



A study of girl child labor

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ABSTRACT

The history of child labor is as old as human civilization. The work children used to perform in the family and farm has always been a part of their socialization process. Child labor is an issue which has generated interest, because of the new economic policies formulated in line with the structural adjustment programmers, which hopes to put the country on the global market economy. The alarming growth of child workers in developing countries has drawn the attention of many organizations of the world. The phenomenon of child labor, as practiced today, is involuntary and exploitative. The problem of girl child labor has become an issue of great concern in recent times all over the world. In India, domestic child workers and street children, particularly the girls, are further vulnerable to sexual abuse. They are the victims of extreme discrimination and neglectful behavior. Here an attempt has been made through this paper to draw the attention of the intellectuals of the society and policy makers to look at girl child workers and their problems, conditions including policy implications.

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Introduction

For instance, estimated that in India alone more than 100 million children (both boys and girls) were engaged in unpaid domestic labor. In general, while girls were expected to help their mothers in maintaining family well-being, boys were expected to help in income generating activities. (Nieuwenhuys, 1996, p: 237).

Much of the literature concerning the time allocation of girls between school and work concludes that 'girls are less likely to work than boys and also less likely to go to school', giving rise to the term 'the nowhere children'. However, this clearly contradicts sociological and anthropological studies which chart, in detail, the work done by girls within households in the developing world.

Calculates that boys spent approximately 5 hours in domestic and non-wage labor and girls spent 6.5 hours a day in such work. This apparent contradiction arises, partly at least, because of the different definitions of work used in the literature. While the Economics literature concentrates on paid work for which data is more easily available, the sociological and anthropological literature considers all work (both paid and unpaid) done by children. Within the Economics literature, therefore, two main options – work and school – are considered, though from time to time, there are references to a third (neither work nor school) category. (Nieuwenhuys, 1996, p: 238).

Therefore argues that the 'existence of the no-activity category underlines the fact that one needs to be careful about assuming that actions which release children from work will also put them in school'. Some researchers aggregate household work with market work. However, given the different factors determining these two types of work as well as the gender of those undertaking each type of activity, the results obtained are likely to be very hard to interpret.

This pattern breaks down once we take the household work done by girls into account. In this paper, we find that there is symmetry between the factors that make women's contribution to the household economy less 'visible' than men's and the

factors that reduce girl's involvement in outside work. Both are related to the kind of socio-cultural environment in which households operate in India. Analyzing the School, Work and household chores options for girls, we find that the kinship system prevalent in different regions as well as amongst different religions and castes is a significant determinant of these choices. In addition, we find that increases in household income do not decrease the probability of girls doing household chores, reinforcing our conclusion that non-economic factors are important.

Factors of poverty and unemployment

Working children are a phenomenon, which is associated with poor countries. It is argued that everyone in a family has to earn in order to make a minimum level of existence for the poor family. Old and young, men and women, they are out of the household, picking up free things like garbage or twigs and leaves, which are substitutes for income or offering service like those of hotel laborers or garage workers or domestic servants as in the case of girl children. Besides poverty and illiteracy, the other factors of child labor which have been identified by the experts are migration, low economic growth, deep social prejudices regarding girl children, large family size, corporal punishment in schools, lack of social security, low investment by countries of low GDP on social development and absence of strict enforcement of laws and acts. Also some other specific reasons for the existence of this problem from the part of the employers are that (1) children work for lower wages; (2) they make no demand for over time; (3) they are easily removable from work; (4) they are flexible and can be easily molded and disciplined; and (5) there is no chance of their strikes or unions.

Poverty and unemployment of adults are the main reasons for this problem of child labor. If all adult men and women had the opportunity to earn income according to the minimum wage or required for a minimum standard of living, no parents in rural or traditional or slum India would want to send their children to any work, especially hazardous work.

They would prefer to send them to school. It is in such a context that we began to see the importance of state policies on full employment to the poor. The right to work programmed, which is the operational part of such a policy, should, if it is made functional, provide real liberation of children from being misused in streets, factories, mines and other work places. It is only such a macro policy that can liberate the child workers of India from being exploited, whether they are bonded children or destitute women. Welfare services and legislations are only stop gap measures. In some sense, apart from providing temporary relief, they can even distract us from making a bid for better working conditions and wage, apart from employment for adults.

Gender issues and child labor

The status of the girl child constitutes an acid test of social development in the third world. Discrimination on the basis of sex is a structural feature of traditional cultures. The lower position of girls in such societies undervalues girl child labor compared to the male child labor. Besides occupational hazardous, girl children are vulnerable to sexual abuse both at the place of employment and at home when they are left to themselves. While discrimination of girl children in the specific area of child labor does exist, it is often studied only as part of the overall pattern of discrimination against girls. As far as child labor is concerned, what most writers on the subject stress, is that the parameters are often defined in such a manner that discrimination is not even apparent. Thus, a large amount of work in which girl children are engaged does not even figure as child labor.

Another aspect that has received attention is the manner in which traditional and cultural factors decide the work patterns of girls in developing countries like India. The fact, that in most Indian communities it is the son who is expected to assume the dominant role in all traditional activities including festivals and religious occasions, results in an almost automatic discrimination against girls. This manifests itself in a number of ways, such as adverse sex ratio, female infanticide, deliberate neglect of girl children in the younger years, neglect of girl's nutrition, health and education etc. It is in this context of gender discrimination that the need for promoting literacy and education as a strategy for bringing down the levels of discrimination against girl children is emphasized. As far as discrimination of girls in the specific context of child labor is concerned, it needs to be set in the context of issues that govern child labor as a whole and cannot be viewed in isolation. In particular, one has to appreciate the key factors, which influence the understanding of child labor in the country.

The concept of child labor has a sex specific dimension and so there are differences in the ramifications of the child labor of girls and boys. Deferent societies and communities have assured and achieved different degrees of gender equality depending on their economic and social progress. So we are aware of this point and emphasize the importance of macro level policies for such special issues of the girl children. In the process we leave out in our political discourse the importance of micro level policies.

There are other basic issues that are being neglected. In our quest for gender equality, do we wish to transform the girl into boy in the acculturation or let the boy become more like the girl? The girl, as she is brought up in the traditional society, in poverty or affluence, in rural or urban areas, acquires multiple skills because of her engagement in household tasks. This generates in her the capability in managing things and a degree of self-reliance. In contrast to this positive situation of the girl,

the boy is less self-reliant. In our zeal for gender equality, we should not forget this advantage gained by the female in our society.

Policy failure in ensuring compulsory education

Compulsory primary education system is not yet fully implemented despite 93rd amendment to the constitution. Different Governments took more than 55 years to enact compulsory primary education in our country. Like western countries if, we could have brought compulsory primary education Acts in the early periods of the independence, defiantly we would have minimize the rate of young child laborers abled by this time. While writing about education to all experts feels the existing disparities between and within sectors and among socio economic groups must be narrowed through the increased availability of educational facilities and service in relatively deprived sectors and the provision of incentives for increased access by deprived socio-economic groups. However, in case of India, Government is spending million dollars rupees on higher education and only few thousand rupees on primary education. The real economic cost of schooling to the poor must to the extent possible is reduced. While the manifold benefits of primary education cannot be denied, it must be qualified with the proposition that unless there are prospects of finding employment, there is like to be an apathy on the part the poor parents to send their young children to schools.

Experts have an opinion that until child get benefits from the school, Government should seriously think about alternative income generation programmed to those families or creative measures in order to lighten the burden on poor families. It is has been noted that there is no direct connection between rate of illiteracy and high incidence of young child laborers. Few countries have largely succeeded in eradicating illiteracy but remain confronted by the young child laborers, which some time very acute. This can be seen in some of the Middle Eastern countries (Dak , 2005, p: 55).

Area of concentration

In rural areas, girl child workers are readily available for work and girls of school going age are commonly engaged in agricultural work as part of family labor. Girls of the landless families are mostly working in the domestic sector. Urban girl child laborers in India are predominantly engaged in the secondary sector, wherein some of the works are hazardous to children. In urban areas a considerable per cent of girl children are found employed in household cottage industries, such as of glass and carpet. Some girl children are engaged in the unorganized sector as pavement sellers, vendors, sweepers and rag pickers.

The extent of the girl child labor differs in different regions in India, and also in rural and urban areas. One of the common characteristics of girl child labor all over India is its concentration in unskilled routine woks which offer little opportunity for innovation or scope for transfer to other more remunerative jobs. Also in recent years girls' work participation has increased in industries and service sectors due to relaxation in social taboos regarding female employment and loosening of joint family system.

Girls perform economically useful roles at home by undertaking productive works themselves. They also shoulder the burden of household works and taking care of siblings which facilitates the adults in undertaking productive works outside home. Often people do not recognize many of the tasks undertaken by the girl children as laborers in the strict sense of the term. Domestic chores are one such category of work. Such

activities are seen as tasks that the girls should naturally perform without any monetary compensation.

Gender discrimination is quite evident in the case of child labor in India. One of its consequences is that education has become a rare opportunity for the girls. On account of the traditional and cultural factors girls start to work at an early age compared to the boys. Since girls work in unorganized or marginalized sector right from the beginning they have little opportunity for education that will be of use to them in the future. If the girls happen to enter the school they are the first among the early dropouts. Girls make up disproportionately larger percentage of out-of-school children and dropouts, especially among the poor. In addition, they are less visible in the official child labor force statistics and over-represented among the nowhere children. While explaining the cultural context of child exploitation, writes that, particularly in the areas of child labor and child trafficking and discrimination against the female child, parents may not be in a position to make judgments because of 'cultural,' 'social' and 'economic' reasons and therefore the state has to take up issues such as elimination of child labor and compulsory education in the larger interests of equity and good citizenship. The veil of tradition and culture is often used to mask systematic exploitation of women and children.

The reason presented or the excuse for tolerating child labor has been that children are forced to work because their parents are poor. Here lies the problem. Child labor keeps children out of school and contributes to the growth of illiteracy in the country. Child employers compete with schools for children. Official policies in all developed and some developing countries dictate that no employer be permitted to employ child labor and the parents, no matter how poor, should not keep children out of school. These countries have succeeded in eradicating this problem to certain extent. It is true the laws in India prohibit the employment of children in factories. But these laws are not applied to cottage industries, household enterprises, and mainly in agriculture sectors. Ironically, since the independence the government in India and all political parties has talked of ending child labor and imparting compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years. Yet, nothing significant has happened. Activists and researchers refuse to believe that India's poverty explains this situation of inactivity.

One significant drawback of the 1986 Act is that it does not say anything about the children who work in unregulated sectors with their parents. Moreover there is no law to detect and control this kind of hidden child labor practice. The minimum wage act has got only meager success. The NGOs have not shown adequate interest in creating awareness among the employers about the issues of child labor. The National Child Labor Project has had its own administrative problems. The personnel engaged in the implementation of the project have not given full attention to the activities under the scheme. Then there has been unnecessary time consuming paper work. The protection of girl child should get much greater and special attention. Enhancing girl child's access to schooling, providing incentives to acceptance of small family norms, sustaining the effort on gender sensitization are some of the positive steps which can be taken in this regard.

A small effort by sub-contracting related NGOs to carry out education programmers, the State sector is left to reproduce its higher rank and often-inadequate provision for education. Better State should learn some lesson from the professional NGOs in case of education development. But the major hurdle is policy promotion by Indian NGOs is still in a rudimentary form. Indian

NGO have, in the main, turned their attention to working with their clients rather than in organizing themselves as political lobbies to seek legislative and programmatic changes. NGOs should play a vital role within local communities in dealing with these issues especially by helping the Govt. in creating awareness about the value of education among socially excluded groups. It will be only possible when both Govt. and NGOs from the prospective of community identities for advocating their secular interest in education and modern occupations. Hence this kind of mobilization of vulnerable sections of the society will better aware of the significance of the education for their young children and may send them to school (Weiner, 1996, p: 81).

However, this intervention should be implemented by the agencies working at grass root level only. In some instance, the success rate of some of anti child laborer programmers of both Government and NGOs are very disappointing because it seems to be framed by only officials without any community participation. Thus, there was always a discrepancy between what is appropriate and useful, and what is actually given-leading to a relatively less than successful outcome. Next many big NGOs are not trying to complement the Government effort's through new ideas, serving hard-to-reach area and constructive partnership with policy makers, but they are intended to substitute the Government, which is highly impossible for ever. But revitalizing State provision by incorporating the lessons learned from the NGO experiences appeared to be promising way forward (Lindert, 2008, p: 21).

Anthropologists say focus should be on 'universal model, which provides all young children with equal opportunities who belongs wide socio-economic background'. It is thus premised on the existence of norms, standards, practices and procedures that are universally applicable. However the standardization of curriculum and teaching methods can also render abstract diversity in learning effects across castes and class. It is argued that learning effects are also socially conditioned and standard applied need to be sensitive to the ways in which identities of exclusion and different life worlds can also effects on the learning process (Khan, 2005, p: 34).

Experts suggests that a strong case can be made for pluralist forms of educational provision within an overall frame work of comparability equivalence in educational standards rather than a single, homogenous model. Not only is this necessary in the context of diversity, but it would also enhance the speed of progress towards universal elementary education. Thus the emphasis of the education policy in Indian schools should be on national standards and the states should ensure the regulation of non-state providers within this framework as the optimal route to overcoming inequalities in provision and distribution of resources.

One of the major problem in case of Indian education system is funding. In India it has been increasingly dependent on western funding agencies for various social developments. But nobody is concerning primary education should be a cost effective one. Reducing the unit costs of education is also necessary given that in India around 3/4th of total budget of education are spent on teacher salaries only. Hence state should include some of the NGOs approaches like 1. Specially designed programmers to reach the unreached 2. Set and proved model to provide quality education 3. Basic criteria for efficient delivery.

Form the above discussion we can draw two generalizations. Compulsory education should not be regarded merely as a duty, imposed by the State. When education is made a duty, parents, irrespective of their Socio-economic

circumstances and beliefs, are required by law to send their young children to schools and it is the legal obligation of the every State to provide sufficient number of schools especially in rural and tribal areas with all essential fundamental facilities. Moreover, as it is proved successfully by much Asian and western countries compulsory education is a necessary condition for the reduction and abolition of child laborer issue. As research found, just not compulsory, a highly effective qualitative compulsory education is very much essential to minimize the child laborers especially in case of India. We strongly propose that there should be a lot of scope for vocational courses in the school syllabus. If the school leaving age is lower than the age of admission to employment, young children are likely illegal to seek employment, and the enforcement of young child laborers law and acts rendered more difficult. Logically we can say it will be easier to administer the young children at school rather than to force the young child laborers laws and Acts. It should be noted that no country has successfully ended child laborer issue without address effective implementation of the compulsory education. We can say compulsory primary education not only reduce inequality but also boosts growth in the long run (by creating human capital), directly reduce young child laborers immediately (through mass enrollment) and in the long run (through the decision on fertility and young children's education as educated adults). Further, more study have revealed that negative relationship between adult literacy and child laborer's clearly demonstrates that schooling bears double dividends as it helps reduce young child laborers both in short and long runs. Also it is found that educational policies which consciously target the enrollment of women will make a larger contribution to reducing young child laborers as compared to promoting enrolment of both men and women in general (Aptekar, 2004, p: 47).

Besides all this, we cannot categorically reject the limitations of the compulsory education programmers in a country like India. A big subcontinent having different culture and tradition the education policies and programmers cannot be implemented uniformly throughout the country at one stretch. Most of the policies and programmers are culturally and geographically not specific. Although it has been long devoting a great chunk of its resources for promoting compulsory education and can boast of the lowest incidence of child labor in India, there will be still pockets of working young children which still thrive within its economy. It is also notable in this context that the young children who are said to have been brought into the fold of compulsory education often combine education with home based unpaid laborers or seasonal work. This kind of trend is more common among rural young children. Since normally in India most of the schools are closed for more than around 170 days in a year, education does not clash with the seasonality of the jobs.

The manifold benefits of primary education cannot be denied. It must be qualified with the proposition that unless there are prospects of finding employment, there is like to be apathy on the part of the poor parents to send their young children to school. Also it can be said that generation of a popular demand for primary education is contingent upon making education something people want and value, mere provision of schooling may with an allurements of mid-day-meals and fees concession may hardly keep the young children there unless parents are convinced that there are enough employment opportunities for their young children once they are out of schooling. More important is that with primary education one cannot get any attractive job in the future unless primary education is

supplemented by the some higher studies. Family which is hit by poverty cannot wait for these extra unproductive and extra few school years for their young children to become income earners. Hence it seems that a sustained desire on the part of these families to send their young children s for primary education with the hope that they can continue for higher studies, is associated with an improvement in the economic condition of these families.

Only primary education and sustained move to make a tangible amelioration in the life style of the downtrodden section of our society; supported by the spread of a network of primary education can be expected to have a lasting impact on elimination of child labor problem.

Additionally, the socio-economic context, especially along the developmental dimension, is an integral part of school effectiveness. One the other hand, area type affects learning directly, by influencing poverty levels and also opportunities and motivation of learning. The impact of the area type on schools and learning is such that no description or analysis of schools can be meaningful without a parallel understanding of the area type. If initiatives to make elementary education universal are taken without the parallel measures as mentioned earlier, they may not fulfill the intended purpose. The absorption of educational inputs will be poor if a larger number of young children are simply not capable of deriving benefits from improved educational facilities. Plenty of resources could then be spent on elementary education without real results. At the same time, if some young children are, classified as poor achieves because of their socio-economic background, then their education may play a role that is the reverse of empowering. They may in fact be getting ready to become a problem educationally in the future. This is a danger, which is especially acute for young children belonging to backward class and tribes (Morrow and Mueller, 2007, p: 329).

Conclusion

It is time to think about creating child labor free areas in each and every community by using a comprehensive decentralized approach which could be developed in partnership between the community and the local NGOs. At the level of the local communities, it may be useful to prepare the list the various occupations in which children are involved. Ultimately the list should form the guidelines to declare any specific area as child labor free.

The state and the local community should consolidate the local resources to implement field oriented, realistic, child centered, and innovative packages to tackle the problem from the local to the national level. The prevalence of child labor in a geographical area is inversely related with its development. So the state should take the initiative to improve the conditions of the section of the people who are living in underdeveloped areas. Such an approach would attack the problem at its roots. The ultimate objective of the child labor programmers is to convert working children into responsible and productive members of the society. This needs generation of public awareness and simultaneous gearing up of the enforcement machinery to meet the challenge. Introduction of new methods of monitoring and evaluation of child labor programmers and projects will help implement programmers in specific, time-bound, cost-effective and result-oriented manner. Secondly, there needs to be a radical change in the traditional perception on children that is unfavorable to their well being. A commitment to people centered development requires purposeful efforts to weaken such a culturally bound traditional perception and to bring about more enlightened social attitudes towards innocent children

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