

Child Labour: An Ugly Face of the Civilized Society

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ABSTRACT The present study was conducted with the objectives to assess the problem of child labour: its causes and consequences in a tribal dominated district of Orissa. Using a multi-stage random sampling method data were collected from 140 respondents covering 12 panchayatas spread over 4 identified blocks of the study area. The study reveals that most of the active child workers are coming from poverty stricken socio-economic backward families. Very often they are ill treated. To deal with the problem a multi pronged attack is inevitable. All the actors should work in unison to have a permanent solution to this man made disaster.

INTRODUCTION

India is often described as “the largest democracy in the world”. But unfortunately the well-being and rights of children count less. The glaring example is the failure to deliver on the 86th Amendment of the Constitution of India, which makes education as a fundamental right for all children aged 6-14 years. Indeed, poor children are twice removed from the center of attention: not only do they belong to the families that have little voice in the political system; they also have no voice within the family. Children are the most important assets of a nation. They are the future of the country. A healthy and educated child of today is the active and intelligent citizen of tomorrow. Therefore, it is the top most responsibility of the nation to give a decent childhood to the young and vulnerable group of children and to allow them to prepare for a decent adult working life. But in reality there is a yawning gap between the conditions of child and the standards envisaged by the “Children’s Charter of Rights”. Child Labour problem has emerged as a burning issue in our country. Child labour is the work, which involves some degree of exploitation, i.e., physical, mental, psychological and economic. Therefore impair the health and development of children. The concern over child labour is now greater than ever before – both within India and all over the world. India has all along followed a proactive policy in the matter of tackling the problem of child labour, and always stood for constitutional, statutory and developmental

measures that are required to eliminate child labour. In consonance with the above The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act was enacted in 1986 and a National Child Labour Policy was adopted in 1987. The national policy reiterates the directive principle of state policy in India’s Constitution. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopts various conventions on child labour (e.g. Convention No. 5 in 1919, Convention No. 138 in 1973 and Convention No. 182 in 1999) and India ratifies them. In 1992, India became the first country to sign an MOU with the ILO to implement the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) as a supplement to its National Child Labour Policy. Nonetheless the problem still persists. In the light of above, present study has been undertaken to evaluate the situation of child labour and awareness of various stakeholders in this regard.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in a tribal dominated district of Kandhamal in the state of Orissa, basically to examine the situation of aboriginal people vis-à-vis the mainstream of the country. For the collection of primary data a multi-stage random sampling method was followed. At the first stage out of 12 blocks and 2 urban areas of the district the investigator selected 4 blocks and 2 urban areas namely G.Udayagiri, Tikabali, Raikia, Chakapad block and Phulbani NAC & G.Udayagiri NAC. In the second stage from each block 3 Panchayatas were randomly selected for

study. In the third stage 10 child labourers of each center were chosen on a simple random sampling basis as the primary unit of data collection.

Primary data were collected through personal interview method with the help of a structured questionnaire. After pre-testing the questionnaire it had been administered among 140 child labourers and their parents, spread over 12 Gram Panchayatas and 2 NACs of the district. The first section of the questionnaire dealt with the personal trait of the child labour, hence answers were collected from the child labor himself / herself. The second section pertained to the socio-economic background of the family of the child labour, therefore answers were collected from the parents / family members of the child labour. The above data were supplemented by secondary information gathered from official records, personal discussion with officials and field observations of the works undertaken in the sample villages / urban centers, and were recorded in the form of field notes which became fruitful in drawing some meaningful inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results are obtained from this empirical investigation. In this study, most of the child labourers are girls – 83 out of 140 respondents are female. This is mainly due to less importance on female child education. 54 per cent of the total workers belong to the age group of 12-14 years. This is probably due to preference of employer for the older children as the younger in the age group of 6-11 years are not physically strong enough to do the work properly. Regarding educational standard of the child workers the study reveals that 78 are educated above 7th standard, 33 are within class 4th to 6th and rest are having education standard below 3rd. In a study done by Chakraborty (2006) on the child labour in rural area of West Bengal similar trend was available.

These child workers are engaged in different activities such as maidservant, fire wood collection, khalli stitching, agricultural labour, chips making, household industries etc. The result of the sample survey implies that 20.7 per cent of the child workers are employed as maidservants. This is followed by the activity of the child worker as hotel boy / shop boy, i.e., 13.6 per cent. Very few child workers are engaged in household industries (Table 1). Except the child

Table 1: Occupational distribution of child labourers

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Maid servant	29	20.7
Fire wood collection	13	9.3
Khalli stitching	9	6.4
Cowboy	11	7.9
Agricultural labourer	18	12.9
Chips making	12	8.6
Household Industry	5	3.6
Motor Garage	7	5.0
Hotel boy/ shop boy	19	13.6
Brick making	9	6.4
Foot-path/ News paper vendor	8	5.6
Total	140	100.0

Source: Computed from field study

workers employed as maidservants all others are engaged as daily wagers. When they are asked about the job satisfaction 27 of them reported 'yes' 49 answered 'no' and rest either tell 'can't say' or 'indifferent' in their attitude.

Children who are employed as maidservant and hotel boys / shop boys have acknowledged that they have been working from early in the morning to 7 O' Clock in the evening. Regarding remuneration the child labourers reply that they are paid very small amount as daily wage. Only hotel boys / shop boys and children engaged in motor garage have been getting a higher wage. All most all the child workers are employed in a walk able distance from their home. Hence, they need not require any accommodation in the workplace. However, their employer generally provides the medical facility, if any problem arises at the work side. In response to the question of treatment in the field of work by their employer and fellow adults, the respondents point out that they are very often ill treated. But most of the children are not ready to respond as they fear that they may be put in trouble in future. Similar opinion is expressed by Benjamin (1990) that the working conditions of child labour is horrible in all respect – working hour, residential facility and the relationship with employer and fellow workers.

In response to the size of the family most respondents said that they have a large size family. The respondents further add that they have been brought up in a family suffering from abject poverty. All the families live one's below poverty line. No one has claimed that either one's father or mother is a government servant. Most of the houses are thatched. Sanitation facility is very poor. The houses are not equipped with facility of latrine. For drinking water the poor families

Table 2: Parents' awareness about social facts

Parents awareness	Yes	No
Primary schooling is compulsory	47(33.6)	93(66.4)
Minimum age of work	18(12.9)	122(87.1)
Minimum age of marriage	15(10.7)	125(89.3)
Supply of mid-day meal in school	81(57.9)	59(42.1)
Supply of books in free of cost	105(75.0)	35(25.0)
Supply of school dress in free cost	45(32.1)	95(67.9)
Existence of tribal residential school	111(79.3)	29(20.7)
Immunization facilitation	52(37.1)	88(62.9)
Pre-natal and post-natal service	50(35.7)	90(64.3)
What is child labor	12(8.6)	128(91.4)

Source: Computed from field study

Note: Figures in parentheses shows percent.

depend mostly on tube well and community well. The last question deals with the awareness of the parents. This question deals with 10 aspects of the social life. The responses of the parents are enumerated in table 2. The table explains poor social awareness of the parents living in rural area. The poor economic condition coupled with large size of the family and low social awareness are the main reasons of continuation of child labour in Kandhamal district. An earlier study conducted by Hazarika (2004) corroborates the view that poor socio-economic awareness and poverty of the parents are mainly responsible for the existence of child labour.

It is very disheartening to mention that no specific scheme adopted at all India level, has been operating in Kandhamal district to eliminate the problem of child labour. It is pointed out that in Kandhamal district not a single child labour is engaged in hazardous activities. Hence, it is not a major problem. But, we do not agree with this analogy. There are some occupations, which although not officially classified as 'hazardous' are in fact dangerous to the child worker. In a sense, every occupation is hazardous, for it not only retards the child's growth and development but also national growth and development. All these lead to a very dismal picture in the district. If we compare the data related to child labour in the district it shows an upward trend: in 1997 the figure was 4656 child labourers (all in non-hazardous

activity) which increased to a level of 11903 in 2001 and further to a high of 14085 in 2005. It is primarily non-pursuance of any specific programme designed towards this end.

CONCLUSION

Laws alone can't change the society. They function along with other socio-economic measures. Non-regulatory positive socio-economic steps are complementary to the regulatory measures and both should operate simultaneously. Among the non-regulatory measure, two prominent instruments are: (i) free and compulsory education at least up to school leaving age i.e., 14 years and (ii) Poverty eradication programmes to meet the economic needs of the poor. The child labour problem is not an independent problem. It is a problem linked with many other problems. It is an outcome and reflection of number of socio, economic and political malfunctions. To deal with the problem, a multi-pronged attack is indispensable. Child labour issues can only be solved in a sustainable manner if an integrated approach is applied. Direct action should be coupled with local capacity building and an improvement of the legal and organizational environment. Programmes should address health and social services, legal protection, education, income generation and alternative employment possibilities for poverty stricken families. Public awareness raising steps are highly essential. Best results can be obtained if several actors - Government, parents & employers, work together.

Let's arm our children with opportunity and hope.

Our slogan is "parents to work & children to school".

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