

The Issue of Child Labor in India: Where Rubber Hits the Road?

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Abstract

The problem of child labor in India is a kind of social threatening and causing damage to very fabrics of a social environment. It has remained both an economic and a social problem since a long time in India. According to the latest report more than 100 million children below the age of 14 years are toiling in different corners of India. Since different culture and society defines childhood in different manner Government polices and programmes should be culturally and geographically specific. In the Indian context, there has been a tendency to formulate the definition of child labour rather loosely. Even in the Labour Commission Report all working children are taken as one hardly differentiated category. It is also revealed that there are many reasons other than economic compulsion to perpetuate child labour. In this paper an attempt made to examine the different issues and prospectives of child labor problem in India emphasizing policy options reviewing various secondary literatures and authors own field experiences

Keywords: Labour; Development; Children; Risk; Policy

Introduction

Child labour implies that who are in the age group below 14 years and who work for themselves or for their family for an income and who contribute a significant share to the labour force of India. Among the developing countries of the world India has world's largest child workers working in all three sectors. More than 86 percent are in agricultural sectors, which are a major hidden form of child labour in India (Ramachandran, 2003: 60). Poverty and illiteracy, two basic reasons of low economic growth, have long been identified as the prime factors influencing supply of child laborers. Child labour is a global problem but it is more prevalent in underdeveloped countries. As per India is concerned it is due the result of traditional attitude, rapid urbanization, population explosion, modern industrialization, urban migration, less investment on primary education, lack of Anthropological role in welfare policies, and globalization. But however, its causes are acute poverty, with high rate of illiteracy, which leads to the low economic growth (Mithal, 2001).

According to the ILO, India has the dubious distinction of having perhaps the largest child labour force in the world. Approximately 45 million children are found employed in both organized and unorganized sectors in different corners of India. Among these working children, around 24 per cent are in urban centers and rest in rural areas. Government statistics in 2010 had shown that there were 18.4 million children below the age of the 15 in the labour force, constituting 7.8 percent of rural child labour force and 2.9 percent of urban labour force (Mithal, 2010: 37). Next, the World Bank report says that there are 78.5 million working children in India that is the largest in terms of any country include 27 million bonded working children (World Bank Report, 2007). India alone accounts for about 100 million child laborers. If we go for multiplicity of the concept of child laborers it will be around 140 million (Mithal, 2010: 39). Thus, the magnitude of child labour in India varies from sources to sources.

Primary field research conducted by Darmesh (2001) in North Karnataka (South India) found some interesting issues with respect to schooling and work. Elder siblings encourage the younger ones to get schooling in those households with several children. Elder sibling will work outside the home though he /she still will be under school going age. Educated adult members in a family improve the schooling rate and bring down the idleness rate. Schooling rates vary directly with the caste hierarchy and the found it higher among the marginalized groups (Darmaesh. 2011: 11).

Methodology

The study is based on the secondary research, authors field visits and discussions with the various agencies.

Literature Review

The aim of the literature review is to find out the scope, extent and distribution of the literatures on various issues of child labour. Searches have been made of key electronic databases and the internet for studies published between 2001 and 2015 on the above theme. Other search strategies included hand searching, searching websites of key organizations, and contacting libraries of leading organization. Relevant data have been extracted from each paper and synthesized through a narrative review that included descriptive characteristics, as well as more substantive issues such as effectiveness, cost-effectiveness of the policies and gaps in the research. Author has also met various NGOS and Govt labour officers for discussion about the issue. Also author has associated with various child labour projects himself.

Child Labour in Pre-Industrial Society

In ancient societies, the daily occupation entrusted to the adults and the children were gradual. Children were socialized by learning skills and customs so that by the time they pass through the rite de passage, they had become fully accomplished adults (Nicuwenhuys,1996: 25). The transitions in to the modern industrial society changed all the

traditional factors for at least two basic reasons: the initiation of formal education turned childhood into a distinct phase of life and work done by the children changed its character from family employment to the sale of labour power.

During the pre-industrial period child labour had been prevalent in Germany in, (a) workshops and in (b) factories of postindustrial and early industrial phase between 1750-1850. Further, there are evidences to prove that the existence of child labour even as early as in 16th and 17th centuries, in orphanages and workhouses. In 1667, “for instance, children worked together with convicts at the loom in the orphanage of Basel (Germany) in order to turn out products of sale”. (Amoberzing, 1990: 56).

Even in 1536, England had an act on the practice of child labour. According to this Act children who are between the age of 5-14 could work in agriculture and cottage industries to improve their skills for their adult life. Also there was a plan to fix the minimum wage for different laborers. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth implemented a new Act. Through this Act it was made clear some direction to the parents to look after their children well (Amoberzing, 1990: 58).

Each day, number of children is exposed to dangers that hamper their normal growth and development. They are often victims of gender and communal discrimination, aggression, neglect, cruelty and exploitation. A child being the last major subgroup of the family has drawn the attention of the social scientists with regard to their protection and rights (Heart, 1991). India is also one of the signatories of the International Convention for Child Rights (CRC). Hence, this is the time to find out the community perception about child laboures, rights of children including how rights of the children can be operationalized within the existing culturally diverse social settings (Wood head, 1999: 27).

The UNISEF records show that more than 40.000 children die every day from malnutrition, various kind of diseases lack of sanitation and drug related problems. Millions of children are passing through their

childhood without any basic education. The task force used is to find ways and means to give children a chance to find their identity and realize has remarked that the 20th century is the century of human rights. Children as the last major sub group of the human family have now drawn our attention with regard to their protection and rights. They are now valued as human and regarded as persons of bearing status. Child hood is an important and inseparable phase of human being, a foundation stone for the rest of the life. Childhood experiences play a vital role in shaping the personality of the person (Hassan, 1998: 78)

The first conventions to protect children were organised towards the end of 19th century. Children's right emerged as a sub-category in the development of the rules of war and of the international labour conventions. Many NGOs have played a vital role in drafting the rights of children. The Geneva declaration of rights of the child was adopted in 1924. It recognizes that the childhood is entitled for special care, assistance and safeguards. India is also one of the signatory for this convention. In the widower context of International human rights instruments have dealt comprehensively with the issue of children, law and justice, particularly in the perspective of the South Asian region. As part of the several interventions that are presently available. Further, it has been attempted to examine the possibility of location the space available for using the United Nations Child Rights Convention, 1990 to create a legal environment favorable for the realization of the rights o children in developing countries of South Asia especially in India (Patil, 2006: 16).

The important point made is that cultural influences have taken place, and there are sometimes common roots in the problems that society faces in given period of their histories. Asian children today are struggling as a result of a common legacy of authoritarianism and traditional exploitation in the name tradition, which had been modified thorough a basic process of social, economic and legal change western countries (Carre and Oliver, 2001: 23). The international norms on Child Rights are thus as relevant for children in the western world

whose societies have moved closer to the egalitarian norms reflected in these international human rights standards (Venkatanarayana, 2004: 4219).

If we go through the current existing literatures regarding different prospective of child labour, it seems to be having a few major drawbacks 1) lack of empirical research 2) needs still better analization of the field data 3) lack of proper understanding of the problem through anthropological point of view 4) a lot of emphasis only to general aspects of the problem and 5) no much work on rural child labour problem. Even though a lot of works have been undertaken on different faces of the problem like socio economic causes, wage structure and remedies they are not so comprehensive (Grootaert and others 2002: 123). The major issue is that studies have been done only at local level and some at regional level. Holistic study is yet to be made. Since child labour problem is highly a complex issue, researchers have got only little success in analyzing the problem from empirical point of view. From statistical point of view many works have been focused only on the general aspects of the problem. A lot of research work has yet to be conducted on employer's view, community perceptions on the issue, psycho-social analysis of the child laboures, community views on the risks and rights of the children and social and cultural factors that are deeply embedded with the problem. The review of existing literatures on child labour reveals that extensive research is required to fill up some of the gapsrelated with different perspectives of the problem (Arun, 2004: 23).

The existence of poverty in different forms is one of the major and vital reasons behind this problem in indie. Various kinds of cultural and social factors are embedded on poverty. The cultural analysis on poverty is most urgently required. Widespread poverty may leads to increase labour size of the family. Also, many cultural beliefs plays a vital role in increasing the family size. As long as, these twin problems continue to exist, it will not be possible to

effectively tackle the problem of child labour. Hence, “it hardly of any use to talk about abolition of child labour which is not only unrealistic but is also likely to do more harm than good to the millions of poverty stricken people in the county who are forced by their awfully poor economic condition to seek the help of their children to come out and work for their existence” (Mittal, 1999: 37). Another major problem is that difficulty is inherent fact that children working in rural areas, in urban informal sector and in domestic service are not readily visible. An integrated and effective measure to save children from hazardous or abuse should, therefore, begin by exploring the invisible visible. As long as child labour is part of the harsh reality that makes good economic sense, the conditions for change will not be met (Grootaert, and others, 2002: 123).

Banning child labour under domestic or industry may not serve any useful objectives as children may just shift to any other alternative job. Hence the Government, NGOs and community should play as a highly coordinated role in tackling this problem. Community should be intolerant the child labor. Government must and should consult Anthropologists before framing welfare policies. Primary education should be compulsory and it should be more meaning full. Provision of multiple entries in school should be promoted. There should be lot of scope for vocational education too. Government should bring more jobs into hazardous sectors and should revise the existing acts and legislatures and stretch the definition of the term child labour (Mithal, 1999: 37). National employment guarantee programme should also cover urban marginalized people. If not it should seriously think about alternative income generation programmes for the people who are sending their children to work just because of acute poverty. Also it should invest more percentage of GDP in social development sector. Finally there should be a strong linkage among poverty alleviation programmes, educational polices and child labour. Involvement of Anthropologist in framing polices really gives a cutting edge to the success. Since we have a

heterogeneity society unlike western as much as possible all welfare programmes and policies must be geographically and culturally specific with flexible governance and it should be reachable to the last lay man of the society (Venkatanarayana, 2004: 4219)

It is the time to think about creating child labour free areas in each and every community by using a comprehensive decentralized approach which could have been developed in well partnership among children, community members and local NGOs. Also we should note that children themselves are an integral part of the monitoring process. State and community should consolidate the local resources to implement field oriented, realistic, child centered, and innovative packages to tackle the problem from local to national level.

(*Note:* Portion of this article has been published in a book titled ‘Anthropology and Child labour’ of the same author)

Policy Suggestions (Based On Authors Field Experience)

- Since social and cultural background of the family plays a vital role in taking household decision to send their children to work, all anti child labour and poverty eradication programmes should emphasize on the following four aspects: value, norms and social solidarity of the community, integrative forces in the people’s life, minimum and maximum resistance to modern innovations in their culture and recognizing vital linkages in people’s cultural fabrics.

- The definition and scope of the term child labour should be thoroughly revised. It should include all small households work, various cottage industries work and agriculture sector where large number of children found employed in case of India.

- Since India is a country of having different culture and traditions all policies and programmes should be geographically and culturally specific. All policies should have a lot of waitage to the local cultural

norms with enough flexibility. • No new specific legislation is required if the existing laws are effectively and promptly implemented. In the same time Government should think to have an effective control about the practice of invisible child labour.

- A comprehensive and an integrated approach are required to address sector specific issues on rural, urban, regional and cultural specific. This necessitates the active participation of civil society and a synergy between the various Government programmes, which are dealing separately with aspects that impinge on child labour.

- Urban anti poverty programmes mainly should cover slum dwellers, people belongs to depressed class, casual workers, etc. More Anthropological research is needed on cultural analysis of poverty and its particular context and local settings.

- The urban anti poverty programme should be threefold: poverty reduction, construction of productive assets and promoting mainstream employment subsequently. We strongly believe that an Act needs to include this long-term focus of the programme, as the strategies use of surplus manpower for sustainable development has to be an important component of any new programme.

- Cost effective health care measures must be put in operation, seeking in particular reduction in infant mortality rates that will reduce the social pressure on families to have many children as possible as way to insure against high rate of child mortality. More over family planning service must be made available to all at easily and affordable cost. • To formulate and execute the projects related to child labour, organizational capacity of the institutions and the departments must be strengthen.

Conclusion

Child labour is a socioeconomic problem required multi prolonged strategy should be adopted as a long-term basis. As much as possible all policies and programmes should be culturally and geographically specific. Programmes should be need based one. Understanding

the problem from poor people's point of view is the long way to go. An innovative, well-balanced welfare economics, legislative and social interventions will be succeed in eliminating child labour as per as India in general and Karnataka is particular. Based on the detailed field study on the different aspects of the problem, the present study has got some policy implications. All these suggestions are operative base. This new findings and results may be useful to the policy makers, economic planners, administrators, researchers, demographers and NGOs and social and women activists, who are fighting against this deadly social evil.

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