

**STATE OF CHILD LABOUR IN CRAIG KIELBURGER'S *FREE THE CHILDREN*****Dr. A. G. Vadivelan**

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**Abstract:**

Craig Kielburger is a Canadian author, speaker, social entrepreneur and human rights activist in Canada. He was also a children's rights activist. He is the co-founder of the organizations 'Free the Children'. Craig Kielburger contacted many human rights organizations to speak about child labour during which he got a relationship with Alam Rahman. Both of them spoke about Iqbal Masih and child labour for more than two hours. Craig formed the Free the Children organisation with his friends. Then he did more actions to stop child labour in the world.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Entrepreneur, Human Rights, Activist, Child Labour, and Abuse

Craig Kielburger was born on December 17, 1982, in Thornhill, Ontario, Canada. His parents, Theresa and Fred Kielburger both of them were teachers. He had one elder brother, Marc Kielburger. Craig Kielburger studied at Blessed Scalabrini Catholic School, in Thornhill, Canada, and Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School in Scarborough, Toronto, Canada. In 2002, he started his higher studies in Peace and Conflict Studies in the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto. He completed the Kellogg-Schulich -Executive MBA Program at New York University, in 2009, as the youngest graduate. Craig Kielburger is a Canadian author, speaker, social entrepreneur and human rights activist in Canada. He was also a children's rights activist. He is the co-founder of the organizations 'Free the Children' later renamed as 'We Charity', and 'Me to We'.

Craig Kielburger contacted many human rights organizations to speak about child labour during which he got a relationship with Alam Rahman. Both of them spoke about Iqbal Masih and child labour for more than two hours. Craig formed the Free the Children organisation with his friends. Then he did more actions to stop child labour in the world. One day Craig met Dr. Panuddha Boonpala, a woman from the International Labour Organization

in Geneva. She told Craig, “If you really want to understand the issue of child labour, then you should go to South Asia and meet the children yourself.” In 1995, Thronhill in Canada, Craig came to know about the child labour through Iqbal Masih murder. He was a Pakistani boy. He died at the age of twelve. Then Craig searched more about child labour. He spoke to some organisation about the issue. After, he got some information about child labour. In the following days, he shared his information with his class students. The students showed their interest and joined their hands with Craig. Craig formed the organization with his friends named “Free the Children”. Then they tried to spread the issue of child labour in Thronhill. They were sent to a neighbouring school. There he talked about Iqbal and child labour. Craig told the students’ “According to the International Labour Organization, there are more than 250 million working children. It was equal to the entire population of the United States!” After the presentation, many students from the neighbouring school were interested to join with them. One day, they had an opportunity to speak in high school, Brebecy College. Most of them were adults, at the end of the presentation, the students asked many questions to them but Craig and his friends were not able to reply to the questions. This led them to know much about child labour.

Then Free the Children organisation sent dozens of inquiries to the organisation located all over the world. These organisations responded to them and sent some photographs and reports regarding child labour. Soon, the Free the Children organisation became famous. Many donations arrived like old toys, books, furniture, clothes, and so on things. They sold this thing to convert as money. They formed one small stall, A Lemonade. They got more response from the people. At that time, Craig had a chance to go to South Asia with the help of Alam Rahman, a twenty-four years old man. His native was Bangladesh. However, Craig’s parents were not allowed. Then he wrote a letter to UNICEF in New York, to ask for advice about the arrangements of the trip.

The organisation, Free the Children, improved to the next stage, which means they had a chance to speak in front of two hundred delegates at the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention in Toronto. Ken Signoretti was the union leader. After his speech, OFL gave five thousand organisation dollars for Craig’s organisation. The Canadian Union of Public Employees, The Canadian Auto Workers Union, The Steelworkers Union were given funds to him one after another. At last, he got one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for their organisation. Again, he got a chance to go to South Asia. After convincing their parents, they allowed him to go. Finally, he started the trip to South Asia by Air.

He started from Dhaka, Bangladesh on December 11. Canada is the coolest place but South Asia is the hottest place. He felt very hot. After much confusion, he met Alam. He saw many rickshaws. The rickshaw drivers drove with bare feet. They worked hard to earn money. He noticed the poverty in Bangladesh. It was a major city in Southeast Asia. Next, he went to the largest slum in Dhaka. “Poverty was a stark reality in all pockets of this slum. A vast majority of the people were living in houses with only one room, which was used for sleeping, cooking, and bathing. It is well documented in other studies that people in slums live in the most inhumane conditions with 4–5 people in temporary dilapidated houses of just 100 ft. with limited access to water and sanitation in an area that is flood-prone and has limited garbage disposal” [25]. Craig came to know that the people were struggling with poverty, overpopulation, and lack of living space.

“The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) defines a slum as “a group of individuals that live under the same roof that lack one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living space, the durability of housing and secure tenure” [1]. To these people, water was the gift. The other issue was girls working as child domestic workers. The people in Bangladesh were not given importance to women's education. More than fifty thousand workers work in the Bangladesh garment industry. It had been the fastest growing industry but they did not give the correct money to the working children. In the explosion of the garment industry, nine children died because they did not have any fire fighting equipment. Alam and Craig met the three representatives of UNICEF and discussed child labour.

Next was Bangkok, Thailand. It was the city of the sex trade. It is an illegal thing. “Sexual exploitation of children and women in Thailand dates back to many centuries. During the Ayutthaya period from 1351 to 1767, women were circulated amongst men as concubines or treated as spoils of war given to soldiers as rewards. Children and women used as sex slaves had to obey their masters or face punishment.”[4] Many prostitutes are from poor families in the northeast. Prostitution considered an easy way to make money. Women did not like to work as prostitutes but they were forced to do this work by the traffickers. Once they settled in Thailand, the sex workers do not have an identification card. The non-government organisation helped the affected women to overcome the evil life providing an avenue for learning about health and safety. They were also affected by psychologically. Craig went to Patpong in Bangkok. He knew about child prostitution.

“Prostituted children in Thailand are likely to have serious, long-term mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders. Many prostituted children often feel helpless, damaged, degraded, betrayed, and shameful, and they tend to be at high risk of suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder. [17] Prostituted children may also sustain injuries, including rape, as a result of violence from pimps, clients, police, and intimate partners. Girls who are forced into prostitution may be physically and emotionally abused into submission. These youths are also beaten to induce miscarriages, a process that is illegal but continues to be practiced openly.”[17] The small kids were made to be involved in brothels by the pimps. There, Craig had an opportunity to talk with some young girls who had been rescued from brothels. These girls suffered a lot. Later, they moved on to a better life. Both boys and girls were affected by such things. They did not have a family to go and they did not like to marry or have children because they did not trust the men.

In Calcutta, Craig had a press conference with Kailash Satyarthi, the head of SACCS (South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude). In the press conference, he said that law made in 1976 and 1986 against child labour but not the single employer had arrested. He added that the absence of social concern is one of the biggest reasons for child labour. Then in the press conference, they talked about the firework explosion in West Bengal. Then they protested for the explosion. Craig participated in that march with Kailash. Craig met the boys in the tea stall and he asked about their life. He also saw many child labourers in the markets and small vendors in the streets of Calcutta.

He had a chance to meet Mother Teresa in Sisters of Charity, Calcutta. It was founded by Mother Teresa to help the poor people and help the needy. She devoted her life to take care of sick people and anyone who needed love. When Craig met Mother Teresa, he told about his travels to meet working children. Then Mother Teresa said, “The poor will teach you many things”. After their discussion, Mother Teresa blessed him. She said, “We can do no great things in life. We can only do small things with great love.” Craig said that she lived in the middle of the slums with poor people. She lived with simplicity and without ego. The work she did for the poor and never for any personal gain.

In Kathmandu, he saw street children outside of the hotels and restaurants. These kids did not have a home to live in. They faced many problems in day-to-day life. These kids were taken care of by the CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal). Gauri Pradhan was the head of this organisation. They protect many children from child labour. Craig met one boy from the organisation, a boy from the tea stall, a boy who worked as a tempo guide, a girl from the

street worked as a small vendor, and another girl, who was breaking the bricks. Craig individually met them and learnt the sufferings of these child labourers. Some of them were stolen by their family, some of them were working for the debt. These children were working long hours a day. These children were not well treated in their working place. Trafficking also happened for the girls in Nepal.

In Varanasi, it was in northern India. Craig had a chance to take part in a raid to realise the working children from the carpet industry. Already, Craig and Kailash were planning when they were in Calcutta. The raid was accomplished with some police, SACCS workers, BBC reporters, and three fathers of boys who were working in that carpet industry. Twenty-two children were rescued in the raid. After releasing the children, Craig spoke with them. They shared their experience and sufferings. They were affected by skin infection and breathing problems. The owner of the industry was not given the proper meal to them and so on. The team decided to join their family. Then they started travelling in the jeep. The boys were so happy. They started singing with a loud voice and clapping hands. They sang, “We are Free! We are Free!” During the trip, Craig talked with Munnilal, he shared his feelings with Craig and they became good friends. Boys all were celebrating their situation. All were from the same village. After eleven hours of travel, they reached the village at noon in the morning. There was no electricity and some basic needs to live. When these children reached their families, they shared their unconditional love. It was a miracle for the boys’ family members. The parents said that they were cheated by the owners.

“According to some NGOs, between 1979 and 1993 the value of export earnings in the hand-knotted corporate industry in India grew tenfold. They also claimed that the number of children working at the looms had increased from 100,000 in 1975 to 300,000 in 1990. The Indian ‘corporate belt’ was found mostly in Uttar Pradesh stretching over a vast area. There were usually about 20 or so loom sheds in each village. Some children worked as bonded labourers; others were kidnapped from their poverty-stricken home villages, including villages in Bihar, the neighbouring state.” (p. 15)

Craig went to Mukti Ashram in Delhi. The Ashram taught the children to read, write, and give self-confidence to them. They also learnt the carpentry, metalwork, and weaving to help them in the future. There Craig met Nagashir, who worked in the carpet factory. He told the tortures. Craig had a friendship with Asmita, daughter of Kailash. She was ten years old. She could speak both English and Hindi. She was a knowledgeable girl. She was

taking part in many protests with her father. Again, Craig participated in a press conference with Asmita. There they made the declaration. The declaration was “A Joint Declaration Between the Youth of India and Canada.”

In Karachi, Craig got information from the staff of PILER (Pakistan Institute for Labour and Education Research). The staff said that there was a four percent budget for education and medical, but forty percent for the military in Pakistan. Craig saw the young boy who was working as an electrician and some boys were sweeping the streets and many children in the street. There Craig tried to meet the Canadian Prime Minister who was coming to South Asia for the mission with other governments. Craig wrote the letter to the honourable PM. Then he had a chance to meet the Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Chrétien. The meeting span was fifteen minutes. Craig met the PM with fear and nervousness. He spoke about the child labour issue and asked him to raise the issue of child labour with the South Asian governments. Canadian Prime Minister said that he would add this issue to his agenda. After the meeting, the press asked him many questions. Craig replied to their questions. Then he went to Lahore, where Iqbal was born and lived. When he met the UNICEF director, he said that the true story of Iqbal was different from the story in the newspapers. He reported on inquiry to Craig. It was written by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. In that report, they mentioned Iqbal as a fraud. It made Craig to find what really happened to Iqbal. Then he knew about Iqbal's story of how he became children's activists. Newspapers and IBBF told that Iqbal was murdered by carpet owners but the report means that he was killed accidentally by his cousin, Ashraf. Craig went to see Iqbal's grave. The age of Iqbal was one of the confusion in Pakistan. “There are jobs that are hazardous in themselves and affect child labourers immediately. They affect the overall health, coordination, strength, vision, and hearing of children. One study indicates that hard physical labour over the years stunts a child's physical stature by up to 30 percent of their biological potential.” (p. 25)

Craig tried to find the age of Iqbal. He went to the church to check. Then he asked Iqbal's mother but no one knew the correct age of Iqbal. Then Craig realized that age was nineteen or twelve it was not a matter, what he had done was a matter. Then he went to the brisk kilns. They understood that people worked for their debt from generation to generation.

“Slave labour or bonded labour is one of the worst forms of labour not only for children but also for adults. In India, bonded labour has been illegal since 1976 when Parliament enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act. However, the practice is still widespread. Even conservative estimates suggest that there are at least 10 million adult bonded labourers in

India. 89 percent of adults in debt bondage belong to scheduled castes and tribes and 89 percent of those who control them are agricultural landlords. Most of the work carried out by bonded labourers is hard manual labour in the fields or brick kilns. Children or adults are bonded to pay off debts that they or members of their families have incurred. They toil all their lives and endure physical attacks that often amount to torture.” (p. 9) “There are thousands of bonded child labourers in India. They are also mostly the children of parents who belong to scheduled castes and tribes. Young children are sold to employers by their parents to pay back small loans that they have borrowed. Such children are made to work for many hours a day over several years. According to one study, there are about 10 million bonded child labourers working as house servants in Indian families.” (p. 11)

In Madras, it was in southern India. The people in Madras followed Tamil culture. It was the hottest place. In southern India, the class division was the major problem. They followed it for many years. The division of classes was from Brahmins to Untouchables. Craig came to know about this system that how they treated the untouchables in the society. All the things were separated for the upper class and lower class, from the living place to the graveyard. Most of the child labourers were from the lowest classes, Shudras and untouchables. In Madras, he met many schoolchildren then went Metal factory and Sweet making company to meet the child labourers. He met a child domestic worker in one of the houses and saw another girl in the plastic reproducing company, the girl separated the plastic from syringes. Craig noticed the process of their work. Some of the child workers worked with their families to overcome their poverty.

The Human Rights organisation told that the domestic workers were physically, sexually, and psychologically abused, it was common. “Where are jobs that may jeopardise a child’s psychological and social growth more than physical growth. For example, a domestic job can involve a relatively ‘light’ work. However, long hours of work and the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse to which the child domestic labourers were exposed make the work hazardous. Studies show that several domestic servants in India on average work for twenty hours a day with small intervals.” (p. 99) The girl who worked with syringes was not wearing the gloves for her production. It was a very dangerous thing. In Sivakasi, Craig went to the firework factory. In India, all were using the crackers to celebrate. Mainly they used this in the Hindu festival, Diwali. It was one of the main festivals, celebrated in India. They mainly produced it for Diwali. All the children made crackers without gloves for their production. It was fully made by the very dangerous chemicals. The factory did not make

any safety rules to follow. The chemicals were highly flammable but there was nothing for their safety in that factory. Respiratory diseases, eye infection, and exposure to chemical agents were the major health hazards in the match and fireworks industries. Researchers accused the employers of not taking any precaution for fire safety in such workshops where even a small crack could start a fire. They found several children with burn scars on their hands, thighs, and legs and 80 percent of the children interviewed in such workshops reported cases of accidents.” (p. 12)

In Kerala, the government gave importance to the education and production for the children. They made a law that every child should attend primary schools. Child labour is very low in Kerala. Craig spoke with the group of schoolchildren. He asked them to make a petition to the governments in the other states to make compulsory primary school education. The students said that we can do it but how they need an adult to do it. Craig said, “Adults can help but you don’t necessarily need them”. A certain group of children likes to speak with Craig. They felt that in Craig’s country lots of money, they have a clean atmosphere, all the citizens had jobs and lived in safety, But Craig said that developed countries also have poor people. Craig said, “There are people in these countries who go hungry and do not have a place to sleep at night. But there is not nearly so much poverty as I have seen in India.” “For some observers, the exact number of child labourers in India could be as high as 150 million. In brief, India is the largest producer of child labour and illiteracy on this earth.” (p. 24)

In Bombay, he noticed the begging children in the streets. Some of the people were given money, but some of the people were hurt by these begging children. Craig and Alam decided to give them food rather than money because the money was taken by the heads of the begging children. These children grabbed the legs and hands of the people to get money. Some of them sang the song to earn money. His trip came to an end in Bombay then he planned to return to Thornhill, Canada. Craig travelled by flight. When he reached Thornhill, many of the people were waiting for him outside of the airport to welcome him. The bright lights of the camera flashed in his face. Craig’s mother had tears in her eyes. The reporters asked him many questions. Then he gave many interviews on the television. He shared his experience in the interview. Then he returned to his school. Free the Children organisation got many telephone calls, faxes, letters from all over the world to get information about child labour.

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