

Child Labour and Education in India

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Abstract

Children in every society have always participated in economic activities; children assist their families at home, in farms, in shops, etc. All work is not bad for children. Some activities do make a positive contribution to their development, prepares them for their future tasks and helps to pass traditional skills from one generation to another. A number of policy initiatives and programmes have been undertaken in this country over the last decade with the basic objective of dealing with the problem of the rapidly increasing number of child workers. About one third of this total 250 million of child labour is in India. Universal literacy and addressing child labour are the movements that should be taken on the war footing not only to make democracy a real success, but also to ensure all round of social progress and sustainable economic development in the country.

Key words: Children, programmes, Universal Elementary Education

Introduction:

Children in every society have always participated in economic activities; children assist their families at home, in farms, in shops, etc. All work is not bad for children. Some activities do make a positive contribution to their development, prepares them for their future tasks and helps to pass traditional skills from one generation to another. So there is a difference between 'child work' and 'child labour'. The former comes into category of permissible work while later comes under exploitative. As committee on child labour observed that, "Labour becomes an absolute evil in the case of child when he is required to work beyond his physical capacity, when heaves of employment interferes with the education, recreation and rest, when his wages are not proportionate with the quantum of work done, and when the occupation in which he is engaged endangers his health and safety". Still, it is not easy to draw a sharp line between

destructive and beneficial child labour. Much of the child labour falls into a grey area in these two extremes.

A number of policy initiatives and programmes have been undertaken in this country over the last decade with the basic objective of dealing with the problem of the rapidly increasing number of child workers. The formulation of a new National Child Labour Policy, the enactment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, the setting up of a Task Force on child labour, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and so on have all formed a part of this process. Corresponding initiatives were taken in the related area of education where a New Education policy was formulated which incorporated a separate component for working children. It is the objective of this paper to examine whether the policy initiatives taken by the Government of India over the last few years can make an impact on the child labour situation in

the country. In particular, the paper examines the basic understanding of the issue of child labour in the Indian context, which has influenced the policies and strategies adopted by the Government. In doing this it is argued that the government policies governing child labour are based not only on assumptions which are fundamentally flawed but also on a faulty appreciation of the situation in the field. It is further argued that, because of this, the set of policy prescriptions and strategies that follow cannot adequately deal with the problem. Consequently, unless the basic premises adopted by the policy makers are abandoned, no significant change can be made in the child labour situation in the country.

The paper also examines the role of the education policy in relation to child labour. It shows how, in proposing Non Formal Education as a major strategy for dealing with illiteracy among working children, the Government has failed to realize the potential of formal primary education as a powerful tool for withdrawing children from work. In the end the paper asserts that compulsory education, at least at the primary level, is not only desirable but also a viable and practicable solution to the problem of increasing child labour.

Two assumptions have broadly influenced Government's policies in respect of child labour. The first is that, child labour is a 'harsh reality' and one can only mitigate some of the harshness of the exploitative aspects of child labour. The 'harsh reality' of child labour arises out of the fact that in the present state of development in the country many parents, on account of poverty, have to send their children to work in order to supplement their income and the income derived from the child labour, however

meager, is essential to sustain the family. This is the 'poverty argument of child labour.

The second assumption is that there is a distinction between child labour and exploitation of the child labour. It has been accepted that a certain amount of child labour will persist under the family environment which is non-exploitative. This is not only inevitable but also desirable. At the same time, there are other forms of child work such as in hazardous occupations, factories and other organized establishments which are reprehensible and should not be allowed to continue.

The above assumptions have defined the framework of all policies adopted by the government. It would be appropriate at this stage to see exactly how policies of the Government have been influenced by this framework.

Child labour is widespread and bad for the development of both that of individual child and society and economy in which he or she lives. If allowed to persist to the current extent, child labour will prevent the achievement of goals of extermination of poverty and achieving Education for All. Nearly all of the world's government has ratified International Human Rights Convention. It is very essential to fulfill these commitments in order to boost development. Motivation and ability of infrastructure rather than poverty are the key factors.

Over 200 million children between 5 and 14 years of age are working worldwide. This population determines the one fifth of total population of girls and boys in this age group. About 3 million are engaged in what has been termed as "hazardous work" which refers to forms of labour which are likely to have adverse

effects on child's safety, health and moral development nearly 10 million children are engaged in some form of slave labour, armed conflict prostitution or pornography, or other illicit activities. About one third of this total 250 million of child labour is in India (UNICEF report 1997)

India has the largest number of working children. After India then come Tanzania, Mozambique and Thailand. The World Bank report in Jan 2000 has revealed that there are 6 crore working children in India, which is the largest in terms of any country in the world. More than 50% child workers in India are concentrated in the five states – Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Almost 80 % are engaged in agriculture sector.

Child Labour is significant, complex and multidimensional issue. Studies have concluded that eliminating child labour and putting children into education would have huge aggregate development benefits. Gains would be primarily through the added productive capacity of future generation that had the benefit of education as opposed to having worked as children. A number of policy initiatives and programmes to combat child labour have been undertaken at international and national level.

In relation with the child labour and education number of initiatives have been taken at international level:

- In 1948, Universal Declaration on Human Rights : Right to Education ,
- In 1966, International covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights : Compulsory and Free primary education ,

- In 1973, International labour Organization Convention [ILO] 138: Minimum age of 15 was decided.
- In 1989, Convention on the rights of Child : Freedom of association, primary education, rest and leisure, no hazardous child labour, protection from sexual exploitation and trafficking and
- In 1999, ILO convention 182 : Worst form of Child labour : Banned Slavery, use in armed conflict, prostitution, drug trade; work harmful to health safety, morals

From the time of independence, India has committed itself to be against child labour. Article 24 of the Indian constitution clearly states that “ No child below the age of fourteen shall be employed to work in a factory, or mine, or on any hazardous employment” Also Child labour Act,1986, prohibits the employment of children below 14 years of age.

There has been multiple entry points in dealing with child labour problems but the greatest progress has been in recognizing the link between eliminating child labour and guaranteeing “ Education for all “. China, Brazil, Sri Lanka are the burning examples to show that in addition to poverty reduction, mass education has been critical in tackling child labour. For instance, drop out rates are very high in states of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh where there is high incidence of child labour. On the other hand dropout rate is the lowest in Kerala, which has the lowest incidence of child labour. UNICEF's research proves that children who grow up without the basic education find it harder to sustain themselves and their families. UNICEF has called upon the nations to chalk out

plans for providing free and compulsory education to all children by 2015.

Up till now the legislative apparatus was unlikely to yield results as legal action was the 1st step in the process. Finally on April 1st 2010, the historic “Right to Education” Act came into force. Thus, India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child. The new law establishes the right to education of every child aged 6 to 14, and addresses India’s need to provide more schools and teachers, and further develop training and curriculums. The crucial aspect, however, is the subsequent step in the process which involves constructive rehabilitation of the child withdrawn from work.

India has the second largest network of school system in the world. Yet, of the three tots enrolled in school in class one, two tend to leave school before reaching class three. The fact that only one out of three children is a girl partly explains why nearly two out of three women are able to read and write in India. Again the situation is still worst in rural areas. The division between rural and urban areas with respect to female level of literacy is quite sharp.

Evidences show that due to lack of awareness and education of parents also many students are sent to work because these illiterate parents who are unaware of the importance of education want their children to fire far themselves as early as possible much better if they become sources of income for their family. Thus, it is fact that the lack of appreciation by parents of the role of the education in improving the life and the living condition, has contributed the prevalence of child labour. Therefore adult education and overall removal of illiteracy is also needed to cope up with this social evil. A school for every child as well as adult

education programme is the need of present day.

If the socio-economic situation is considered then it depicts that large scale poverty has acted as an effective barrier to the success of the programme of the Universal Education in the country. It is because of the poverty the dropout rates have been reported very high. This is corroborated by a recent survey (The Public report on Basic Education – PROBE) in the four of the poorest and most child labour endemic states Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. But in another comparative study of state of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh disregard the claim that it is predominantly poverty that prevents the poor from sending their children to school. In both states the proportion of people living below the poverty line is around 45%. Nevertheless Kerala has an average literacy rate of 90% whereas in Uttar Pradesh this figure is around 40%.

It is not therefore, to cite poverty and ignorance as the main cause for large scale dropouts. The increase in the dropout rates can be also due to the unattractiveness of the school and teaching process. The PROBE recorded startling data about the lack of basic amenities in many schools. As many as 52% did not have playgrounds, 89% did not have toilets and 59% did not have drinking facilities. Teacher Student Ratio (TSR) is also not satisfactory. About 1/3rd of primary schools have 1 teacher, of which only 53% are actually involved in teaching. Others are involved in none teaching activities or talking to each-other etc; and above all the poor quality of education which results in unemployment adds to dropout rates. This means proper education facilities, with good quality and result awaited education can give way to child labour

eradication. India confirms that there is a keen interest among the poorest to send their children to school, nearly 100% enroll, but they drop out in massive numbers in the first year. Parents are willing and can be convinced to make the sacrifice of losing relatively small contribution of their children to family income if they get access to good quality relevant education. Many scholars think child labour as a 'default activity' and has concluded that parents are keen to educate their children provided they are assured of basic quality. The poor in Kerala for example, where almost every child goes to school. The Kerala does however give direct scholarship to 10% of the students to go to school of their choice and subsidizes transportation cost for all children.

While debates may rage about what kind of work constitute child labour or whether the system of mainstream education are meaningful or not, for vast majority there is no system of education is in place at all. Social mobilization without state support is meaningless. This has to accompany with affirmative action. The Right to Education Act should be implemented effectively and free and compulsory education for all should be there. The Government of India should be attentive while allocating funds to education. The state governments play the major role. For example, the government of Kerala allocates main funds to education than any other state, with the per capita expenditure of 11.5 rupees compared to Indian average of 7.8 rupees.

It is not only the expenditure of more funds, but where the funds are used also makes the difference. The state should spend more money on elementary mass education than colleges and universities. Kerala's emphasis on primary education

has led to dropout rate to 0%, a literacy rate of 94% for males and 86% for females and a low child work participation rate. Weiner points out that "the Kerala government has made no special effort to end child labour. It is expansion of school system rather than enforcement of labour legislation that has reduced the amount of child labour.

The example of Kerala asserts the fact that education is one of those instruments that illuminates the social fabric, combats child labour and speed up the process of modernization and development. Despite the fact that education plays a vital role in the prosperity of the nation so many education programmes which were adopted time to time such as Universal Elementary Education, Formal, Non-Formal and Compulsory Education, National Literacy Mission, District Primary Education Programme, child labour and dropout rates still remains a harsh reality. A faster pace of spread of education is possible only when all the rural habitants have access to well-knit institutional set up imparting education at least to primary level. Social mobilization, economic incentives, adequate infrastructure and resources are very important for government to implement the "Right to Education" Act. Thus child labour policies and education policies have to be formulated and be operated in tandem, and not independent of each other. In order to expedite their policies, a high expenditure, a great bureaucratic efficiency, sincerity and integrity on the part of the public servants are very important conditions.

Universal literacy and addressing child labour are the movements that should be taken on the war footing not only to make democracy a real success, but also to ensure all round of social progress and

sustainable economic development in the country.

Conclusion:

Recognizes the fact that child going to a formal school is a child withdrawn from labour. Child labour policies and education policies have to be formulated and be operated in tandem and not independent of each other. Adopts a more positive attitude towards child labour. Parents do want their children to be educated and poverty as a limiting factor is highly over-rated. In particular, such a policy recognizes the fact that even today there are 'poor' parents sending their children to school instead of work. Motivation and availability of infrastructure rather than poverty are the key factors. There is no other explanation as to why factors like parents' educational status make a difference in the literacy level of children. Realizes that the NFE system cannot be a solution to either the problem of illiteracy or child labour. It is at best a temporary solution which has no relevance unless simultaneously backed by adequate strengthening of the formal education structure.

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