



Women And Child Labour In Early Industrial Punjab

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Abstract:

This study has been undertaken to look into the industries of Punjab women and child labour was working in different field of work, mostly in carpet making, cotton weaving and spinning, cottage industries, handloom weaving and hosiery industries in Ludhiana, Sialkot, Lahore and Amritsar. They faced low wages and long hours of work in a day, bad working condition and totally injustice. Weak economic status forces them to work there. Most of them were working as seasonal workforce without any compensation and legal aid. This research includes the development of laws for women and child labour in a given period also.

Index Terms - Child Labour, Dhariwal, Industrial Punjab, Labour, The Indian Factory Act 1922.

I. Introduction:

In early period of Punjab's industrial development, women and children were deficiently and brutally treated by the employers to manufacture highest 'surplus value', Dewan Chaman Lall had cited the brutal utilization of children. He writes "Slavery is that the essential of industrial life in India; we do not have to take to countries like Liberia or Abyssinia to find forms of child slavery. Not long ago a well-known public man, in the days when he was working as a schoolmaster disclosed that in the house neighboring his own, a large number of children used to hear their pitiful cries, which gave him some times at night he used to be drafted in every day and that sometimes at night he used to hear their pitiful cries, which gave him no rest. He thought that the adjoining house was a school and that it was his duty as a schoolmaster to report to the authorities regarding the cruelties that were being inflicted upon blameless children. When enquiries were made, it was discovered that the adjoining house was a lace factory in which little children of tender age were made to work unheard of hours and it was when they were tired and when their heads bent in sleep that the kind-hearted factory owner would come with his whip and wake them up thinking that their cries and their tears were an aid to their industrial education."¹

But F. L. Brayne being a major supporter of progress of villages for all round growth of the economy suggested that village supplementary industry should be for men who were idle and not for the women who were overburdened.² In his study he concluded that male members of rural population did not keep themselves engaged in work rather they tried to leave maximum burden on women.³

¹ Diwan Chaman Lall, Coolie-The story of Indian Labour and Capital in India, Vol- II, Lahore, 1932, p. 16.

² Brayne F.L., Socrates in an Indian Village, Wisdom Village Publications Pvt Ltd, 2017, p. 261.

³ Amandeep Kaur, British Writings on Punjab Economy (1849-1947): Historiographical Analysis, (Un-Published Thesis) Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 81

II. Condition of Women and Children in Industries:

The stipulations of child labour in a variety of occupations had been discussed in detail under the corresponding section. The number of children employed in organised industries is comparatively small and where it exists it was regulated. The Royal Commission on Labour investigating into problems of child labour found in system existing in several industries (Amritsar Carpet and Bidi factories) whereby parents or guardians of the child mortgaged the labour of the child in return for a loan or advance on an argument either written or oral.⁴

In ginning Factories 90 per cent of the workers were women and children and daily working hours were extended up to 12 years old. Corporal punishment was also not ruled out even over trivial mistakes and such a treatment was prevalent in small workshops also in Factories.⁵ The situation in tanneries of Punjab was not improved. The workmen, mostly of the so called lower caste, were the slaves of their masters. They could be called to work at any time of the day or night; sports work at Sialkot gave the same ugly picture as far as working hours and service of children were worried.⁶ The report of the Royal Commission of 1908 made the investigations, and found that many textile mills were working from 13 to 15 hours and a single set of workers, and before that this practice had been fairly general.⁷

In another example of the same type cited by Lall exposed the nature of exploitation. He illustrated that when Sastri arrived with the Royal Commission on Labour in the town of Amritsar, he visited, along with the other members of the Commission, the carpet weaving feretories owned by Greeks and Anglo-Indians, where some of the most beautiful reproductions of ancient carpets were made with the labour of children, whose ages were as low as five years. Sastri discovered on his rounds a man carrying a ledger under his arm. When the ledger was examined the following entry was disclosed:

"I Boota son of Chakhi, Chowkidar of Amritsar owe Rs. 57/- of which half is Rs. 28/8 which I have borrowed from Bootee Weaver in advance. I agree that my grandsons N and F should be handed over for Carpet Weaving. N to get Rs. 9/- and F to get Rs. 7/-. I will return all the money when I borrowed to the man from whom I have borrowed."⁸ The poor workers, working for long hours were not able to make ends meet and were always in debt.⁹

Children from about 8 years of age and women were employed in Punjab, "seated on the earth floor of the open yards to which the loosely baled wool is brought." They first had to tear or beat out the wool from mud, coagulated blood and other matter with their hands and with iron rods. It was a foul process. There were no grids to remove the accumulated dust and the whole place was covered with dirt and wool. Children slept near their mothers on piles of wool, their faces clothes covered with gum-ladder dust. Other women were employed, either indoors or out, as colour graders of wool.

It was predictable that in Punjab, about more than two thousands workers were dependent on them and of those; at least fifteen percent were children between 6 to 12 years of age. The common condition of these factories was bad. The faulty sanitation, the unclean Kutchra (Raw) floors and the dirty yards all tell on the health and physique of the operatives. The workmen and apprentices were also very worked with some time with no weekly holiday. They laboured from sunrise to sunset and more than 90% suffer from stomach problems and eye weaknesses, owing to the stain of the work and its usual prolongation and sedentary nature. No reform has yet been made in the sitting posture of the craftsmen while at work, although some measures in this direction can be effectively employed. The old conditions continue. Children of ages varying from six years and upward were employed as apprentices and were kept in the workrooms all day

⁴ Industrial Labour in India, Studies and Reports, Series A, (Industrial Relation) No. 41, United Kingdom, 1938, pp. 92-93.

⁵ Mukhtar Ahmad, Factory Labour in Punjab, Madras: The Huxley Press, 1929, p. 53.

⁶ Manjit Singh, Industrialisation, *Working class formation and trade union movement in Ludhiana*, (Un-published Ph.D. thesis), Patiala: Punjabi University, 1986, p. 113.

⁷ Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931, (Punjab) Vol., II, Part- II, (U.K.) Harrow, London: (His Majesty's Stationery Office) H.M.S.O. Press, 1931, p. 196.

⁸ Ibid, Vol. I, p. 16, Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol-II, Part- II, Calcutta, 1931, p. 92.

⁹ Saxena, Kiran, Trade Union Movement and the National Movement, New Delhi, 1990, p. 37.

alternately working and resting.¹⁰ The exploitation of children in ginning factories was continuous in Punjab and might be in other localities in India.¹¹

The distinguishing narrative is told of a boy, said to have come with his mother's food, who looked confused and made no response when asked, "Which is your mother?" but replied rapidly as consideration to the question, "How amount do you get a day?" Panch Anna."¹²

Child Labour 1913 to 1926 ¹³		
Year	Total No. of male children employed	Total No. of female children employed
1913	725	67
1914	940	192
1915	931	173
1916	968	96
1917	857	78
1918	759	141
1919	1033	203
1920	1093	138
1921	975	55
1922	1473	166

The Indian Factories Amendment Act of 1922:

The Secretary of State, appointed a Commission with the W. T. Morison as its President to go from side to side the working of different factories in India and details on the viability of further legislation. This Commission made a travel around of the countryside and visited Amritsar, Dhariwal and Lahore which were the major industrial centers in the Punjab.¹⁴

The commission thought that the rules concerning the employment of women were usually overlooked. Women were usually over-worked and children were also worked full time in entire disregard of the provisions of the Factory Act. Again, children under nine years of age were worked for half time.¹⁵

The majority of the commission supposed that no direct limitations on adult male labour were advisable. They were, however, in favour of an indirect restraint of their working hours.¹⁶

The committee recommended some suggestions like:-

- "the formation of a young person's 'class to comprise all young adults between the ages of 14 and 17, with working hours limited to 12 in any one day;
- "the decrease of the working hours of children from seven to six hours;
- "the prohibition of the employment of 'young persons'. Women and children before 5-30 a.m. or after 7 p.m.;
- "the replacement of a compulsory intermission after six hours' continuous work in place of the present mid-day gap; and
- "the assimilation of the restrictions placed upon the employment of women to those proposed for the young persons' class."

In consideration of the special circumstances of seasonal factories, women and young workers could be employed therein at night provided they did not work for more than 12 hours a day.

Dr Nair, a talented member of the Commission, added a minute of dissent to the report. Briefly, one of the opinion that was women should be legally prohibited from work at night. He differed from the Majority

¹⁰ Guriqbal Singh, Trade Union Movement in Punjab: 1920-1947, (Un-published Thesis) Panjab University, Chandigarh, p. 53.

¹¹ Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Factories Act, 1911, in the Punjab, Delhi, and N.W.F. Provinces for 1915, by L.H Taffs, M.A., p.3. and that for 1920 by W.H. Abel, A.M. I. Mech., p. 2., Quoted in Kelman, Janet Harvey, Labour In India, A study of the Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry, London: 1923, p. 68.

¹² Kelman, Janet Harvey, Labour In India, A study of the Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry, London: 1923, p. 68.

¹³ Data used in preparing this table has been drawn from Annual reports on the working of the Indian Factories Act, 1911, in Punjab from 1913 to 1926.

¹⁴ Guriqbal Singh, Trade Union Movement in Punjab: 1920-1947, (Un-published Thesis) Panjab University, Chandigarh, p. 53.

¹⁵ Mukhtar Ahmad, Factory Labour in Punjab, Madras: The Huxley Press, 1929, p. 27.

¹⁶ Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, 1907-1908, Vol- I. pp. 33-34.

Commissioners in their suggestion for "the raising of the hours of labour for women employed in factories from their present limit of 11 a day to 12, and the reduction of the present hours of interval or intervals amounting to one and half hours to half-hour."¹⁷

It is interesting to note that the Punjab government was in favour of an eight-hour day for women workers as far back as August 1920. It will be of interest to note that the Punjab government was the favour of an eight-hour day for women workers as far back as August 1920.¹⁸

In January 1922 the Indian Factory Amendment Act was passed and came into force from the 1st July 1922. The code of a 60-hours week was accepted for all factories, textile and non-textile and the daily maximum was brought down to 11 hours. Child labour was restricted to six hours a day and the minimum age of the children was raised from nine to twelve years and on 1st February 1923, Sir C.A. Innes came forward with a further alteration to the Indian Factories Act of 1922, under it, an employer could substitute for a Sunday holiday on any one of the three days succeeding the Sunday.¹⁹

Conclusion:

The early decades of the twentieth century were witnessed the industrial development in Colonial Punjab viz a viz women and child labour in factories. Cotton and woollen mills employed the child and women to create more production with fewer wage. Bad working conditions and the absence of Legislations the contemporary period unsavoury for them. But due to The Indian Factory Amendment Act 1922 that was implemented in First July 1922, limited work hours, restricted child labour's age to work and holiday on Sunday for the industrial worker in Punjab.



¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 104-105.

¹⁸ Letter No. 4788--S (0 & 1), dated Simla, the 27th August 1920, by the Punjab Government to the Government of India as a reply to the latter's letter No. 1-812 dated the 11th May 1920" Personally, the Lieutenant- Governor would like in this province to see an eight-hour day prescribed for women as a maximum." Bulletin No. 10 of Indian Industries and Labour, p. 96, Quoted by Mukhtar Ahmad, Factory Labour in The Punjab, Madras: The Huxley Press, 1929, p. 108.

¹⁹ Mukhtar Ahmad, Factory Labour in Punjab, Madras: The Huxley Press, 1929, p. 30.