 11-14 years had been trafficked from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and had been working without any wage for over 12 hours a day. 80% of the working children in India are the children of the "Dalits" who are oppressed low caste or minority tribal people. A country that uses child labour violates the rights of the kids that are legally guaranteed by human rights law.

Bonded laborers work in the diamond, stone-cutting and manufacturing industries and especially in carpet making where the children hand knit rugs are exported all over the world. Asia has the highest percentage of children who work in export industries. Kailash Satyarthi started his journey as an activist in carpet industry. There are 300,000 children working in the carpet industry in India which recently brought in \$815 million annually.

#### **Issues of concern for Mr. Kailash Satyarthi:**

Kailash Satyarthi was born in January 11, 1954 in Vidisha, India. He started his career as an Electrical Engineer and left this lucrative career for the cause of a major social issue. From his early childhood child labour was an issue which was tormenting Mr. Kailash Satyarthi's mind and he started taking initiatives to help underprivileged students from a very early age. He was thinking why children of his age who belong to lower-caste or very poor, are not going to school and are engaged in doing something to earn livelihood or to help the poverty-stricken parents. He was moved by the world's economic disparities, and the discrimination among children based on caste. Since young-age, he used to take some initiative to help the children from poor family by providing used textbooks and money so that they can go for tuitions. Money he used to collect from others. Gradually he also realized that these young child-labourers are getting exploited and manipulated as child labour in the hands of the factory owners. Mr. K. Satyarthi has emphasised that child labor leads to, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, population growth and other social problems and it is a human rights issue. Various researches have supported his claim. "Children are sold by destitute parents into bonded labor," Satyarthi said. "The children are then often re-sold into prostitution or, more recently, as forced organ donors." He said he wants to give them a childhood, and to give them the tools they need to overcome poverty and abuse through education and validation as human beings.

#### **Strategies taken:**

When he grew up Mr. Satyarthi he stated as an activist against child-labour and initiated a movement to eradicate child labour by creating domestic and international consumer resistance to products made by children in bonded labour. Mr. Satyarthi not only tried to eradicate child labour from industries but also to rehabilitate them with vocational training and education. Mr. Satyarthi has initiated for enactment and adoption of national and international legislations, treaties and conventions as well as the constitutional amendment on child labour and education. He started the movement with child labour and gradually linked it to attain "Education for All". Initially Satyarth started with Rugmark, a programme in which rugs are labeled and certified to be child-labor-free by factories that agree to be regularly inspected.

He is the founder of the Global March Against Child Labour, its international advocacy body, the International Center on Child Labor and Education (ICCLE), the Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save the Childhood Movement), the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS), and the world's first child labour-free social labelling system, RUGMARK And Global Campaign for Education worldwide on social issues involving children. He has been a member of a UNESCO body that examines this social issue and has been on the board of the Fast Track Initiative now known as the Global Partnership for Education. As mentioned in

<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/82801.htm>, the organisations with which Satyarthi associated with provide direct legal assistance and advocacy for victims. His efforts have taken many different forms, some of them on massive international scale. In 1998 he organized the Global March Against Child Labor, across 103 countries with the participation of 7.2 million people, and more than 10,000 civil society organizations. It was the largest peoples' campaign on child labor that led to the ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor. His initiated to pressure governments, manufacturers, and importers to stop illegal and unethical labor practices.

As an analytical thinker, he emphasised that child labor is a human rights issue and not a welfare matter or charitable cause. He has highlighted that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, population explosion and many other

social evils many a time results from child labor. He has also played an important role in linking the fight against child labor with the efforts for achieving 'Education for All'.

**Role played by Kailash Satyarthi in Global March Against Child Labour:**

The Global March Against Child Labour is a worldwide network of trade unions, teachers' and civil society organisations that work together towards the shared development goals of eliminating and preventing all forms of child labour and ensuring access by all children to free, meaningful and good quality public education. "To be free from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be damaging to a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". After this Global march led by Satyarthi International Labor Organization (ILO) made changes in its policies related to child labour. Kailash Satyarthi is the President cum Chairperson of Global March Against Child Labour's objective was to give the children the right to be free from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be harmful to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The International Center on Child Labor and Education (ICCLE) which was incorporated in Washington, DC, in November 2000 is the International Advocacy Office of the Global March Against Child Labor. Its objective is to build and strengthen worldwide efforts to protect and promote the rights of all children, especially to be free from economic exploitation and to receive a free and meaningful education.

**Role played by Kailash Satyarthi in Rugmark, the world's first child labour-free social labelling system:**

In September 1994 Mr. Kailash Satyarthi founded an international consortium of independent bodies from a dozen carpet exporting and importing countries, Rugmark in cooperation with the German non-governmental organization "Bread for the World". It makes sure that rugs have not been produced with child labour by getting involved in a voluntary social labeling initiative. One of the reasons that the carpet industry was targeted by Rugmark is because it is such a large export market for India. It is also known for being a large employer of child laborers and bonded laborers.

"Rugmark specifically is an Indian foundation with offices in Germany, the US and Nepal. Rugmark, now known as Goodweave, is an international consortium of independent bodies from a dozen carpet exporting and importing countries, which take part in a voluntary social labeling initiative to ensure that rugs have not been produced with child labor. This initiative gives positive alternatives to responsible businesses, protecting them from any possible boycott and sanctions and gives an ethical choice to consumers worldwide. He is pursuing the industries and other stakeholders to adopt a similar system for knitwear, sporting goods and the other international common products.

The GoodWeave label asserts that no child labor was used in the making of the rug. GoodWeave's certification standards are set by GoodWeave International, an associate member of the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance (ISEAL), which leads the world in setting norms and good practices for certification. GoodWeave's national offices in producer countries implement and enforce the standards. It also helps the business houses from any possible boycott and sanctions. He has also pursued the organisations to accept a similar system. Ultimately all these initiatives taken by Kailash led to a UN resolution to move toward labeling schemes that would make certain that while manufacturing products the company would not use child labour. After the publication of the resolution, the objectives and criteria of the organization were formulated by the Indo-German Export Promotion group (IGEP). After establishment of the first office in 1994, a second office was opened in Germany. In 1995 the ILRF managed to assist in the opening of an office in the US. Now Rugmark operates in Nepal and Pakistan as well.

The impact and success of this initiative affected global production and supply chains. Some renowned exporters started making losses. The main problem faced by the Rugmark program in eliminating child labor from the workplace is to do so without causing a significant loss in India's carpet market share, but also to create a viable alternative to work that would benefit all involved.

In order to earn the GoodWeave label, rug exporters and importers must be licensed under the GoodWeave certification program and sign a legally binding contract to adhere to the no-child-labor standard and not employ any person under age 14. The company also allows unannounced random inspections by local inspectors. It takes initiatives to pay fair wages to adult workers. To get the Good weave labeling the companies have to give a licensing

fee that helps support GoodWeave's monitoring, inspections and education programs To ensure compliance, independent GoodWeave inspectors make unannounced inspections of each loom. If inspectors find children working, they offer them the opportunity to go to school instead, and the producers lose their status with GoodWeave. To protect against counterfeit labeling, each label is numbered so its origin can be traced to the loom on which the rug was produced. Importers and exporters also help support GoodWeave and its commitment to provide rehabilitation and schooling for all rescued children. Exporters pay 0.25 percent of the export value of each rug, and importers pay a licensing fee of 1.75 percent of the shipment value. Licensing fees go toward monitoring, inspections and educational programs that are part of the GoodWeave program.

The US proposed ban on goods made with child labor was a unilateral act that worried the Indian carpet exporting industries. This concern had been growing ever since the issue of the conditions of child labor had received wide publicity in the Western media. This caused the heightened awareness of the child labor problem and was the catalyst that inspired Kailash Satyarthi, Chair of the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SAACS) to create the Rugmark program with strong coordination and support from the Indo-German Export Promoter (IPEC). Other organizations such as UNICEF, ILRF and the ILO have also been involved in the development and coordination of this programme.

Kailash Satyarthi has also established ashrams (communities) for the rehabilitation of rescued child labourers. One is in Viraat Nagar, about 30 km from Jaipur and the other is in Delhi.

#### **Recognition:**

Kailash Satyarthi has been awarded several international awards. Satyarthi's contribution has been recognized through several international awards like Defenders of Democracy Award (US), 2009, Alfonso Comin International Award (Spain), 2008, Medal of the Italian Senate (2007), recognized in the list of "Heroes Acting to End Modern Day Slavery" by the US State Department<sup>l</sup> 2007, Freedom Award (US), 2006, Wallenberg Medal, awarded by the University of Michigan , 2002, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Award (Germany) , 1999, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award (US), 1995, The Trumpeter Award (US), 1995, and The Aachener International Peace Award (Germany), 1984. He also received Human Rights Award 1999.

#### **Roads ahead:**

Although child labour declined substantially in many places, but almost 60% of child labourers are still engaged in agriculture sector which is generally neglected. Child trafficking is a concern till date 11.5 million Children predominantly girls across the world are engaged as child domestic labourers. Although most countries have their own laws to combat and criminalise the worst forms of child labour and also the legal provisions that guarantee education, but legislations regarding slavery and trafficking are not enforced and implemented properly. Governments along with society members need to take initiative to implement those laws properly.

Despite the fact that Kailash Satyarthi has contributed immensely to reduce child labour, it is time for all of us to think what lies ahead of us. We need to find a way of making sure that employers, governments and ultimately the consumers of the products, created by child labour, take all possible means to reduce/eradicate child labour. Let us not forget that child labour appeared and continues to exist for some reasons: extreme poverty, lack of social security, human greed to make more money, human need to buy cheap goods and saving money etc. Until and unless, all of the above parties undertake concerted action, the road ahead will be long and hard. Governments of exporting countries must eradicate poverty so that parents of these children do not have to use their loved ones and send them to harm their life in this manner. There must be social assistance to parents and their children to have at least the basic necessities. Manufactures in exporting countries show some social responsibility and be pro-active in devising HR policies and practices that is family focused and prohibitive of any children employment. Businesses in importing countries must make sure that they are not directly or indirectly involved in employment of children, and workplace practices that promote profit over propriety. Consumers in Western countries must reduce their appetite to buy cheap and promoting products that are made by unethical employment practices. Kailash plans to extend the labeling program to other products such as soccer balls, another popular product that is commonly made by children. Kailash says "If not now, then when? If not you, then who? If we are able to answer these fundamental questions, then perhaps we can wipe away the blot of human slavery."

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