Velpur Model of Eradication of Child Labour

Mains *– (GSII) Issues related to child labour and education*

Why in News?

On the occasion of World Day Against Child Labour (June 12), it is significant to study the remarkable success of Velpur Mandal in Telangana which was declared as a child-labour-free zone in 2001.

What is status of child labour crisis?

- **Global crisis of child labour –** According to International Labour Organization (ILO), 160 million children are involved in child labour globally.
- Around 9 out of 10 such children are from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.
- COVID-19 exacerbated the crisis, pushing more children into labour due to school closures and economic stress.
- **Child labour in India –** As per Census 2011, India had 43.53 lakh child labourers (5-14 years).
- Common industries employing children: beedi, carpet-weaving, fireworks.

> *According to ILO Child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental wellbeing.*

Constitution provisions for eradication of child labour in India
• **Article 24 –** It prohibits employment of children below **14 years** in factories, mines, or hazardous jobs. • **Article 39(e & f)** – It directs the State to protect children from exploitation and ensure healthy childhood. • **Article 45 –** To provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years • **Article 21A –** Right to free & compulsory education (6–14 years).
Legal framework for eradication of child labour in India

• **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986** – It prohibits employment of children below **14 years** in specified hazardous occupations and processes.
• It also regulates conditions of work for children in other occupations.
• **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016** – It prohibits employment of children (<14 yrs) in all occupations, except if helping family after school hours.
• It prohibits adolescents (14–18 yrs) in hazardous occupations and makes child labour a **cognizable offence**.
• It introduces stricter penalties:
  - Employer – Rs 20,000–50,000 fine and/or imprisonment up to 2 years.
  - Repeat offence - Imprisonment up to 3 years.
• **Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 –** It **e**stablishes National & State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights NCPCR & SCPCRs).
• To protect children from abuse, exploitation, neglect, and ensure their rights to education, health, survival, and development.
• **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act)** – It ensures free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 years.
• It helps to prevent child labour by keeping children in school.
• **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 –** It treats working children as children in need of care and protection.
• It empowers Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) to rescue and rehabilitate working children.

Government measures for eradication of child labour in India

• **National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme** – Targeted intervention in **districts with high incidence of child labour**.
• **Launched in** – 1988
• Rescued children are:
  - Put into Special Training Centres (STCs).
  - Provided bridge education, stipend, healthcare, vocational training.
  - After preparation, they are mainstreamed into formal schools.
• **PENCIL Portal** (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) – It is launched in 2017 by Ministry of Labour & Employment.
• It is an online portal to:
  - Report instances of child labour.
  - Track rescue & rehabilitation.
  - Coordinate between stakeholders
• **Operation Smile (Also called as Operation Muskaan)** - Launched by Ministry of Home Affairs in 2014.
• It is special police drives to rescue missing and trafficked children including those in labour.
• India is a signatory to **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, 1989 which ensures child's right to education, protection, and development.

How Velpur mandal is able to become child labour free zone?

- Velpur, once noted for child labour but on October 2, 2001, Velpur was declared child-labour-free.
- It is started with initiative of **100-day community-driven campaign** in June 2001.
- **Strong community involvement –** Village panchayats, parents, and local volunteers actively participated in identifying and rescuing child labourers.

- Local campaigns raised awareness on the importance of schooling over work.
- **Employer cooperation** – Debts of child labour families that were tied to bonded or child labour was waived by employers.
- This removed financial dependency that often forces families to send children to work.
- **School enrolment drives –** Special enrolment drives ensured every child was admitted to school.
- Dropouts and working children were tracked and reintegrated into the education system.
- **Convergence of Government Departments –** Coordinated efforts between education, labour, police, and revenue departments helped in enforcement.
- Regular inspections and surveys ensured compliance.
- **Support from NGOs –** They played a key role in mobilizing communities and providing bridge courses for child workers.
- Awareness programs and community dialogue sustained momentum.
- **Local governance leadership –** Mandal-level authorities showed strong political will and accountability.
- **Strict Enforcement and Follow-up –** Rescued children were monitored to prevent relapse into work.
- **Institutional support –** All village heads signed Memorandum of Understanding with the government under Andhra Pradesh Compulsory Primary Education Rules (1982).

Even 24 years later, Velpur maintains 100% school retention and zero child labour.

Legal Backing + Social Push = Sustainable Reform – Synergy between law and grassroots participation yields better outcomes.

What lies ahead?

- Replicating the Velpur Model in other high-burden regions.
- Promoting awareness campaigns to counter social resistance by imparting the importance of education.
- Ensuring universal access to schools, especially in rural areas.

Reference

[The Hindu| Velpur's story in ending child labour]

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