

CHILD LABOUR AS SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUP: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract Social exclusion is related to disadvantage and deprivation in society. Although, it is associated with marginality, closure, dissatisfaction, dispossession, deprivation and destitution. In the Indian context, it highlights lack of distributive justice, caste based distances and discrimination, unequal access to opportunities, weak policies of the society. The poor sections in society are excluded group in terms of life chances and dignity and they experience dehumanization in all walks of their life. Child Labour is one such category which is largely excluded from the mainstream of society and they are denied basic rights. Despite passing of Right to Education Act, many such children are deprived of education. Child labour means that children are forced to work like adults and take part in economic activity. According to the ILO, the term child labour is applied to people up to age thirteen, or seventeen in case of dangerous work. Child labour has been an international concern because it damages, spoils and destroys the future of children. The problem of child labour is a serious matter not only in India but also in other developing countries. Children are the hope and future of a nation. Yet, there are millions deprived children in our country who have never known a normal, carefree childhood. The present paper is an attempt to study socio-economic and health profile of children involved in labour activities. Based on primary data of 25 child labour in Chandigarh using interview schedule method, the paper will study the nature and extent of problems of child labour and their coping mechanisms. The study will recommend some steps to ameliorate the conditions of child labour for their social inclusion.

Keywords: Child Labour, Social Exclusion, Problems of children,

Introduction

The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that: - is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or - interferes with a child’s ability to attend and participate in school fully by obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. There are many inter-linked factors contributing to the prevalence of child labour. Child labour is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Household poverty forces children into the labour market to earn money. Some perform child labour to supplement family income while many also are in it for survival. They miss out on an opportunity to gain an education, further perpetuating household poverty across generations, slowing the economic growth and social development. Child labour impedes children from gaining the skills and education they need to have opportunities of decent work as an adult. Inequality, lack of educational opportunities, slow demographic transition, traditions and cultural expectations all contribute to the persistence of child labour in India. Age, sex, ethnicity, caste and deprivation affect the type and intensity of work that children perform. Agriculture and informal sector employment continue to be sectors where children end up working. The ILO experience is that stable economic growth, respect for labour standards, decent work, universal education, social protection, recognizing the needs and rights of the children —together help tackle the root causes of child labour.

As per Census 2011, the total child population in India in the age group (5-14) years is 259.6 million. Of these, 10.1 million (3.9% of total child population) are working, either as ‘main worker’ or as ‘marginal worker’. In addition, more than 42.7 million children in India are out of school. However, the good news is that the incidence of child labour has decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011. However, the decline was more visible in rural areas, while the number of child workers has increased in urban areas, indicating the growing demand for child workers in menial jobs. Child labour has different ramifications in both rural and urban India.

Distribution of working children by Rural/Urban Area

Percentage of working children (5-14) Total number of working children (5-14) (in millions)

Year	Rural	Urban	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
2001	5.9	2.1	5.0	11.4	1.3	12.7
2011	4.3	2.9	3.9	8.1	2.0	10.1

Source: Census 2001 and 2011**Distribution of working children by type of work in 2011**

Area of work	Percentage	Numbers (in millions)
Cultivators	26.0	2.63
Agricultural labourers	32.9	3.33
Household industry workers	5.2	0.52
Other workers	35.8	3.62

Source – Census 2011 Note: ‘Other workers’: Workers other than cultivators, agricultural labourers or workers in household industries

Child Labour is the practice of having children engaged in economic activity, on a part- or full-time basis. The practice deprives children of their childhood, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. Poverty, lack of good schools and the growth of the informal economy are considered to be the key causes of child labour in India. Some other causes of Child Labour in India are cheap wages and accessibility to factories that can produce the maximum amount of goods for the lowest possible price. Corruption in the government of India also plays a major role in child labour because laws that should be enforced to prevent child labour are not because of the corrupt government.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion as a concept has come in use in the late 20th centuries and has attracted a good number of scholars who are out to critique the concept and align it with the 21st century developments. This concept was first coined in France. It is used widely in the world to depict the various types of social disadvantages. Moreover, the concept has attracted different definitions from different scholars. According to Butler and Watt (2007), social exclusion can be defined as processes that block basic individual or community rights, gags opportunities and basic resources that are often readily available to habitants of a society and vital to the wellbeing and social integration of a people. In other words, social exclusion deprives individuals off their rights and freedoms to fully engage in matters of politics, social and economic. The aforementioned deprivation is presence despite them being residence of a given society. In the contemporary modern society, equality is a fundamental right that ought to be enjoyed by every human being. However, grave social deprivations disadvantage certain individuals and communities in the society from enjoying this right. Social exclusion puts forward and brings to attention a concern with material inequality such as education, housing, healthcare and employment. Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live.

Child Labour

As per the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, amended in 2016 ("CLPR Act"), a "Child" is defined as any person below the age of 15, and the CLPR Act prohibits employment of a Child in any employment including as a domestic help. It is a cognizable criminal offence to employ a Child for any work. Children between age of 14 and 18 are defined as "Adolescent" and the law allows Adolescent to be employed except in the listed hazardous occupation and processes which include mining, inflammable substance and explosives related work and any other hazardous process as per the Factories Act, 1948. In 2001, an estimated 1% of all child workers, or about 120,000 children in India were in a hazardous job. Notably, the Constitution of India prohibits child labour in hazardous industries (but not in non-hazardous industries) as a Fundamental Right under Article 24 UNICEF estimates that India with its larger population, has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age, while sub-Saharan African countries have the highest percentage of children who are deployed as child labourers. ILO estimates that agriculture, at 60 percent, is the largest employer of child labour in the world. While the United Nation's FAO estimates 70% of child labour is deployed in agriculture and related activities. Outside of agriculture, child labour is observed in almost all informal sectors of the Indian economy.

Companies including Gap, Primark and Monsanto have been criticised for child labour in their products. The companies claim they have strict policies against selling products made by underage children, but there are many links in a supply chain making it difficult to oversee them all. In 2011, after three years of Primark's effort, BBC acknowledged that its award-winning investigative journalism report of Indian child labour use by Primark was a fake. The BBC apologised to Primark, to Indian suppliers and all its viewers. Another company that has come under much scrutiny was Nike. Nike was under pressure to speak up about alleged sweatshops that harboured children that the company was exploiting to make their sneakers. Since then Nike has come out with a separate web page that specifically points out where they get their products from and where their products are manufactured.

The Factories Act of 1948: The Act prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory. The law also placed rules on who, when and how long can pre-adults aged 15–18 years be employed in any factory.

The Mines Act of 1952: The Act prohibits the employment of children below 18 years of age in a mine.

The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986: A "Child" is defined as any person below the age of 14 and the CLPR Act prohibits employment of a Child in any employment including as a domestic help (except helping own family in non-hazardous occupations). It is a cognizable criminal offence to employ a Child for any work. Children between age of 14 and 18 are defined as "Adolescent" and the law allows Adolescent to be employed except in the listed hazardous occupation and processes which include mining, inflammable substance and explosives related work and any other hazardous process as per the Factories Act, 1948.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2015: This law made it a crime, punishable with a prison term, for anyone to keep a child in bondage for the purpose of employment.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009: The law mandates free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years. This legislation also mandated that 25 percent of seats in every private school must be allocated for children from disadvantaged groups and physically challenged children. (It is not applied through) India formulated a National Policy on Child Labour in 1987. This Policy seeks to adopt a gradual & sequential approach with a focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations. It envisioned strict enforcement of Indian laws on child labour combined with development programs to address the root causes of child labour such as poverty. In 1988, this led to the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) initiative. This legal and development initiative continues, with a current central government funding of Rs. 6 billion, targeted solely to eliminate child labour in India. Despite these efforts, child labour remains a major challenge for India. No, child below age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any hazardous employment

Causes of Child Labour in India

- **The curse of poverty**

The main reason for child labour in India is poverty. Most of the country's population suffers from poverty. Due to poverty, parents cannot afford the studies of their children and make them earn their wages from a tender age. In fact, they are well aware of the grief of losing their loved ones to poverty many times. They send their small children to work in factories, homes and shops. They are made to work to increase the income of their poor families at the earliest. These decisions are taken only for the purpose of eking out a living for their family. But such decisions shatter children's physical and mental state as they lose their childhood at an early age.

- **Lack of educational resources**

Even after so many years of our country's independence, there are instances where children are deprived of their fundamental right to education. There are thousands of villages in our country where there are no proper facilities of education. And if there is any, it is miles away. Such administrative laxity is also responsible for child labour in India. The worst sufferers are the poor families for whom getting their children educated is a dream.

Sometimes the lack of affordable school for the education of poor children leaves them illiterate and helpless. Children are forced to live without studying. And sometimes such compulsions push them into the trap of child labour in India.

- **Social and economic backwardness**

Social and economic backwardness is also the main reason for child labour in India. Socially backward parents do not send their children to receive education. Consequently, their children are trapped in child labour. Due to illiteracy, many times parents are not aware of various information and schemes for child education. Lack of education, illiteracy and consequently the lack of awareness of their rights among them have encouraged child labour.

Also, uneducated parents do not know about the impact of child labour on their children. The conditions of poverty and unemployment give rural families a compulsive basis for engaging children in various tasks.

- **Addiction, disease or disability**

In many families, due to addiction, disease or disability, there is no earning, and the child's wages are the sole means of family's sustenance. Population growth is also increasing unemployment, which has adverse impact on child labour prevention. So, parents, instead of sending their children to school, are willing to send them to work to increase family income.

- **Poor compliance of laws**

In modern society, laws stipulate that citizens have the right to receive good education, avail good health services and take care of their health. Every citizen has the right to play the game he enjoys, and enjoy all the means of entertainment, and when he grows, to obtain employment where he can earn well and contribute to society and nation. But in the absence of proper compliance of the laws, child labour in India is continuing. It can be prohibited only by strict adherence to the related laws.

- **Lure of cheap labour**

In the greed of cheap labour, some shopkeepers, companies and factory owners employ children so that they have to pay less to them and it amounts to employing cheap labour. Shopkeepers and small businessmen make children work as much as they do to the elder ones, but pay half the wages. In the case of child labour, there is less chance for theft, greed or misappropriation of money too.

With the development of globalization, privatization, and consumerist culture, the need for cheap labour and its linkage with economic needs of poor families have encouraged child labour in India.

- **Family tradition**

It is a shocking but a bitter truth that in our society it is very easy to give child labour the name of tradition or custom in many families. The cultural and traditional family values play their role in increasing the problem of child labour in India at the voluntary level. Many families believe that a good life is not their destiny, and the age-old tradition of labour is the only source of their earning and livelihood.

Small businessmen also waste the lives of their children in the greediness of perpetuating their family trade with lower production costs. Some families also believe that working from childhood onwards will make their children more diligent and worldly-wise in terms of future life. They believe that early employment will give rise to their children's personal development, which will make it easier for them to plan their life ahead.

- **Discrimination between boys and girls**

We have been conditioned into believing that girls are weaker and there is no equal comparison between boys and girls. Even today, in our society, we will find many examples where girls are deprived of studies. Considering girls weaker than boys deprives them of school and education. In labourer families, girls are found to be engaged in labour along with their parents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Child labourers are marginalized section of the society. The findings reveal that majority of them have migrated from different parts of India and 40% were born in the city as their families had migrated in previous generation and they were born here. Child labour were working in different professions such as labourers, workers in dhabas, puncture shops, street vendors, as servants in shops, houses, hotels, etc. 72% of them belonged to the Hindu community while 24% were followers of the Muslim religion. Only 4 percent were Sikhs. Caste-wise analysis showed that majority belonged to Scheduled Caste followed by general caste and Backward Caste category. They were in the age group of 10 to 14 years and large majority were in the age group of 12-14 years.

Education wise analysis reveal surprising data that illiteracy was not common in the child labour as 72 percent had some education while remaining have never gone to school. Level of income child labour reveal that majority of them 52% earned less than 2000 rupees per month; earning range 32% rickshaw was Rs 2000-3000 per month while 16% earned monthly more than 3000 rupees. Analysis of dwelling places show that show that 40% were living in small rented houses followed by slum dwellers (20%), own houses (12%) and sleeping outside or in ran baseras (28%). Many of them were without safe drinking water, toilet and sanitation facilities.

The health aspects of the respondents were also not satisfactory as most of the child labour were suffering from health problems. They have to spend a part of their earnings on their treatment. Moreover, the welfare provisions and social security covers are not specifically carved to cater to the needs of this segment of population. It was further found that the situation with regard to facilities was not very encouraging as large majority of respondents reported that the provisions with regard to rest, shelters, medical aid and drinking water were very unsatisfactory. The majority of them do not have basic minimum facilities at their living places. All these factors like working, living and health are interconnected and have direct impact on individual's day to day life. With meager income large majority of the respondents felt that the amount they earned was not sufficient to fulfill the required needs of the family. There was no protection of their working conditions and wages.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that Child Labour is a socially excluded category. It is irony that we have Right to Education but at the same time children have to work and that too in conditions dangerous to their health and safety which is totally unacceptable. Nor can the problem of child labour be left untackled until economic conditions and social structures are fundamentally improved. Toiling long hours for a pittance, these little breadwinners accept exploitation as a way of life. They only know their sorrows. Silent acceptance is writ large on their faces. Each day adds more to their growing numbers. Though it is true that labour helps children in their survival, should the children be made to pay for structural deficiencies to provide alternative employment or inability to curb poverty. Should they be forced to inhabit an adult world, bear adult responsibilities, and suffer abysmal exploitation?

The child workers have no shelter, no food and no education. They run the risk of contracting various ailments and skin diseases. They are vulnerable to exploitation by almost anyone-the employer, the parents, the cops, and even the common man. They become easy targets of drug pushers. They are even sexually abused. Certain principles of policy are, therefore, to be followed by the state so that children get opportunities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and the childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment. Let us hope, with proper implementation of Constitutional provisions and Right to Education, the child of the today will find himself into the "heaven of freedom".

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