Child Labour in India: A Curse on Humanity

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Abstract: In India, the problem of child labour is well recognized. Children are engaged in various types of work including those that are classified as 'hazardous'. Although there are inter-state and inter-regional variations in India, the factors that generate child labour in general, and hazardous child labour in particular, are basically similar and revolve around poverty, lack of access to quality education, demographic pressure, social exclusion etc.

Child labour is a serious evil for the developing countries like India. The majority of child labourers in India work in industries such as cracker manufacturing, diamond polishing, carpet weaving, brassware industry, glass and bangle making, and mica cutting. The employers hire child labor by paying less pay in sub-human conditions with long working hours. Government of India has taken major initiatives to eradicate the child labour by passing special legislations and punishing the offenders. Not only government authorities, but also other social rehabilitated centers are playing an important role in rescuing the child labour at the central and state level. Providing education to all the children is a long-term answer to this social menace.

The problem of child labour continues to pose a challenge before the nation. Government has been taking various pro-active measures to tackle this problem. However, considering the magnitude and extent of the problem and that it is essentially a socio-economic problem inextricably linked to poverty and illiteracy, it requires concerted efforts from all sections of the society to make a dent in the problem. This paper is an attempt in analytical look at the official sources of information on the scale of child labour in India.

Key Words: Hazardous, Demographic Pressure, Social Exclusion, government authorities

I. Introduction

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 is one of the most debated acts regarding children in India. It outlines where and how children can work and where they cannot it is decided. The provisions of the act are meant to be acted upon immediately after the publication of the act, except for part III that discusses the conditions in which a child may work. Part III can only come into effect as per a date appointed by the Central Government (which was decided as 26th of May, 1993).

After independence from colonial rule, India has passed a number of constitutional protections and laws on child labour. Government has developed the law in the Child Labour in various ways. The major national legislative developments include the following:

- 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 Labour Act of 1986: The Act prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in hazardous occupations identified in a list by the law.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2000: This law made it a crime, punishable with a prison term, for anyone to procure or employ a child in any hazardous employment or in bondage.
- 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.

India is home to more than 12.6 million children who are forced to work in order to survive. These children are working as domestic help, on streets, in factories and farmlands silently suffering abuse. Child labour is the practice of having children engage in economic activity, on 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 growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India. The 1998 national census of India estimated the total number of child labour, aged 5–14, to be at 12.6 million, out of a total child population of 253 million in 5-14 age group. A 2009-2010 nationwide survey found child labour
prevalence had reduced to 4.98 million children (or less than 2% of children in 5-14 age group). The 2011 national census of India found the total number of child labour, aged 5–14, to be at 4.35 million, and the total child population to be 259.64 million in that age group.

According to the Census 2001 figures there are 1.26 crore working children in the age group of 5-14 as compared to the total child population of 25.2 crore. There are approximately 12 lacs children working in the hazardous occupations/processes which are covered under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act i.e. 18 occupations and 65 processes. However, as per survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2004-05, the number of working children is estimated at 90.75 lakh. It shows that the efforts of the Government have borne the desired fruits.

Biggeri and Mehrotra have studied the macroeconomic factors that encourage child labour. They focus their study on five Asian nations including India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines. They suggest that child labour is a serious problem in all five, but it is not a new problem. Macroeconomic causes encouraged widespread child labour across the world, over most of human history. They suggest that the causes for child labour include both the demand and the supply side. While poverty and unavailability of good schools explain the child labour supply side, they suggest that the growth of low paying informal economy rather than higher paying formal economy is amongst the causes of the demand side. Other scholars too suggest that inflexible labour market, size of informal economy, inability of industries to scale up and lack of modern manufacturing technologies are major macroeconomic factors affecting demand and acceptability of child labour.

It is observe that the Child Labour in the age 5 to 14 are consistently highest in rural area as compare to Urban area in India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Share of children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0-6 yrs)</td>
<td>(in millions)</td>
<td>(0-6 yrs) to the corresponding total population (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Total Male Female</td>
<td>Total Male Female</td>
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<td>Census 2001</td>
<td>163.84 85.01 78.83</td>
<td>1028.74 532.2 496.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census 2011</td>
<td>158.79 82.95 75.84</td>
<td>1210.19 623.72 586.47</td>
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Non-governmental organizations Many NGOs like Bachpan Bachao Andolan, CARE India, Child Rights and You, Global march against child labour, RID E India etc. have been working to eradicate child labour in India. Pratham is India's largest non-governmental organization with the mission 'every child in school and learning
well.’ Founded in 1994, Pratham has aimed to reduce child labour and offer schooling to children irrespective of their gender, religion and social background. It has grown by introducing low cost education models that are sustainable and reproducible. Child labour has also been a subject of public interest litigations in Indian courts. Still a big challenge Despite a law in force in India, prohibiting child labour, millions of children to be employed in homes, at roadside restaurants and in factories across the country. These young kids are also subjected to exploitation in various other ways, including sexual and mental abuse. With June 12 being observed as anti-child labour day, activists alleged that lack of enforcement of the Child Labour Act and no rehabilitation has been fueling child labour. In 2007 the Indian Government published the results of one of the world’s largest and most sophisticated studies on child abuse, carried out in conjunction with Unicef and Save the Children. This detailed research on over 12,000 children produced some shocking conclusions:

- Two thirds of children are victims of physical abuse. The majority is beaten in school, and over half have to work seven days a week.
- Over 50% have faced some kind of sexual abuse, and over 20% of them severe abuse.
- Half of children also face emotional abuse.

So this is some of the context from which so many children choose, or are forced, to leave their home or village and end up in a city like Delhi.

II. Facts of Child Labour in India

- Official figures indicate that there are over 12 million child workers in India, but many NGOs reckon the real figure is up to 60 million. The number of girls involved is not much lower than the boys.
- The largest numbers work in places like textile factories, dhabas (roadside restaurants) and hotels, or as domestic workers. Much of the work, such as in firecracker or matchstick factories, can be hazardous; even if not, conditions are often appalling and simply rob kids of their childhood.
- By a law introduced in 2006, no child under 14 should work. But like many laws in India, the problem is enforcement. 2 years after the ban, the Labour Ministry had carried out 12,000 operations but only made 211 prosecutions.
- The majority of children are enrolled in school, but up to half don't attend regularly. Many are pressured to work and earn money for their families (see below).
- After five years of classes, fewer than 60% can read a short story or do simple arithmetic.

III. Health for Children in India

- About 27 million children are born each year in India. But nearly 2 million of them do not live to the age of five.
- Much of this is due to malnourishment. India has over 200 million people in hunger, and over 40% of the children who do live till 5 are malnourished.
- Immunization is very low by world standards.
- 79% of children under 3 have anaemia. Half of children have reduced learning capacity because of iodine deficiency.

IV. Child Labour and Business

The International Labor Organization estimates that 218 million children ages 5-17 are engaged in child labor the world over. Businesses save money as child labor is cheap and kids can be easily exploited, taking advantage of their parents' poverty and helplessness. This further spurs the rise of child labor in the country. So factories find loopholes and get round the law by declaring that the child laborer is a distant family member or is above 14 years of age. Child labor in India is mostly practiced in restaurants, roadside stalls; matches, fireworks and explosives industry glass and bangles factories; beedi-making; carpet-making; lock-making; brassware; export-oriented garment units gem polishing export industry; slate mines and manufacturing units; leather units; diamond industry; building and construction industry; brick kilns, helpers to mechanics, masons, carpenters, painters, plumbers, cooks, etc. Thousands of affluent Indians hire youngsters for household chores and to look after their own kids, under the pretext of providing some money to the parents of the child laborers and of offering a better life than he/she would normally have had.

- An estimated 14 percent of children in India between the ages of 5 and 14 are engaged in child labor activities, including carpet production.
- It would cost $760 billion over a 20-year period to end child labor. The estimated benefit in terms of better education and health is about six times that — over $4 trillion in economies where child laborers are found.
- Some children are forced to work up to 18 hours a day, often never leaving the confines of the factory or loom shed.

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Children trafficked into one form of labor may be later sold into another, as with girls from rural Nepal, who are recruited to work in carpet factories but are then trafficked into the sex industry over the border in India.

A recent report, produced by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, says there are as many as 60 million children working in India's agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors. The report argues that India's booming economy takes advantage of children workers to aid its growth and to bring wealth to a minority.

Even though the urban centers see many child laborers, estimates say that about 80 percent of child laborers reside in rural India, where they are forced to work in agricultural activities such as farming, livestock rearing, forestry and fisheries.

Reports say that there are more children under the age of 14 in India than the entire population of the United States. And children under 14 years of age account for about 4 percent of the total labor force in the country. Of these children, nine out of every ten work in their own rural family settings.

Nearly 85 percent are engaged in traditional agricultural activities. Less than 9 percent work in manufacturing, services and repairs. About 0.8 percent works in factories.

The most inhuman form of child exploitation is the age old practice of bonded labor in India. Here children are sold to the buyer like a commodity for a certain period of time. The labor that the child is subjected to is treated as collateral security and exploiters “buy” them for small sums at exorbitant interest rates.

There are many reasons for child labor. Poverty is the biggest reason for child labor in India. The small income of child laborers is also absorbed by their families.

Children’s in India Highlights: Following are the highlights of the Children’s in India

- During the decade 2001-2011, there is a reduction of 5.05 millions in the population of children aged 0-6 years during this period. There is drop in male children is 2.06 million and in female children is 2.99 millions.

- During the period 1991-2011, child sex ratio declined from 945 to 914, whereas the overall sex ratio showed an improvement from 927 to 940. As per Census 2011, the State/UTs with alarmingly low (<900) child sex ratio are, Haryana (830), Punjab (846), Jammu & Kashmir (859), Delhi (866), Chandigarh (867), Rajasthan (883), Maharashtra (883), Uttar Pradesh (886), Uttar Pradesh (899). The State/UTs which are having better (> =950) child sex ratio are Mizoram, (971), Meghalaya (970), A &N Islands (966), Puducherry (965), Chattisgarh (964), Arunachal Pradesh (960), Kerala (959), Assam (957), Tripura (953), West Bengal (950).

- Female infants experienced a higher death rate than male infants in all major states. Though the Urban and Rural gap in infant mortality has declined over the years, still it is very significant. IMR has declined in urban areas from 50 in 1990 to 31 in 2010, whereas in rural areas IMR has declined from 86 to 51 during the same period.

- There is considerable increase in the absolute number of child labour between 1991 and 2001 in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, and Delhi, whereas the States of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Orissa, Gujarat and Kerala have shown significant decline in the number of child labour.

- As per the NFHS -3 (2005-06), nearly 11.8% children age 5-14 years works either for their own household or for somebody else.

- The very young children (age 5-7 years), both boys and girls, are mainly doing unpaid work for someone who is not a member of their household. The older boys age 12-14 are mainly engaged in paid work or family work, whereas girls in this age group are involved mainly in household chores or family work.

- Rural children age 5-14 years (12.9%) is more likely to be engaged in work than their urban counterparts (8.6%).

- It is alarming that, in 2011, the Crimes against children reported a 24% increase from the previous year with a total of 33,098 cases of crimes against Children reported in the country during 2011 as compared to 26,694 cases during 2010.

- An increase of 27% is observed in the Crime of Procuration of Minor Girls, i.e.862 cases in 2011 compared to 679 cases in 2010. West Bengal has reported 298 cases such, indicating a share of 34.6% at national level followed by Bihar (183), Assam (142) and Andra Pradesh (106). Maharashtra accounted for 74% of the total 27 cases of ‘buying of girls for prostitution’ and West Bengal has accounted for 77% of the total 113 cases of ‘selling of girls for prostitution’.
V. Important Schemes for Well-being of Children

- Integrated Child Development Service Scheme
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- National awards for child Welfare.
- National Child Awards for Exceptional Achievements.
- Rajiv Gandhi Manav Seva Awards for Service to Children.
- Balika Samriddhi Yojna.
- Nutrition Programme For Adolescent Girls
- Early Childhood education for 3-6 age group children.
- Welfare of working children in need of Care and Protection
- Childline services
- Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for children of working mothers.
- UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue.
- Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- National Rural Health Mission
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for empowerment of Adolescent Girls – SABLA.
- Dhana Lakshami – Conditional Cash Transfer for Girl Child with insurance cover
- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

VI. Conclusion

The problem of child labour appears in severe form and various factors are involved. The reasons for the incidence of child labour in India are complex and deeply rooted into the society. Child labour has been a complex rural problem, as well with children helping out in the farm with their families. It has been one of the biggest obstacles to social development. It is a challenge and long-term goal in many countries to abolish all forms of child labour. Especially in developing countries, it is considered as a serious issue these days. It refers to children who miss their childhood and are not able to have the basic amenities which a child should have. The India government has established various proactive policies towards elimination of child labour. India has a number of child labour projects which have been implemented to help children from hazardous occupations and provide them an education. Each and every citizen should be aware of their responsibilities and should take corrective measures to stop child labour, so that we can have a better and developed India. Child labour can be controlled if the government functions effectively with the support of the public. Not only because the laws themselves have drawbacks, but also because of the human factors, and usually an international organizations and NGOs cannot fix the problem on their own, what they need is to intensify the cooperation with the governments who has the right of making laws. In a word, the key of the reduction of child labour is to emancipate children.

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