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Child Labour among Tribal Children of Patiala City: Interplay between Social and Economic Factors

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Abstract

This research paper titled 'Child Labour among tribal children of Patiala city: An interplay between social and economic factors' is an effort to complement our understanding about child labour among tribes of Patiala city of Punjab. In pursuance of it factors responsible for child labour has been differentiated into social and economic headings. A socio-economic analysis has disclosed that early marriage and family responsibilities, big family size, alcoholism, poverty, disappointment emerges out of poverty, expenditures on health problems, expensive education, lack of economic assistance, and miscellaneous expenditures could be held accountable for child labour among the tribes of Patiala city of Punjab. To have an in-depth insight into their socio-economic world tribal respondents' statements are recorded in 'verbatim'. These statements will help us to empathise with their routine life struggle to earn bread. While earning their bread they also become victims of sarcasm and indignified remarks. They also have to encounter some inappreciable and derogatory remarks. For instance, "Tusi log bahut gandhe ho. Padai-likhayi tuhade bass di gall nahin". Meaning, 'You, people are very dirty. Studying is not your cup of tea.'

Keywords: Child labour, tribal children, interview schedule, verbatim etc
Introduction

"Child labour" means the employment of children below 14 years in gainful occupations (in industrial as well as non-industrial occupations) which are injurious to their physical, mental, moral and social development. Thus, the term includes wage labour as well as self-employed children working independently as well as in family enterprise (Sharma 1979). However, Srivastava describes child labour as a system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which the child, or usually child's parent enter into an agreement, oral or written, with a creditor (Srivastava 2005).

A child labourer is defined by SIMPOC (Statistical Information and Monitoring Program on Child Labor) as an economically active child under 12 that works 1 or more hours per week, an economically active child of age group 14 and under that works at least 14 hours per week or 1 or more hours per week in activities that are "hazardous by nature or circumstance," and a child of age group 17 and under that works in an "unconditional worst form of child labor" (trafficked children, children in bondage or forced labor, armed conflict, prostitution, pornography and illicit activities) (ILO 2002).

According to the ILO Report on India published in 1999, about 1.5 million people were employed in the diamond industry, mostly in the unorganized sector. This is also substantiated in A Human Rights Watch Report 2003 which claims that children are employed and work for up to 12 hours a day and six to seven days a week in silk industry. These silk industry children are forced to dip their hands in scalding water to palpate the cocoons and are often paid less than Rs 10 per day. In 2010, a German news investigative report claimed that in states like Karnataka, about 10,000 children working in 1,000 silk factories in 1998 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_labour_in_India).

Census of India, 2011, reported that children of 05-14 years age group, a total of 43,53,247 are working in the category of main workers out of which 26,64,047 are males and 16,89,200 are females. Total 19,00,182 children work less than three months in a year in which 9,59,894 are males and 9,40,288 are females. Similarly, total 38,75,234 children work for three

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to six months in a year in which 20,04,974 are males and 18,70,260 are females in Punjab state of India, there are 90,353 working children in the age group of 05-14 years (Census of India 2011).

Presence of child labour is also substantiated by the report proposed by NSSO, 2009-10 (66th round of survey) on child labour which underlines that there are 48,836 working children in Punjab state of India, falling in the age group of 5-14 years (<http://labour.nic.in/content/division/nssso-data-on-child-labour.php>)

Methodology of the Study

The tribal children of 06 to 15 years age group in Patiala city of Punjab make the universe of this study. In the process of interviewing the respondents, census method was used in the selection of tribal settlements and households. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents (children belonging to 06 to 15 years age group). Given the nature of the problem under study it is decided to follow the census method since only those households had to be selected that had children between 06-15 years. Hence all such households across all settlements were taken whose number stands at 211. And the total number of respondents stands at 366. It cuts across gender lines thus we have 191 boys and 175 girls included in this study. Census method is used in the selection of tribes in Patiala city. There are four tribes namely, Bazigar, Sikligar, Dehe and Ghihare (the latter two are Sansi's subgroups) living in the city.

The research design for the present study is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature. Some of the popular methods of exploratory research used in the research include literature survey which of course is true for all types of research followed by field observations, depth interviews and group meetings with the respondents and other concerned members of the family and community.

Aims and Objectives

Interview schedule is used to procure the answers to certain questions regarding their child labour:

1. To discuss socio-economic factors responsible for child labour
2. To study interplay between social and economic factors of child labour.
3. To discuss the plight of tribal children in verbatim.

Child labour is a serious problem posing before the tribal world (Crawhall 1999; Robertson 1997, Sharma et al. 2001). There are traced some

prominent reasons for exploitation, discrimination and subordination of tribal people like lack of ownership rights of land, land exclusion, lack of recognition of land rights, child labour or processes of social exclusion among tribal peoples are some of them. Tribal children become victims from many forms of forced labour represent structural situations of exploitation. It includes high dependence on a landlord, trader or other person for food, clothing and housing. This sort of exploitation is faced by whole communities or particularly vulnerable households (HRC 1997).

Many children need to work for hours to raise money for their schooling and supplement household income. The incidence of poverty has caused children to work for their survival and many parents depend on their children's work even if they know it is wrong (ILO 2010). In India, there is institutionalized discrimination against tribal children through government education policies. It is considered a main factor responsible for high level of child labour (Weiner 1991). Dubey (1994) in his study quotes, 'Tribal children are supposed to work with elders of family. They have poorer consciousness towards education. It is because they do not find any incentives from education in order to solve their immediate problems'. It is because, according to Cartwright and Patrinos, 'Indigenous children face more difficulties when searching for formal employment, leaving the actual number of working children uncounted for in the informal sector' (Cartwright and Patrinos 1999).

Table 1.1 highlights that more than half of the working tribal children that is 58.33 per cent were engaged in the rag-picking occupation; succeeded by 20.00 per cent tribal children fall in the occupational category of domestic worker; 11.25 per cent work as waiter; 05.00 per cent involve in the occupation of shop workers; 04.17 per cent work as wage labourer; and the remaining 01.25 per cent of the respondents fall in the occupational category of drum (dhol) beating. This indicates that maximum of the tribal children are engaged in rag-picking. Further, it is important to inquire about their threshold age of engagement in labour work. Table 1.1 helps to show the corresponding relationship between age and nature of occupation. The responses of the respondents are given as:

Table 1.1
Distribution of respondents according to their age and occupation

Occupation	What is age of occupation (in years)			
	06-09	10-12	13-15	Total
Rag picking	140	00	00	140 (58.33%)
Waiter	07	20	00	27 (11.25%)
Wage Labourer	00	03	07	10 (04.17%)
Drum (dhol) Beating	00	00	03	03 (01.25%)
Domestic Worker	32	07	09	48 (20.00%)
Shop workers	07	03	02	12 (05.00%)
Total	186	33	21	240 (100.00%)
	77.50 %)	(13.75%)	(08.75%)	

The distribution of the respondents in the table 1.1 exhibits that overwhelming majority of the children that is 77.5 per cent starts working in the age

category of 06-09 years; succeeded by 13.75 per cent in the age category of 10-12 years and 08.75 per cent in the age category of 13-15 years. Data reveals that

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children jump into some sort of occupations at their tender age. It is extremely important to diagnose the reasons responsible for their early engagement in some sort of occupations.

Their poor socio-economic status is compelling factor behind child labour. Despite their hardships income earned is not enough to complement their basic needs. It may seem strange that there are certain common factors traced in the research work responsible for early indulgence of tribal children into some sort of occupations. Concerned factors are divided into two sub-headings like social and economic factors. These determinants are explained below in detail:

Social Factors

Social life is influenced by a number of social factors. In the present study social factors like early marriages and family responsibilities, large family size and problem of alcoholism have been found out, influencing the life of tribal children. One by one these sub-headings are elaborated below:

Early Marriage and Family Responsibilities

Tribal communities arrange marriage of their children at the threshold of their adulthood. Four cases of child marriage (at the age of 15-16 years) have been reported in Bazigar and Sikligar community (two cases in each community). However the number is not so big but it is indicative of presence of child marriage. Due to early marriage responsibilities of domestic life come on the shoulders of young couples. After marriage new married couple has to bear all the expenses by themselves. It is because parents cannot afford their expenditures.

New married couples do not get any economic aid from their respective families to meet with their daily expenses. They have to be self-reliant. Generally, this issue turned into a matter of discord among the family members. Many a times, it leads to fragmentation of larger family into nuclear units.

Poverty-stricken family conditions force married ladies to do labour work to earn livelihood. It is a very unpleasant experience for them. Usually, husband and wives locked their horns on petty issues like kitchen expenditure, non-payment of school fee, health problems, to purchase new clothes and so on. Parents remain under stress to run their domestic affairs.

Big Family Size

Children's educational participation and progress in school also suffers through large household sizes as parents invest less in their children's schooling. Thus, tribal children from large households are therefore more likely to get involved in child labour. Household size is an essential determining factor of children's labour activities and educational opportunities. It is because families with larger number of children are more likely to give their children to work in order to earn income for the family.

There is relation between household size and poverty, since larger households are found to be poorer (Similer et al. 2004). It has been argued that high fertility rate is positively correlated with the incidence of child labour. High fertility increases the chances that children from large families have to do

work to support household income (Akarro and Mtwewe 2011).

In the context of poverty and basic survival needs, children are considered as preferred commodity by their parents compared with other goods because of their economic utility. This is also found in tribes of Patiala city. 'Munde di chahat bich jyada bacche paida kar lende hann jis karke pariwar bada ho janda hai.' Meaning, for the want of boy child, they produce many babies resulting into large family size.' In this time of inflation, one person cannot bear economic burden of the family so all the family members have to work outside to earn the money. This causes child labour.

Alcoholism

Alcoholism (especially among elder male members) is also responsible for child labour. Due to alcohol addiction, respondents' fathers cannot save a single penny to meet with household expenditures. One tribal child informed in this manner, 'Nasheyan karke koi bachat nahin ho paundi hai, je 300 rupaiye di dihadi launde ne te 200 rupaiye di sharab pee jande han' (Drug addiction perishes money. For instance, if earn Rs. 300 per day, Rs. 200 spent on alcohol).

Economic Factors

Roots of social problems can be explained in terms of economic forces. There is mutual interplay between the economic and non-economic forces of society. There are multiple factors like poverty, disappointment emerges out of poverty, expenses on health problems, expensive education and miscellaneous expenditures are topics of concern for both sociologists and economists. These factors are elaborated below:

Poverty

Poverty is a curse for millions of people on the earth. It deprived them from basic amenities of life. This is what reflected in the present study as tribal children do not have basic amenities of life. They work hard to procure them. Rag-pickers while working in the afternoon take lunch of 'basi roti' (stale food) to quench their hunger. In tribal households food is cooked two times in a day.

In many instances tribal children go to bed without having dinner. That day when children take heavy food three times in a day, is a matter of joy for them. It happens only when langar or bhandara (feast) is organized on some important days like Shivratri, Gurupurabh, Janamashtami, Nirjala Ekadasi, New Year, Lohri, Holi etc. Children do not wear new clothes. They purchase old clothes on sale from Sunday market held at Patiala city. For getting clothes, they beg door to door. 'Kayeen baari asin kapde bi mangan chalejande haan'. Meaning, 'Many times we make move to beg for old clothes.'

Children informed, 'kothian-wale kapde de dinde ne'. Meaning, 'Rich people give them old clothes'. On special occasions like festivals or marriage, they go for purchasing of cloths not more than of Rs. 40. For this shopping, they go to Sunday market, held at Chhoti Baradari, Patiala.

Occasionally, rich people visit their bastis (colony) and distribute stale food among them. It is a

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pleasant experience for them. Gravity of the worse economic situation can be estimated from this statement 'kade-kade kothiwale tutti hoi chappal bi shut dinde ne te asin ghanda ke paa lende haan. Ek chappal nu dass baari bi ghanda lende haan'.

Meaning, 'Often, repair the slippers thrown off by the rich people in scrap. On an estimate one slipper is repaired ten times to use it again and again.' Desires of children are not fulfilled by their parents. They want to enjoy the taste of kulfi, ice cream, biscuits, toffees, kulcha (burger), snacks, fruitsetc. Exclusively, it can be accomplished through the agency of money.

Children complain that their parents do not give them enough pocket money to purchase all these things. They remain half starved because they get food two times in a day. They get pocket money but after two or three days. 'Sada bi mann karda hai changee jindagi jeen daa'. Meaning, 'We have yearned for leading a respectable and luxury life.'

They dream to have one pucca house, new clothes to wear, bike, motorcar, television etc. They do not have ownership over their land of settlement. For a long time they are demanding for permanent allotment of a piece of land to them. They want to construct houses on it. They do not have enough income to build their own pucca houses. 'Aur kharche pure nahin hunde ghar kiwen banayiye?' Meaning, 'It is very hard to bear other expenses. In these conditions, how it is possible to build cemented house?'

Their houses are in deteriorated conditions. Almost all the tribal settlements missing proper bathroom or toilet facilities. They face the problem of water shortage. For water they go to nearby places.

Disappointment Emerges out of Poverty

It is noted that the life style of poor differs in certain respects from that of other members of society. Poverty life styles in different societies share common characteristics. The circumstances of poverty are similar, in many respects, in different societies. Similar circumstances and problems tend to produce similar responses, and these responses can develop into a culture.

Lewis (1969) in his study argues that the culture of poverty is a 'design for living' which is transmitted from one generation to the next. In Lewis's words, 'On the level of the individual, owing to poverty, have sense of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence and inferiority, a strong present time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification, a sense of resignation and fatalism.'

The children of the poor families are more likely to end being poor on account of factors in the social environment that put them at disadvantage. Thus, giving priority to children and the alleviation of childhood poverty is not just about mitigating suffering, it is about breaking poverty cycles that trap whole families, communities and countries in long term.

Tribals of Patiala city has a type of disappointment which is clear in these words, 'Asin taan garibi ch paida howe haan, garibi bich hi mar jana hai, eh saadi takdeer hai'. Meaning, 'We are

destined to remain destitute throughout our life till death.' Furthermore, they expressed their feebleness and disappointment in the manner 'Aamir banan layi 02 number da kam kar nahin sakde, asin kithe jayiye? Kayi log ilzam lagaunde ne, eh garibh taan hai kyounki eh log kam hi nahin karde, bele bethe rehnde hann. Je koi kam sarkar dewegi te kuch kariye, dihad laga ke te kharcha bi nahin chalda'. Meaning, 'To become rich we cannot opt illegal way out. What we should do?'

Many people blame our idleness for our poverty. We will labour hard if government provides the opportunity of employment. Wage labour is not enough to meet day to day expenses.'

Expenditures on Health Problems

Apart from the higher cost of living, the burden of disease among the urban poor has enhanced. Unhygienic living conditions, deplorable status of basic necessities like water and sanitation, increased exposure to accidents and poor environmental condition are factors that increases the vulnerability to indispositions and hence the economic burden.

High rate of growth of urban population and consequent increase in population residing in slums has lead to over straining of infrastructure and deterioration in public health and wide inequalities in accessing services (Chowdhary 2009).

It is surprising to note, in the present research, no tribal child was suffering from disease like cholera, diarrhoea, and malaria etc. despite the fact their place of abode is very filthy and stinking. However, 11 cases of common cold, fever and cough were found. Minor ailments are mostly ignored due to financial constraints. In the event of even minor health problems, they cannot rely on government run health institutions.

They are disenchanted by the health system. Tribal children were asked about their health related issues. The information provided by them, was later cross checked by the information given by tribal parents. In their interview they informed, in government hospitals, they do not get free medicine or proper treatment. 'Bukhar hon te bacche karyane di dukan ton dawai le lende ne'. Meaning, 'In the time of sickness children purchase medicines from karyana (grocery) shop'.

They do not consult specialists. Very rarely, in critical conditions, they visit hospital. When small children suffered with any serious health problem or chronic diseases, parents cannot afford expensive treatment. For this they have to move to private medical practitioner or chemist shop. Doctors recommend those medicines and private chemist shops which offers them commission.

They are left with no alternative but to bear the heavy cost. This make them pauperized. There was a case study, in which one child suffering from Polio could not be treated. It is because doctor asks for Rs. 20,000. Owing to financial constraint, they could not treat it. In other case, one child got seriously injured by falling down from the above. His arms get fractured.

Owing to poverty they could not be treated properly. They avoid expensive treatment and go for 'desi' (traditional) treatment like smearing of 'haldi' (turmeric) or 'mitti' (soil) on wounds, go to 'hakeem' (clinician), local traditional physiotherapists etc. On usual fever, headache, cold etc. children do not go to specialists medical practitioner.

Expensive Education

When family expenses are unbearable, parents can anytime dropout their children from school and engage them into some sort of occupations. Das and Naidu (2003) in his study has highlighted that costs of schoolbooks, clothing and loss of income are frequently presented as reasons for keeping children out of school. Owing to sheer poverty, they cannot avail of the educational opportunities.

Thus, prior to solve the problems associated with the educational backwardness of the tribal the problem of bread must be satisfied. Parents have notion that investment in education will go in vain.

It is because they have notion, 'Saade bachae je padh vi jaan tan sifarish kithon liyanwange. Vaddi den layee paise kithon liyanwange. Is layee padhai da koi faida nahin.' (Education is a useless exercise since we neither have money to offer bribe nor sifarish to get employment). So, it is better to engage children in some sort of occupations. Among tribal community a negligible percentage of persons are in government job.

Lack of Economic Assistance

No bank loan is provided to tribal people. Due to lack of economic support they cannot invest in their own business to upgrade their economic level. Tribal children complained, 'Garib bande nu dekh ke har koi dabke marda hai'. Meaning, 'Being poor people they are threatened and intimidated'.

Tribal parents complain, even banks do not give loans to them to start new occupations. Banks demand registered land or property to provide them loans. They do not have property. They could not take benefit of government banking schemes. Tribal parents have also expressed their disappointment in the fashion, 'Je sade kol pucca rozgar howe taan sade bachae takke kyon khan, oh bi changge tarah padai karan'. Meaning, 'if our children had government employment they were not running from pillar to post.'

They (tribal parents) have no hope from the system. Their despondency is quite apparent in the statement 'Asin taan dihadi la ke hi roti khani hai, jo kama liya oh kha liya'. Meaning, 'We have to do labour work to earn our livelihood. Whatever we earn, we have to manage into it.'

Miscellaneous Expenditures

Expenses on marriage and death ceremonies put economic burden on families which push them into labour work. Tribal parents express their anxiety in the manner, 'Je kal nu koi bacha vihauna hai tebadde logan diyan minattan karaniya paindiya ne, paise dhele layi'. Meaning, 'To bear the expenditure on the marriage of their wards, they have to beg before rich people for money'.

They also have to pay excessive electricity bill. Several times due to non-payment of electricity bill their main power supply is discontinued. Other miscellaneous expenditures include expenses on school uniforms, tuition fee, note books, pocket money, milk, tea etc. These are the compulsions which push children to contribute to their family income by doing labour.

Above references has highlighted that there is interrelationship between social and economic factors responsible for child labour among tribal children of Patiala city of Punjab. We cannot put onus on single factor or cause rather it is an assemblage of multiple social and economic co-efficients.

Conclusion

It is not because of their takdeer (destiny) tribal children are wage labourer. They are engaged in child labour on account of uneven process of development. Their socio-economic disabilities are structurally designed in the uneven process of development'. It is observed that some areas develop and other remains backward, some communities become rich, prosperous and educated and other remains otherwise. This is also true in the case of tribal children of India in general and of Patiala specific. This perspective criticises the prevailing notion of culture of poverty which turns down the argument that poor are poor just because of their self inability and initiative (Leacock 1971). This is also substantiated in a study conducted by Eames and Goode (1970), that the description of a culture of poverty is not only consistently negative, and reflects middle-class values, but that "the actual terms used to describe the attributes are value-laden". It rather justifies the prevalence of poverty and blames poor for their poverty. Moreover it camouflages the reality and maintains status quo.

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