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ECONOMIC DETERMINATION OF CASTE AND CHILD LABOUR IN BIHAR

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Abstract

Children are future citizens of the nation and their adequate development is utmost priority of the country. Bihar has the third largest number of child labourers in country. It is true that low-caste household children are inhibited from educational opportunity. The economic condition and social position of parents bestow new born privileged or deprived status in stratified societies. Parents profession education income and even castes in such societies outline the future of children. Although there have been numerous legislations and schemes to address the issue, they could not provide a lasting solution. Due to extreme poverty and discrimination, dalit children in Bihar account for the largest section of child labourers in the state and are among the most exploited as well. The 2011 census points out that a staggering 51% of SCs and 56% of STs live below the poverty line in the state.

Keywords:

Child, Caste, Labour, Education, Poverty, Interlink

The problem of child labour continues to pose a challenge before the nation. Bihar is the fifth poorest state and ranks lowest on school attendance. The dalit children who make it to government schools are also discriminated against, due to the deeply entrenched caste system. Children are under a constant fear that their names could be struck off the school register due to their absenteeism¹.

Mental healths problems of children in labour are likely to be associated with socio-economic determinants as well as factors related to their underage employment; focusing on grassroots strategies to mobilize communities against child labour and reintegration of child workers into their homes and schools has proven crucial to breaking the cycle of child labour. A multidisciplinary approach involving specialists with medical, psychological and socio-anthropological level is needed to curb this evil².

The Interlink of Child Labour and Caste:- The link between caste and occupation, which has been the case since time immemorial in the Indian society, finds its expression even among the child labourers in Bihar. When asked about the prevalence of caste based occupations among child labourers, Shantha Sinha, eminent child rights activist and former chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, says: "There is certainly a correlation between Dalit children being stigmatised when it comes to serving of food. There is an element of untouchability in weddings or in Dhabas

etc. But the fundamental issue is that they should not be there in [such places] in the first time. The essential discrimination that the society practices is when children are kept out of school that is a form of apartheid. That is the biggest divide, and children who are illiterate and have never been to school are marginalised and stigmatised against³

Caste as a Determinant:- The State specific SC Plans are a useful point in order to rework targeted programmes to address the issue to the child labour among the SCs. The care of the Bihar SC sub-plan is no different because it does not specifically mention the issue of child labour among the SCs. The prevention of child labour born a part of other large schemes and measures that grossly overlook the caste angle. For instance, the Bihar Mahadalit Vikash Mission, a government body that aims to address the deprivation among the Dalits, talks about the upliftment of 21 Mahadalit caste, but does not say anything about the prevalence of child labour among the SCs. Similarly, the Poshak Yojna, which aims to make schools attractive by providing food and uniform to children, does not talk about the discrimination by providing food and uniform to children, does not talk about the discrimination faced by Dalit children in schools the results in them dropping out. Further the study also finds that the probability of SC/ST Children engaged in illegal and hazardous works is higher compared to those from other castes⁴. The 13 districts account for 55% of child labour in Bihar (as per Census 2011). The district identified were Patna, Gaya, Darbhanga, Bhojpur, Araria, Muzaffarpur, East Champaran, Madhubani, Nalanda, Nawada, West Champaran, Purnia and Sitamarhi⁵.

Towards Creating a Child Labour free Bihar:- The ingrained notions of impurity and untouchability in the state further complicate the everyday discrimination of the communities not just by the upper castes, but also by the non-SC/ST Communities. The State Action Plan is the amended version of the State Action Plan for Elimination, Release and Rehabilitation of child labour which was notified in 2009. Due to the various legislations and policy changes after 2009, need to make changes in (SAP) State Action Plan was called for, therefore state action plan for elimination of child labour and it takes a holistic approach to achieve its vision of “Child Labour Free Bihar⁶”

Nation Policy for Children 2013, the policy defines children as anyone below 18 Years of age and envisages the plan of action that all out of school children such as child labourers, migrant children, trafficked children, street children etc., are tracked, rescued, rehabilitated and have access to their right to education, previously the NCLP scheme envisages running of special schools for child labourer withdrawn from work has been revised in 2016 to better support of child.

A range of underlying economic factors that compelled a child to work, including economic pressure stemming from unavailability of house or land, low wage rates result increased involvement of every member in economic activities, earning member of the family being alcoholic, economic distress stemming from illness of family members etc.

Bihar State Commission for Protection of Child Rights and Bihar Child Labour Commissions:- The commission have very important role to perform in the elimination and rehabilitation of the child/adolescent labourers. The commission would also play a significant role in holding public hearing on child/adolescent labour issues, monitoring and reviewing the implementation of legislations and measures for welfare of child/adolescent labourers and advise the Government on matters of child labour.

UNICEF, Bihar:- Unicef, Bihar has always been at the forefront of all programs and activities championing the cause of children, extend technical support in implementation of Child Labour Tracking System, training and capacity building of officials of departments mentioned in this state action plan and supporting the child labour cell functioning in the Office of the Labour Commissioner Bihar.

Conclusion:- The goals of human development are deeply inter linked with the development and empowerment of women and children. The history of human rights is history of struggle. Child labour occurs due to various factors viz, poverty, caste, tradition, size of the family, labour scarcity, wage rates, illiteracy, neighborhood effect etc. Many studies have referred to inequalities in society, high birth rate or fertility, large size of the family etc., as non-economic factor leading to child labour. Urbanization is also found to encourage child labour; but knowledge is the only prime factor which can be a universal solution for this problem. Reducing poverty, child trafficking, cheap (or free) and compulsory education and average standards of living are such main factors that can root out the problem of child labour.

It is proved that child labour participation rates have decreased in almost all countries. The growth rate, economic growth will have an effect both on the demand for, and supply of child labourer. Large companies sometimes decide to pay for children's education as a way of keeping them out of the labour market and they even pay wages while children attend school. The quickest way to reduce the number of full-time child workers is to continue to pay them while they attend school.

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