Can Children Influence Policy? The Contribution of Working Children's Union's in tackling Child Labour - *a case study of Bhima Sangha, Karnataka, India*

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Abstract

The high incidences of child labour across the globe commands worldwide attention and have given rise to a number of competing explanations. Broadly speaking, these explanations can be categorised under those factors, which focus on poverty and under-development, and those which focus on policy failure and poor implementation of educational services. However, in the debates of child labour, grossly neglected are the experiences and voices of working children.

Giving children a voice and space to participate in debates surrounding child labour, has thrown up a whole range of questions, challenging common assumptions of childhood and the relationship between children and adults. By reviewing the body of literature on working children's movements, their involvement and contribution towards policies and decisions in the struggle against child labour, the following research provides pragmatic perspectives on the appropriateness and capability of children to participate in decision making processes and the importance of recognising working children's movements in the debates and dilemmas surrounding child labour.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the abolition of child labour and the children of *Bhima Sangha* and other working children's movements who are fighting extreme odds and demanding legal recognition for their movements and platforms.

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Boxes

Glossary

Ankur	CWC's Urban Programme
Anganwadi	pre-school day care centre below six years of age
Beedi	A kind of local Indian cigarettes
Bhima Kala Ranga	Cultural wing of *Bhima Sangha*
Bhima Pathrike	*Bhima Sangha*'s Newsletter
Bhima Sangha	Union for and by Working Children
Caste	A system of rigid social stratification based on wealth, hereditary status, inherited rank, occupation or race sanctioned by custom, law, or religion
Devadasi	Temple Prostitute
Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (EJT)	In English it means Working Children
Gram Sabha	*Local village meeting*
Gramashrama	*CWC's rural programme*
Gram Panchayat	*Local government*
Mahabharata	*Ancient Indian epic*
Mahila Samakhya	*Women's group*
Makkala Mitra	*Child Ambudsmen*
Makkala Panchayat	*Children's government*
Makkala Sahayavani (MSV)	*Child Help Line*
Namma Angadi	Our Shop
Namma Bhoomi	A vocational Training Centre for *Bhima Sangha* Children
Namma Kaadu	Our Forest
Namma Sabha	An association of youth, composed of artisans, crafts persons and others engaged

	in various occupations, founded by ex-*Bhima Sangha* members.
Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadoes (NATs)	A Latin American acronym which translates as child and adolescent workers.
Panchayat	Village (it refers to both Geographic and administrative units.
Sindicatos	Unions
Taluk	An administrative unit in India - Several *Panchayat*s constitute a Taluk.
Task Force	A tripartite body, devised by Concerned for Working Children, comprising of children's representatives; government officials and elected representatives; and community based organisations. It links the Makkala *Panchayat* with the *Gram Panchayat* and focuses primarily on issues related to children that are raised by the Makkala *Panchayat*.
Yakshagana	Dance Drama specific to Karnataka

Abbreviations

AMWCY	African Movement of Working Children and Youth
CRIN	Children's Rights Information Network
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
CWC	Concerned for Working Children
DCI	Defence for Children International
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GNP	Gross National Product
GOI	Government of India
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights
IGO	Inter Governmental Organisation
IICRD	International Institute for Child Rights and Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMWC	International Movement for Working Children
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
ISPCAN	International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
IWGCL	International Working Group on Child Labour
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIEPA	National Institute of Education Planning and Administration
NMWC	National Movement of Working Children
PRWSWO	Pakistan Rural Workers Social Welfare Organization
UCW	Understanding Children's Work
UK	United Kingdom

UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organisation
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children
UNHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commission of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations Office of the High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
USA	United States of America

1. Introduction

> *No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death* (Kofi Annan, 1998 cited in Lansdown, 2004, p. 271).

The above quote of Kofi Annan's, former Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), has been chosen as a symbol for the thesis as it advocates the indispensable need for the inclusion of children in mainstream society, and because this thesis calls for the social recognition of working children's unions, in the context of addressing child labour. Indeed, much of the current literature on development, argues Ansell (2005), emphasises on empowering young people, the importance of listening to children's voices and their participation in democratic decision making processes.

This thesis presents a case study of *Bhima Sangha,* a union for and by working children located in the state of Karnataka, India and their participation in society. Although, drawing from personal experiences, this thesis a desk–based research that combines analysis of the literature surrounding children's advocacy in development and the contribution of working children's unions in the discourse of child labour. As the thesis concerns the issue of child labour and children's participation, the two main research questions are:

1. To what extent can children influence policy, in the context of addressing child labour?
2. Should working children's unions be legally recognised?

Considering that children and youth constitute nearly half of the world's population, and global developments, as Lansdown (2004) argues, affect children's lives in many ways, it seems important that young people should have the right and opportunity to participate and be involved in decisions concerning their welfare and development.

During the last quarter of the last century, the world community has witnessed major paradigm shifts in the understanding of development (Desai and Potter, 2008). Initially, starting from the post-war era, what has been described as the modernisation theory, development invariably meant a linear scale of progression of catching up with, or generally imitating the 'West'. The 'developed' nations provided the model for the 'developing' and 'under-developed' nations to copy, with the belief that if poor countries would follow suit and replicate 'Western' course of action, they would then achieve the same levels of 'development' as that of the developed nations (Dodds, 2008).

However, the failure of development to meet the desired objectives, in many of the so-called Third World countries, has given rise to burgeoning literature challenging conventional norms and practices. New, more critical theories where put forward, all articulating the voices of poor nations, arguing that modernisation theory in emphasising only on economic growth, discriminated and undermined the cultural values and ways of life of those countries that have not been classified as 'developed' (Escobar, 1994). Western development imperatives were blamed for keeping 'poor nations' in a state of poverty and dependency and causing more problems (Schuurman, 2002). Furthermore, there was recognition for the need to include cultural diversity and advocacy of the vulnerable in development (Schech and Haggis, 2008). Today, we have arrived at a phase described by theorists, as alternative or post-development, one that goes beyond the dominant discourses (Sidaway, 2008). There is a need to re-evaluate and re-examine our motives and the purpose of our actions "in a reconstituted field of development studies" (Hettne, 2008, p. 8).

Regardless of all the various theories, clearly development cannot be divorced from moral and ethical considerations. Not surprisingly, words such as egalitarianism, holism, respect, culture, diversity, transparency, indigenous knowledge and perspectives, human rights, ethics, dignity, sustainability, democracy and participation are increasingly being used in both theory and practice (Elliot, 2002, p. 45). With the adoption of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in September 2000, Poverty Reduction and Human Capital

Accumulation, the end objectives of all development policies, and even considered a catalyst or a pre-requisite for development (Basu and Tzannatos 2003; United Nations, 2000). Amartya Sen (1999) argues, that "development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy... [with] the final objective to enable people to choose to live the lives they want" (cited in Lansdown, 2004, p. 276).

Meeting these goals, reports the UN (2005), would require a comprehensive approach, one which encompasses a number of specific objectives, such as, expanding access to health and educational services, food, sustainable incomes and the equal opportunity for all individuals to participate and take an active part in society (Mohan, 2002). Even if we take development as a business concern, humanity's most precious asset is the sum total of the minds of those who inhabit this planet (Rajagopalachari, 1959).

Judged, therefore, from every point of view, the welfare and position of children, argues Pant[1] (2002), reaches paramount importance in the dimensions of human development, bringing about a resurgence of interest into the issue of child labour, considered perhaps the most neglected humanitarian issue of our times (cited in Ramachandran and Massün, 2002, p. vi). Hence, as mentioned before, this thesis focuses on the importance of children's participation in decision making processes within the context of addressing child labour.

Child labour has emerged as one of the most hotly debated issues in the development agenda (Lloyd-Evans, 2002). It perpetuates poverty, illiteracy and reinforces the existing socio-economic inequalities already prevalent in many societies. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1996), The United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF, 2007), Defence for Children International (DCI, 2005), International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN, 2008), the Anti-Slavery Society (2008), along with the many other national and international organisations, all

[1] Former Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India

committed towards the emancipation of children, report that children's involvement in the labour force only replaces adult labour, and that often the work undertaken by children is beyond their individual capacity, causing severe growth deficits, serious injuries and exposure to chronic diseases.

The global estimates of child labour, comments Arat (2002), range anywhere between 200 to 500 million children, with the majority of them found in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, incidences of child abuses can be seen in industrialised countries, too. The United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) according to Christian Huot (1998) "are estimated to have at least two million working children each" (cited in Arat, 2002, p. 180). The Coalition to stop the use of Child Soldiers (2008), reports that in many war torn countries of Africa, children are still being used in armed conflicts. Human Rights Watch (1996) estimates that more than 300,000 children are working as bonded labourers (forms of slavery) in the carpet industry of India. ECPAT[2] International, (2007) – a global network of organisations, working towards the elimination of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of children (CSEC), reports on the high incidences of child prostitution in both developed and developing countries.

The humanitarian response in trying to emancipate children can be reflected by the establishment of the number of distinguished institutions and agencies all at the forefront of all global policies. Thanks to wide coverage by the media, stories of child abuses and horrific work conditions have been brought to the limelight, bolstering a worldwide international movement against child labour. Publications on child labour have been most forthcoming, and since United Nations Education and Social Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) proclaimed, 17th December 1979 as the International Year of the Child, issues surrounding children occupy a focal point in almost all global policy settings (UNESCO, 1979). In 20th November 1989, the body of international law gained further momentum with the adoption of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989).

[2] ECPAT International – Elimination of Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for sexual Purposes.

The UNCRC is a significant achievement in the field of international law and children's rights. It is the first legally binding instrument to be ratified by almost all countries in the world (except two - USA and Somalia) (UNHCHR, 1989). The ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) launched in 1992, is now operational in more than 25 different countries (IPEC, 2002). In 1999, the ILO adopted a new convention – The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, to specifically address the more serious issues, such as CSEC. This convention came into force on 19thNovember, 2000 and calls for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour for all persons under the age of eighteen, and as of 2002, has acquired 49 ratifications (Arat, 2002).

Over the years, the World Bank and United Nations (UN) have shown great maturity in terms of setting about common objectives with regard to children's growth, welfare and development. Together, the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank, have launched the joint interagency research project called the Understanding Children's Work (UCW), in order to enhance knowledge, identify solutions and facilitate research on the work done by children (Fyfe et al. 2003; UCW project, 2000). Similarly, the Children's Rights Information Network (CRIN, 1991) is a comprehensive database, which brings together a great deal of data on childhood, work, labour and children's rights, so as to assist researchers and help improve the understanding of the problem. Consumer boycotts have been introduced on products made by children and manufacturers have been pressurised to follow healthy labour practices. Many governments also have come a long way by embarking on reviews and regular updates on child labour laws in their countries (ILO, 1996).

However, despite the widespread concern, most of the research and investigation on child labour, as mentioned by a number of social scientists, have proceeded from the view that these children are the poor, the destitute and the vulnerable – the helpless victim image in need of sympathy, protection and adult benevolence (Ennew, 2000). This is apparent from the high moral tone behind media portrayals of children engaged in deplorable working conditions as victims of crime and abuse (Lloyd-Evans, 2002). While these portrayals, as Hungerland et al. (2007) argues, have undoubtedly

contributed towards sensitising the public about the plaint of working children, unfortunately they have failed to capture, the multifarious cultural experiences of childhood from the perspectives of the children themselves. In hindsight, at times, these portrayals have proven to be more problematic by robbing children of their identity and personhood. As mentioned by Nieuwenhuys, to display emotions such as sympathy and compassion, while is understandable and not uncalled for, can often "deny working children a feeling of self-esteem and [pride] of accomplishment" in the work they undertake, and in particular, takes away children's right to struggle for a more equitable distribution of benefits, or play a role in emancipation movements (1994, p. 4).

Fortunately, with the emergence of working children's organisations or movements across Asia, Africa and Latin America, a change of perspectives has come about. Rather than seeing children as objects of enquiry, concern and a problem, children are increasingly being seen as part of the solution and as subjects, or holders of rights, with an aim to communicate their views to policy makers and other concerned parties (Fabrizio Terenzio and Coly 2007). In the context of development, research from this perspective, involves the use of participatory techniques and enabling children's voices and views to become audible. A voice that seeks to understand the experiences and causes of child labour, from the perspective of the children themselves – "one which is not distorted by the mindset of the investigators" (Robb, 1999, p. v).

Allowing space for children to participate in development, has thrown up a whole range of new questions, challenging commonly taken assumptions of supposedly ideal forms of childhood and in particular, the meaning of work and place of children in society (Kumar, 2006a). Robert Chambers (1983) makes it clear, that within development in practice, it is no longer possible to ignore the views of those of whom we intend to help. Likewise children too, have managed to convince a number of very self-assured adult, 'child experts' that they have a right to be heard and listened to.

Reports by Reddy and Ratna (2002), confirm that children, through their participation in government decision making processes, have managed to

conduct research on their own, and have often done so better than adult professionals. What is more, making space for children to be involved and take an active part in society, does not contradict the articles enshrined in the UNCRC, which implicitly states that children, have a right to participate, the right to self-expression and the right to form unions (Cairns, 2006). Likewise, the Norwegian Sociologist, Per Miljesteig (2000) has attempted to persuade the World Bank to regard working children as partners in all their decisions and policies (Liebel, 2004, p. 19). Children, argues Lolichen (2006), have astonished policy-makers and 'experts' with their analytical abilities, honesty, transparency and that they are capable of objectivity in taking decisions and advocating for their rights.

Rhetoric notwithstanding, unfortunately, worldwide, a culture of non-participation of young people in political processes is endemic in most societies. For example, in India, Kumar (2006a) and Lolichen (2007) mention that the focus on children has been mostly as mere objects in need of adult benevolence. Only a minority of the world's children fully enjoy the elaborate list of rights outlined by the UNCRC, while most are totally unaware of its existence. Interventions and policies, mostly treat children as objects of research and passive recipients of welfare services and benefits (Lolichen, 2006).

While, the UNCRC advocates "a model of active citizenry for children", societies still find it difficult to reconcile with the dominant notions of, passivity, frailty and incompetence attributed to childhood (Daiva, 2002, p. 507). No attention is paid for children, to articulate their views or play a role in emancipation movements, and neither governments, nor the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have legally recognised working children's unions, despite their existence for close to two decades. This can be reflected by the reluctance of adult-decision makers to open up space for children to participate and by the fact that most institutions and organisations are inimical towards children's participation (Wheal, 1998).

The current trends in globalisation and economic growth, far from eradicating child labour, have instead aggravated the problem and intensified the exploitation of workers, including children. For example, Lloyd Evans (2002) comments on how increases in child prostitution in South East Asia can be linked to macro-economic policies of governments which focus on rapid industrialisation at the expense of rural development and poverty alleviation. Similarly, in South Asia there appears a growing middle class whose rush for attainment of modern technologies and material goods only increases the values of exploitation, thereby worsening the scale of poverty (O'Kane, 2003). Prosperity and economic growth are being directly linked with the inequality of distribution of wealth, forcing people to live in varying degrees of squalor in order to support and build this so called 'prosperity' (Escobar, 1994).

India stands out as a perfect example of the above scenario. Despite being considered the world's largest democracy, it holds the dubious distinction of housing the largest numbers of working children in the world. From staying at home and looking after siblings, tending to cattle, working in cottage industries, collecting firewood, agricultural workers in fields, domestic workers in middle-class homes, in tea stalls and restaurants, or as prostitutes, beggars, bonded labourers (forms of slavery) and rag pickers living on the streets or in slums, the problem of child labour is widespread and complex, threatening the growth and development of a huge population of Indian children (Lloyd-Evans, 2002; Weiner, 1991). Statistics on child labour is so elusive, that estimates of working children range anywhere between 15 to 100 million children, depending on the report one reads (O'Kane, 2003, p. 3).

Although, policies to end child labour have preceded independence, the grim reality is that even today the goals of absolute emancipation of children remains as elusive as ever. This is because children similar to the poor have been totally excluded from mainstream society and are not in a position to express their political talents or be able to participate in democratic processes (Ennew, 2000). Like most marginalised groups, such as the poor, indigenous people, women and youth, children too, have been left out of planning and decisions concerning their own futures. Their parameters for growth and

development are often determined by welfare agencies, governments and other concerned parties (Lolichen, 2006). Silent sanctions surround children's fears, concerns and feelings, thereby subjecting children to the whims and fancies of policies, over which they have no influence. Even in the media or on reports and articles, events and issues directly related to children, their voices are invariably missing. If at all children do appear, argues Joseph (2007), it is generally as victims of crime, survivors of abuse, involved in violent conflict ridden situations, as recipients of charity, beneficiaries of welfare schemes, or as participants in cultural or sports events, and/or at best winners of various kinds of competitive events.

Hence, it is little or no wonder, why Indian policies to tackle child labour, have in many cases done the opposite of what they intend to do. The talent for running governance, through democratic decision-making processes, is yet to shape itself fully and prove equal to the task. As mentioned by Ambedkar (1948):

> Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realize that our people are yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic (cited in Guha, 2007, p. 103).

The demands put forward by working children through their organisations or movements are absolutely legitimate and justified, considering it is the children themselves who are facing the problem. Moreover, these demands do not contradict the articles outlined in the UNCRC, making it inexcusable for the ILO and other agencies not to legally recognise working children's unions or engage in a serious dialogue with them. In the end, it becomes rather ironic that while working children are the ones who are experiencing the problem, they are the least consulted in making decisions concerning their own futures.

In the light of the above problem, this thesis exposes the short comings in the existing discourse on child labour and calls for the legal recognition of working children's unions, so that children, can have a platform for advocating their

cause, and be able to participate in all policies surrounding their welfare and betterment.

As children's work encompasses a wide range of activities, Ike argues that in order for definitions on child labour to be meaningful "it should be cultural relevant" (1999, p. 109). Hence, first it becomes important, to understand and explain how child labour has been constructed as a problem across time and history in varying contexts and situations. These in turn, have come to characterise the various discourses in addressing the problem by different actors and concerned groups. According to Ennew, et al., (2005, p. 28) "the measures taken to combat child labour from historical times, to the present day, can fit under 4 key discourses, which can been labelled as:

1. 'Labour market' discourse
2. 'Human capital' discourse
3. 'Social responsibility' discourse
4. 'Children – centred' discourse.

The 'labour market' discourse or the standard based response of the world community, concerns the minimum age permissible for children to work (Mathew, 1991). Work is conceived as an activity incompatible with children's lives, and that children should be prevented from entering the labour force (Ennew et al., 2005). This can be reflected by the fact that most national and international laws imposed by governments, call for an outright ban on child labour, make primary education compulsory, restrict children from working, introduce consumer boycotts on products made by children and take punitive action against those employers who profit from hiring children (Lloy-Evans, 2002).

Dominating much of the literature on child labour, the 'labour market' discourse, is perhaps the oldest and most well known and can be traced back to the start of the industrial era. This approach is a legalistic and simplistic approach, highly abolitionist in tone and relies on the strength of state authority (Fyfe, 1989). It fits the fundamentals of ILO policies, government

rules and regulations, minimum age conventions, trade unions and international labour standards introduced to combat child labour (Cullen, 2005).

Although, legislation is important, Fyfe (1993) argues that it is not sufficient enough to combat the problem and at times may even unintentionally make the situation worse by forcing children to work in hidden circumstances. Bourdillon (2006) questions whether the discourse on 'abolishing child labour' actually works in children's best interests, considering that in most cases, it leads to children's work becoming invisible to the outside world and draws pejorative moral judgements from mainstream society.

The 'human capital' discourse on the other hand, according to Ennew et al., (2005) can be characterised by policies designed by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional and other national banks, the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and other concerned groups which focus on economic growth, education, health and development (UNDP, 2008). Childhood is construed as a period of investment, and great emphasis is laid on education to enhance children's skills and capacities so that they can become good productive adults (Prakash, 2002). This discourse differs from the 'labour market discourse' on the fact there is no objection to children working, as long as work does not seem to interfere with children's education or become detrimental to their growth and development.

However, while undoubtedly the principle goal of global development policies, is to attain minimum standards of civilisation, in terms of food, health, education and security, often at times these standards are based on idealised views of childhood or adult interpretations of what is appropriate and what is not, emanating mainly from the experiences of the Global North (Escobar, 1994). Or else, these standards are set by 'outsiders' and agencies, which at times are not compatible in cross-cultural contexts, or correspond to the ground realities of people's lives (Esteva, 1992).

The 'social responsibility' discourse, unlike the 'Human Capital' discourse, argues Ennew et al., "looks at children in the context of social rather than economic development" (2005, p. 28). This discourse is largely the outcome of NGO strategies, humanitarian groups, philanthropists and other charitable trusts which offer selfless service to society and are based on principles such as compassion, sympathy and help - rooted at times in moralistic and religious beliefs. The focus is to extend support services, opportunities and resources to the poor and marginalised groups through a number of different flexible and innovative ways. Like for example World Vision's (1951) Sponsor a Child Programme which aims at reaching out and helping poor children and their families directly. Society's moral responsibility and duty is to reach out and help the most needy and disadvantaged groups (Ennew et al., 2005).

However, this discourse is normally marked by venting out moral indignation and sympathy to the plight of working children, and as Robson (1996) and Fyfe (1989) argue, moral considerations often "draw attention away from a more rational interpretation of the processes which draw children into the labour market" (cited in Lloyd-Evans, 2002, p. 216).

The fourth and last discourse, relates to the central theme revolving around my thesis, and which Ennew et al., (2005) have labelled as the 'children-centred' discourse, stresses on the participation of children in all decisions concerning their welfare and betterment and subscribes to the underlying framework of the UNCRC - the "best interest of the rights of the child" (UNCRC, 1989). Corsaro (1997) mentions, that with the gradual realisation that children too constitute a marginalised group in need of recognition, children are increasingly being seen as active social agents in their own right, with their own lives, needs and desires. Children's participation is studied in the light of '*protagonism*', with the view that children have the right to advocate on their own behalf, and the right to arrive at their own conclusions of ideal forms of childhood rather than being subjected to adult standards and interpretations (Ennew et al., 2005).

In contrast to the 'social responsibility' discourse, where resources and opportunities are being extended out to children – the 'children centred' discourse, facilitates children to take the initiative to access, opportunities, institutions, resources and information on their own and demand the right to be involved in all decision-making processes. Examples can be seen by the demands and objectives put forward by the social movements of working children across Asia, Africa and Latin America (Beers, 2007; ITALIANATS, 2004), who have established platforms and have managed to raise their views and concerns to adult society. At the same time, this discourse does not necessarily negate the above three discourses or absolve parental responsibilities towards children, rather it puts children's concerns the prime focus of all policies, with the view that children too are worthy of recognition in their own right and that they have a right to question all decisions concerning their welfare and development.

At the international level the 'children-centred' discourse is represented by the child rights approaches of organisations such as the UNICEF and the International Save the Children Alliance (cited in Ennew et al., 2005, p. 29) and by an increasing number of local level organisations like the Concern for Working Children (CWC, 1986), in Bangalore, India and the Butterflies programme with street and working children (1989) in New Delhi, India, who promote children's advocacy and the unionisation of working children.

Each of the following chapters of this thesis, in relation to the research questions brings out the importance of listening to children's voices, its significance in designing policies and interventions, so that it can be translated into action.

In Chapter 2, I explain the research background, and the methodology utilised in writing my thesis. It provides information into my philosophical position, my past experience of working with working children, the justification for my research, data collection methods, limitations - essential background for understanding research context and potential research bias.

Chapter 3 focuses on the relationship between children and work across cultures, and how the modern outlook towards children has influenced policies on child labour, along with the various explanations and approaches put forward based on idealised concepts of childhood - one which does not necessarily correspond to the ground realities of many children's lives and at the same time, discriminates and marginalises on other cultural outlooks towards children. This chapter goes on to explain the gaps in the existing literature on child labour and how this gap can be addressed by giving children a voice.

Chapter 4 examines the role of working children's movements with examples of historic and contemporary forms of resistance to exploitation by children, and the importance of children's participation and incorporation of their voices in the debates and dilemmas surrounding child labour.

Chapter 5, the crunch of my thesis, tells the story of *Bhima Sangha* – a union for and by working children in Karnataka, India - Its origin, achievements, growth, significance and contributions towards addressing child labour and strengthening children's participation. Chapter 6, the final chapter, reflects upon the dominant themes covered and concludes the thesis.

In justification of this thesis, so far the discourse on child labour has mostly been based on adult interpretations of what constitutes good and proper childhood. Considering the magnitude and distribution of child exploitation proliferating around the world and the fact that it is flourishing, it reflects only one thing – a failure of colossal proportions on the part of adults in trying to emancipate and protect children from abuse and exploitation.

Hence, this thesis argues that it seems only right that adults learn to remain silent and listen to what children have to offer. This is not to say that adults should have no involvement in advising children, neither is it an abdication of responsibility on the part of adults; rather, an honest and humble admittance, that adults have failed in their endeavours to protect children, and that children have a right to express their views and question adult decisions.