

8. Aspects of child labour among the tribals (Santal, Munda & Oraon) :

8.1 Introduction :

Child labour is one of the most intricate problems in almost all developing countries including India. It has many facets some of the prominent ones are: social, micro-macro economical and purely humanitarian consideration. The child labourers are deprived of the pleasures and pains of childhood including education, play and the natural ways of growing up to a subadult and adult in time. This disturbs the development of their personality permanently. Often the child labourers are abused, maltreated and sexually exploited by their employers.

Significant studies on different aspects of child labour problems have been conducted by various authorities both in India and abroad such as : Rehman (1992) on education of deprived children in Delhi; Choudhury (1996) on dynamic profile of child labour in India; Chandra (1997) on problems and issues on child labour in India; Deol (1998) on child labour in sports goods industry; Agarwal (1999) on street children in New Delhi; Vidyasagar and Kumarababu (2000) on child labour in match industries at Sivakasi; Bimal (2000) on problems of working children; Sekhar and Mohammed (2001) on child labour in home based lock industries of Alighrah; Goyal (2004) on child labour in the sports goods industry in selected bastis of Jalandhar; Yates (1981) on Narcissistic Traits in abused children in U.S.A.; Browne and Davis (1989) on early prediction and prevention of child abuse in New York.

Quite a number of cottage and small scale industries in developing countries substantially depend on child labourers who thankfully work on half or even less of adult wages but produce an out put of at least three fourth of adults. This fact enables the entrepreneurs to become competitive on their products in the global market. Thus in developing countries large proportion of labourers are children and subadults in various manufacturing small to medium size industries such as: Carpet weaving, fire works, packing box, garment factories, brick fields, grill factories, cycle repair shops, motor garage, carpentry, tea gardens, tea shops, restaurants-hotels, groceries, as maid or domestic hand, cattle rearing, agricultural works and even as prostitutes. The child labourers substantially augment the income of their families. This is one of the main reasons for poor couples to go for large family.

The situation in developed world is very different. As such we have to think of child labour problem, anew. We cannot go on simply dittoing western philosophy and model regarding child labour. We need to chalk out a frame work to solve our problem in our own ways taking into consideration all the relevant socio-economic aspects of our country. In doing that we have to consider several factors such as huge population, vast unemployment problem among all sections of our population irrespective of education-training and general socio-economic aspect of our country.

Globally, out of an estimated 211 million children who are engaged in some form of economic activity between the ages 5-14, 186 million children fall within the accepted ILO definition of child labour (Sekhar and Khurana, 2004). The Asian Pacific region harbours the largest number of child workers in 5-14 age group, 127 million constituting 19% of the total population of children (ILO, 2002). Overall, more than 2/3 rds of child labourers are engaged in hazardous jobs (Sekhar and Khurana, 2004).

In 1991, the total number of child labourers were about 0.712 million in the West Bengal comprising 6.31% of the total child population and the figures for India were 11.3 million and 1.34% respectively (Census records 1991). Thus, West Bengal harbours a

significantly higher percentage of child labourers compared to India as a whole. In the present study area, Hili Block percent child labourers among the Santals, Mundas and Oraons were 14.96, 20.92 and 12.31 respectively in 1996 which despite decline to 10.54, 13.60 and 10.34 in 2004, is still about double the West Bengal figure.

No substantial information is available on the child labourers of the ethnic communities in the Hili Block. This article attempts to study of the various socio-economic aspects associated with child labour in three ethnic communities inhabiting the block.

8.2 Results and Discussion:

Table-8.1 presents sex wise data on number and percent of child labourers among the three communities in 1996 and 2004. Percent child labourers found was 14.96, 20.92 and 12.31 respectively among the Santals, Mundas and Oraons in 1996 but it declined to 10.54, 13.60 and 10.34 in the said communities in 2004 due to developmental activities. Percent male child labourers among the Santals, Mundas and Oraons were 16.15, 18.60 and 15.46 in 1996 which declined to 8.95, 12.57 and 9.65 in 2004. Similar decline in percent female child labourers is also observed. Higher percentage of child labourers among the Mundas as indicative of their lower socio-economic conditions compared to the other communities.

Although child labour phenomenon is of common occurrence among the communities in the Hili Block, it is rarely found in the below eight years age group. Table-8.2 shows that a higher percentage of Santal children (18.00%) of 8-10 years age group are engaged in some kind of commercial work in comparison to the Mundas and Oraons.

Table-8.3 shows that higher family size i.e., above six is common among the Mundas than the other fellow communities.

Table-8.4 shows that more children from low income families join the labour force at a higher percentage than high income families. The relation between child labour and family income is statistically significant ($r = 0.981$ at 2 df. $P < 0.05$).

Table-8.5 shows clear difference among the communities with regard to educational level of the child labour force. While more than 50% child labour of the Santals and Mundas (56.4 % and 64.7 % respectively) were illiterate, only 47.6% were so among the Oraons. This indicates that not only the Oraons are more careful regarding the education of their children but also more open to allow their children to earn.

Nature of work open to the tribal children are mostly limited to agricultural, cattle rearing and household ; and different combinations of the three types mentioned. It is found that a little more than a third male and female

Table 8.1: Sex-wise number and percent distribution of child labourers among the three ethnic communities in 1996 and 2004.

Community	Year of survey	No. of male children	No. of male child labour	No. of female children	No. of female child labour	Total no. of children	Total no. of child labour
Santal	1996	192 (53.19)	31 (16.15) (8.59)	169 (46.81)	23 (13.61) (6.37)	361	54 (14.96)
	2004	190 (51.35)	17 (8.95) (4.59)	180 (48.65)	22 (12.22) (5.95)	370	39 (10.54)
Munda	1996	172 (46.74)	32 (18.60) (8.70)	196 (53.26)	45 (22.96) (12.23)	368	77 (20.92)
	2004	191 (50.93)	24 (12.57) (6.40)	184 (49.07)	27 (14.67) (7.20)	375	51 (13.60)
Oraon	1996	97 (49.74)	15 (15.46) (7.69)	98 (50.26)	9 (9.18) (4.62)	195	24 (12.31)
	2004	114 (56.16)	11 (9.65) (5.42)	89 (43.84)	10 (11.34) (4.93)	203	21 (10.34)

Figures in the parenthesis indicate %

Table -8.2 : Number and percent distribution of child labourers in different age groups among the three communities in 2004.

Age group	Santal		Munda		Oraon	
	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%
8-10	07	17.95	05	9.80	01	4.76
10-12	20	51.28	25	49.02	14	66.67
12-14	12	30.77	21	41.18	06	28.57
Total	39	100	51	100	21	100

Table-8.3 : Number and percent distribution of child labour according to family size.

Family size	Santal		Munda		Oraon	
	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%
4	07	17.95	06	11.76	04	19.05
5	12	30.77	18	35.29	05	23.81
6	17	43.59	12	23.53	06	28.57
7	01	2.56	08	15.69	02	9.52
8	01	2.56	03	5.88	03	14.29
9	-	0.00	01	1.96	-	0.00
10	01	2.56	03	5.88	01	4.76
Total	39	100	51	100	21	100

children of all the three communities are engaged in agricultural work. Household work alone or in combination with agricultural work is almost exclusively done by the female children. Where as cattle rearing alone or in combination with agricultural work is always done by the male children (Table-8.6). This indicates some sort of taboo or tradition. It may be mentioned that cattle rearing requires physical strength and often the livestock required to be lead to pastures far away from home which is not safe for female children. The child labourers of the Hili Block mostly work under three wage systems i.e., on daily, monthly and yearly wage basis. They are commonly paid in terms of money and rarely through commodities such as paddy / rice etc.

Table-8.7 shows that more than 70% child labourers (boys and girls) are under daily wage system and marked gender difference is not observed which is however prominent in the monthly and yearly wage system. More girls work under monthly wage system than boys. The picture is almost the reverse in the yearly wage system. Overall there is hardly any difference among the communities with regard to wage system of child labourers.

Although the female child labourers are just as efficient as their male counter parts; they are paid less under all the wage regimes. This is probably because the employers take for granted that they are less efficient in work, physically weaker and are not courageous enough to protest against wage discrimination. There appears to be no difference among the tribal communities with regard to gender discrimination as such male and female child labourers of all the communities are taken together for analysis. Table-8 presents data on mean earnings of male and female child labourers under daily, monthly and yearly wage system. It is found that in case of daily wage system the difference between mean wage of male and female child labourers is more than nine times the combined S.E. Thus, the difference is highly significant.

Similarly, the difference between the means of male and female child labourers in case of monthly wage system is more than three times the combined S.E. Thus, this difference is also highly significant. On the other hand the difference between the average for male and female child labourers in case of yearly wage system is only 1.6 times the combined S.E. and thus the difference is

Table-8.4 : Distribution of child labour according to their family income.

Income per year	Santal		Munda		Oraon	
	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%
5000-10,000	30	76.92	37	72.55	15	71.43
10,000-15,000	07	17.95	11	21.57	04	19.05
15,000 ⁺	02	5.13	03	5.88	02	9.52
Total	39	100	51	100	21	100

Table -8.5: Distribution of child labourers according to their education.

Educational status of child labour	Santal		Munda		Oraon	
	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%	No.of child labour	%
Illiterate	22	56.41	33	64.71	10	47.62
Bellow primary	15	38.46	16	31.37	08	38.10
Upper primary	02	5.13	02	3.92	03	14.28
Total	39	100	51	100	21	100

Table-8.6 : Distribution of child labourers according to nature of work.

Community	Nature of work											
	Agricultural		Cattle rearing		house hold		Agricu house ltural & hold		Agricu Cattle ltural & rearing		Cattle house Rearing & hold	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Femal e
Santal	14	15	01	-	-	05	-	02	02	-	-	-
Munda	17	19	-	-	-	-	-	06	07	-	-	02
Oraon	07	09	01	-	-	01	-	-	03	-	-	-

Table-8.7 : Distribution of child labourers according to nature of wage system.

Community	Nature of wage					
	Daily		Monthly		Yearly	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Santal	14	15	00	05	03	02
Munda	16	19	01	04	07	04
Oraon	07	09	02	00	02	01
Total	37	43	03	09	12	07

Table-8.8 : Sex wise average wage of the child labourers under different wage systems in the tribal communities.

Parameters	Wage structure					
	Daily		Monthly		Yearly	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mean and S.D.	24±2.09	20±1.52	383±23.57	322±26.15	925±220.32	736±273.49
Number	N=37	N=43	N=03	N=09	N=12	N=07
S.E.	0.412		16.16		121.36	

not statistically significant. Although, the girl child labourers wage is in general less than their male counterparts (Table-8.8).

So the apprehension that the female child labourers are discriminated against with regard to wage is substantiated quantitatively. This tendency however, is in common in India, if not globally.

Table-8.9 shows that there is hardly any gender discrimination with regard to night residency of child labourers. Because 76.90% male and 77.90% female child labourers stayed in their own home at night and the rest in employers home. However, in case of Oraons no girl child labourers were allowed by the parents to stay in the employers home. It appears that the tribal communities at Hili Block despite their concerns on exploitation of the child labourers in the employers home sometimes allow their wards to stay in the employers home under compelling circumstances.

Table-8.10 shows that out of 111 (one hundred and eleven) child labourers in the block only 25 (22.50%) stayed in the employers home. However, out of this 25 children only 5 (20.00%) stayed in employers home when the distance is above 10 kilometers from own home. Surprisingly, all 5 child labourers who stayed in the employers home at night are girls and belong to Santal Community. On the other hand no Munda or Oraon children (Boys or Girls) stay in the employers home which is beyond 10 km. from their own. This probably indicates that the Santals are least concern regarding exploitation and abuse by the employers.

8.3 Conclusion:

Increase in population inevitably triggers a chain reaction such as : increase in unemployment and underemployment a feeling of frustration and disenchantment towards established norms of the society- unrest-violence and cessation. Job situation in the country is extremely competitive- so much so that a well qualified individual from even upper socio-economic layer remains unemployed for years. Thus it would be more pragmatic for a child from a lower socio-economic level to go for an apprenticeship for any kind of job from the childhood rather than venturing to get proper education / training for a long time and then enlisting his / her name as educated unemployed. At that point he / she will be unable to settle for any thing less than a white collar job for which he / she

Table-8.9 : Distribution of child labourers according to their night residency.

Community	Stayed in own home		Stayed in Employer's home		Total child	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Santal	14	15	03	07	17	22
Munda	18	21	06	06	24	27
Oraon	08	10	03	00	11	10
Total	40	46	12	13	52	59

Table-8.10: Distribution of child labourers according to distance of night residence from their own home.

Community	Distance of employers home from own home			
	Up to 10 k.m.		Above 10 k.m.	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Santal	03	02	00	05
Munda	06	06	00	00
Oraon	03	00	00	00
Total	12	08	00	05

has acquired proper education and training. It sounds well to utter good sayings such as: a child must be allowed to enjoy his childhood as is often done by westerners but in attempting to achieve that a child may end up being a frustrated youngman in course of time causing enormous harm to himself and to the society in most under developed countries. The traditional way of life in India was that a kid learns the profession of his family from the childhood so that in time he acquires proficiency and expertise in the job and becomes a responsible citizen. The system was not actually altogether bad-after all. Higher education and training is good only if the surrounding situation of the individual child permits it. Child labour violates a range of child rights. Children are deprived of their right to education, play, leisure and all the necessities for proper development of mental, physical, psychological and spiritual growth. Children being future assets of any country, their arrested growth affects the country as a whole in the long run. Societies with large number of working children will be producing more and more illiterate citizens, devoid of skills that a country needs for development. This also adversely affects national development. This is the commonly accepted analysis of child labour problems through out the world. However, each country must solve its problem taking into consideration all the associated socio-economic and political realities prevailing in the country. Our country, for example, is a highly populous, democratic, secular country with approximately 1/4 population belonging to minority communities. As such, no Government has been courageous enough to undertake tough measures to curb population.

There are various welfare programmes to address the child labour problem in our country but often there is a serious mismatch among the programmes. The sheer magnitude and the complex nature of the problem calls for more intensive and cost effective approaches for its control. There is a need for a concerted and well-coordinated



Child labours feeding goats.



Tribal children leading goats to a field.



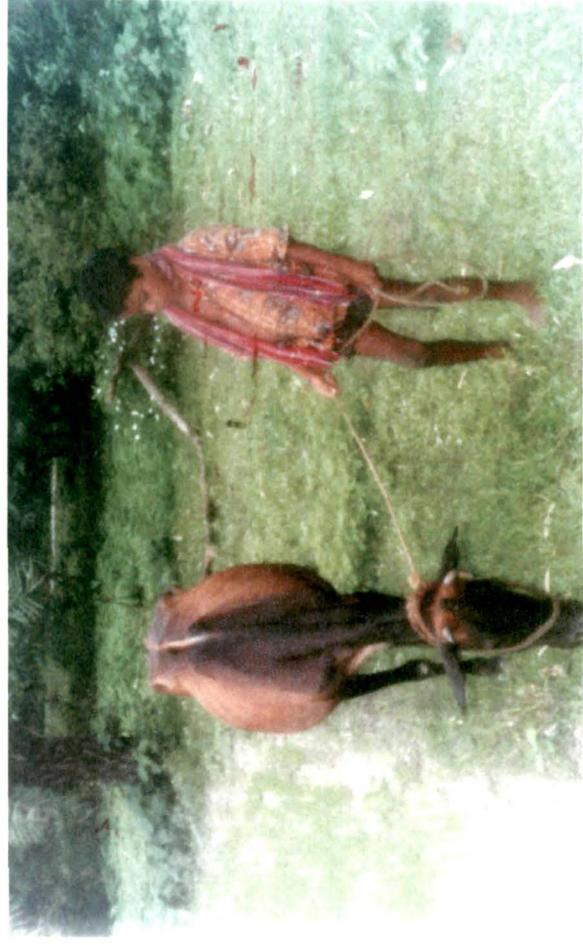
A child labour ploughing a field.



A Munda girl feeding her goats.



Grazing of Cattle in a public field.



A tribal child labour grazing a cow of his master.



A Santal child labour preparing the paddy field of his master.



An Oraon child labour ploughing his master's land with the help of bullocks.



A Santal old man ploughing paddy field with the help of bullocks.



A Munda man ploughing his land for paddy plantation with the help of bullocks.