



## **POLICY PERSPECTIVES AND CHILD LABOUR**

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Child Labour is a deep-rooted problem as it denies the child his/her basic right to education. This, in turn, leads to unskilled adult labour force, which causes early physical decay, economic insecurity, low quality of life and ultimately a high rate of poverty. Child labour is a vicious circle of poverty, unemployment, underemployment and low wages. Over the year, the Government grants are being released under National Child Labour Project (NCLP) have also seen a significant increase, which is translating into a higher number of rehabilitated children joining formal education in most of the states of India. However, the number of children working (4.9 million) is still worryingly high. Something that must bother not just policy makers but also well-meaning parents, citizens and the civil society.

Every child is a gift of nature – a gift must be nurtured with care and affection, within and outside the family. Due to socio-economic and cultural problems, the code of child centeredness was replaced by neglect, abuse and deprivation, particularly the poverty afflicted sections of the society. While child labour is a complex problem that is basically rooted in poverty culture and mindset. The strategy of progressive elimination of child labour is not an isolated phenomenon that can be tackled without simultaneously taking into account the socio-economic milieu that is at the root of the problem.

An International Moral Code of Right and Wrong Behaviour said that "human right and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings" and as a result such right may neither be granted nor be taken away by legislation.

The position of India in term of child labour is not an appreciable one; with a credible estimates ranging from 60 to 115 million, India has the largest number of working children in the world. Whether they are sweating in the heat of stone quarries, working in the fields 16 hours a day, picking rags in the city streets, or hidden away as domestic servants, these children endure miserable and difficult lives. They earn little and are made to work more. They struggle to make enough to eat and perhaps to help feed their families as well. Child labour is a conspicuous problem in India. Its prevalence is evident in the child work participation rate, which is more than that of other developing countries. Poverty is the reason for child labour in India. The meager income of child labourers is also absorbed by their families. The paucity of organized banking in the rural areas creates a void in taking facilities, forcing poor families to push their children in harsh labour, the harshest bonded labour.

The declaration stated, all ILO members have an obligation "to respect, to promote and to realize in good faith" a set of fundamental right which include freedom of association the

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effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour the effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. Millions of children in India today turned into child labor due to various socio-economic problems. According to one study, more than a quarter of the World's total number of child laborers are in the India and every third household in the country has a child labor.

#### Policy Initiatives :

The early Congress Party, led by Pt. Nehru was rationalist and socialist in its ideology. The Congress party projected itself to represent the interests of the 'nation' as a whole at the same time, the Congress came to be influenced classes; said Pranab Bardhan.<sup>2</sup> Business groups played a significant role in early policy making, Chibber supported his observation. In his work in 2004.<sup>3</sup> The Indian national Congress Party built its political support in the rural areas via upper-caste, laundering groups, in this way incorporated landed interest into the heart of the body politique this is the observation of Francine Frankel in her work of 2005.

No doubt, professional urban classes and the top echelon of bureaucrats exerted their influence on the state yet; the Indian National Congress party has never been a party of the Indian elite alone. During the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi mobilized segments of the Indian Peasantry into the nationalized movement. In post-independence India Pt. Nehru's socialists commitments further broadened the social base for the Congress party. In practice, Pt. Nehru and his policies failed to make any significant dent in India's poverty. His emphasis on heavy industry meant the neglect of agriculture in

practice, one finds, a set of policy decisions with serious negative consequences for India's poor. Much reliance was placed instead on re-educating the peasantry via community development programmes, and on altering the incentives of the land tiller via land reforms. Gunar Myrdal observed that the Nehruvian Policy was probably mistaken even in conception and given the poor quality of peripheral bureaucracy was certainly implemented very poorly. Gunar Myrdal observed this way back in 1968.

In India the abolition of Zamindaries was mainly a political phenomenon, in the sense that many zamandaries were allies of the British, they lost power as the nationalists gained and posed an obstacle to the Congress rulers' efforts to build political support in the periphery. It is, therefore, Congress rulers pushed hard in reducing the size of Zaminadari land holdings. However, the several subsequent rounds land reforms redistributing land above a certain 'ceiling', even ensuring the rights of tenants were mostly a failure. This fact has been highlighted by Herring in the study of 1983. The case of Bihar is not different. The similar kind of story is still unfolding in Bihar. Gunar Myrdal says on the whole, land reforms failed mainly because state authorities in India proved either unwilling or incapable of confronting powerful class interests in the countryside.

In brief, important factors contributing to the state's limited capacities on this score included the congress Party's incorporation of landed interests as pillars of party support in the rural Indian federal political structure in which, land redistribution was a responsibility of state governments, a less-than professional, lower-level bureaucracy that was readily co-opted system, a legal system that was based

in favour of property owners; and a relatively low level of mobilization and organization among the potential beneficiaries, all these went in the interests of propertied class of India.

#### Comparative Study of Bihar and Other States :

Over the decades the states in which poverty and incidents of growing number of child labour have come down, include Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, poverty and the number of child labour have come down the least in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Atul Kohli writes the two states in which poverty has come down the most Kerala and West Bengal- are the states with long experience of left governments. All the southern states- Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka- are amongst the top half of the states in which poverty has come down the most.

Atul Kohli is of the opinion that India's BIMARU States- Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are among the bottom half of the states, in which, the poverty has come down the least. Leaving important determinants of such patterns aside for example, irrigation, infrastructure, growth in farm yield, access to credit, the deeper explanation of such and its probabilities are in the nature of social and political power in these states. As a hypothesis, it may be put like this that the poverty has been reduced the most in states where effective governmental power rests on a broad political bases; in such case, rulers with political will have been able to minimize the poverty.

Another important study that has been highlighted by Frankel and Rao in the year 1990, explains the well established fact that

the narrow domination or Brahmins had been more effectively challenged in all the southern states relatively early in the 20th century. Since 1949, the political base of power in these states has generally been middle class and caste and in some instances even lower classes in the Hindi heartland narrow Brahmanical domination was challenged only relatively recently. Atul Kohli's observation is the state- level bureaucracy in the south has generally been superior to that of their North, reason being the broader socio-political base of the bureaucracy in power structure. Kohli writes, 'over years of field work' was repeatedly struck by a sharper sense of professionalism among state- level bureaucrats, especially in Tamil Nadu more akin to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) than to prevailing practices in Hindi heart land over the last several decades the Southern states have benefited more from the subsidized public distribution of wheat rice. The credit must go to populist leaders and a superior bureaucracy. With more effective bureaucracy, other poverty alleviation programmes, a variety of employment generation programme have been better implemented.

Local Self Government in India have quite ineffective in pursuing either redistributive policies or poverty alleviation programmes. Yes, there are some pockets of success but on the whole, panchayats have not functioned very well because of the complicity of corrupt local politicians and bureaucrats, on the one hand, the powerful among the upper caste and classes in the village society of India.

#### Bihar and Other States :

Ideologically we have four major political perspectives on Development in Bihar first, we have the centrist political party, the Congress party. On the eve of Indian

independence, for different reasons credit has gone to the Indian National Congress Party. It is the congress party which ruled the state for more than four decades except the intermittent rules by the opposition for a few years— Secondly, the Socialist party for which G.D.H. Cole has rightly pointed out that it is like a hat which has lost its shape because so many people used it. The latest incarnation – Janata Dal (United) is in the power since 2005, it is the broken away group of the self claimed socialist fraternity Janata Dal. Thirdly, the right wing Hindu Party – Bhartiya Janata Party, believes in the dictum, of Hindi, Hindu Hindustan. The party has been unable to distinguish itself from the Congress party in its economic programmes and policies. Practically, there has not been any difference. Fourthly, we have different hues of communist parties treading their different paths and therein lays the political defeat. Since the year 1990 the congress party has lost its credibility. It has been because of its organizational structure, the lack of visionary local leadership, programmes and policies. The self introspection is on the top of the agenda within the right thinking ranks and files of the party.

Main concentration is on the present regime which has been in power since 2005. Since then, Bihar has witnessed a decisive shift from the past governments to the Good Governance. The present regime is trying its best to live up to the wishes, aspirations and expectations of the people. Apart from the recent few unfortunate developments at Madhubani and Gaya where some innocent people have been beaten up and students lost their lives in police firing. The law and order situation has been fairly good. The peace and harmony is the pre requisite or progress and prosperity in any society. The Government has been able to accomplish that

goal in a very short span of time. Today one of the most backward State Bihar is the role model for the state Governments of India. The bedrock of Indian democracy, local self Government (the panchayati raj institutions) has been further strengthened by the legislation for women in order to ensure their further participation upto 50%.

Growth with justice is the catchword and to the shelter less Maha-Dalits is on the top of the agenda, the OBCs and the EBCs are quite enthusiastic in getting their due share in political power, and demanding the similar share in the productive assets. As a matter of fact their aroused aspirations are difficult to be fulfilled only through a populist measures and the State cannot be at the top of the advanced States of the Indian Union without the dignity of labour, land to the tillers, meaningful quality Higher Education, maximization of production and in turn increase in the per capital income and further improvement in the quality of life of the society.

The present leadership has taken many positive initiatives. School going children are getting their dresses and bicycles. After many years of vacancies, the posts of teachers are filled up, about 72,000 (Seventy two thousand) elementary schools are getting their proper building, the transport system along with roads and some of the buses has been improved beyond recognition, the law and order situation has improved significantly; it is because of speedy trial that most of the dreaded criminals are behind the bars. The incidents of kidnappings and extortions are rare. Hence, the positive administrative measures have contributed enormously in the double digit growth rate of Bihar. The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is better than the so called advanced States of India.

A comparative study of Bihar and developed states like Karnataka suggests that Bihar has a better track record so far the question of political stability and the corruption at the top echelon of the duly elected representative Government is concerned. So is the case with Maharashtra, ten thousands of farmers committed suicide. The corruptions related to land and housing corporations have rocked the state. The question of extreme regionalism is against the spirit of the constitution and the gross violation of the fundamental rights of citizens, which may prove detrimental to the national unity and integrity of India. The 'of the soil' theory is a theory of Balkanization of the country and must be condemned. Gujarat is another extreme case of sectarians. A comparative study of the two Heads of the Governments— Bihar and Gujarat their perceptions and orientations towards welfare schemes are well known to the people at large.

**Table-1 : Social Structure in Bihar**

Year	Population	Sex Ratio	Child Sex ratio	Urbanization
2011	103,804,637	916	933	11.30%
2011	82,878,796	919	942	10.47%

**Table-2 : State of Education in Bihar**

Year	Male	Female	Total
2011	73.39%	53.33%	63.82%
2011	59.38%	33.12%	47.00%

**Table-3 : School and Enrollment in Bihar**

Year	Primary School	Children enrolled	Teachers	Teachers Students
2011	71031	1.95 Crore	3.25 Lakh	1.50
2005	52112	1.40 crore	1.14 Lakh	1.90

**Table-4 : Public Health Scenario in Bihar**

Year	Child mortality rate	Year	Mortality rate among mothers	Vaccination
2009	52 per thousand	2010-11	261 per lakh	68.0%
2002	61 per thousand	2003-05	371 per lakh	18.6%

Bihar is facing the tremendous challenges of development. The explosion of population. Limited quality human and material resources, uneven geographical landscapes, vagaries of weather, no irrigation with the electricity, the second lowest per capita income in India i.e. next to Orissa. Higher education without plan and objective, in fact, rudderless boat in the sea, no investment in research and development, little scope in the field scientific and technological innovation, in planning and its implementation. However, it has set the goal of development through empowerment unlike the previous regime the present political regime is a committed one. Despite the fact that the state government does not have sufficient capital at its disposal to carry forward the ambitious project of socio-economic transformation. A lot of positive initiatives have been taken up by the government.

The out migration of the educated and uneducated youth is still a major challenge. We have not been able to achieve anything concrete in the field of Higher education. The reason is best known to the policy makers themselves. No society can make proper progress without quality higher education. It is the idea which moves the world : the idea may not come only through the mere universalisation of Elementary Education. One may not believe in the Mcaulay's policy of colonial policy of limited standard of education for the native Indians. Therefore, we must do something essential to strengthen higher education in Bihar which in turn, will contribute to the holistic development of the youth, revenue losses of the state, quality job opportunities for them within the state. The assemblies Election of 2010 are the testimony to the positive initiatives of the state government the massive mandate is in its favour it is against the feudal mind set,

the message is loud and clear it is for the secular, democratic and progressive Bihar and castes and communal forces have been rejected thoroughly. Hence, the future belongs to Bihar. The current trend in the migration of child labour has witnessed a slow pace. It has not been checked completely as the incidents of poverty and illiteracy have not been checked properly.

However, our polity should not get influenced by demands made by the volatile and privileged majority and thereby implement policies that detrimentally affect the silent majority. In a representative democracy, the wishes and dreams of the silent majority should matter at least as much, if not more, than that of the volatile, privileged minority. The trade unions represent 15% of the workforce that works in the organized sector and is therefore substantially more privileged than the 85% majority that works in the unorganized sector. The trade unions represent the privileged minority that gets several benefits such as leave, retirement benefits, insurance that the silent majority can only dream of.

In spirit, politicians catering to this volatile minority are no different from politicians pandering to the religious minority. When such pandering on religious lines is denounced as pseudo-secularism, why shouldn't similar catering to an economically privileged minority be described as pseudo-secularism? Why is criticism of such pseudo-secularism not even on the agenda of any political party?

Yet, it is both fair and tactical for political parties to not advocate pseudo-socialism. After all, in a true democratic setup, it is fair that the dreams and aspirations of the entire population, and not just a small minority, are reflected in the policies of the government of

the country. In fact, fairness would also demand that the policies cater disproportionately to the dreams and aspirations of the have-nots even if they hurt the interests of the haves.

Instead, current policies do exactly the opposite. For instance, all the hurdles imposed by labour laws on the firing of employees prevent employers from firing some of the unmotivated and/or unproductive permanent workers. This is so despite the fact that any of the scores of equally qualified members from the silent majority would be doubly motivated if given the chance to replace such incumbents. Similarly, trade unions' insistence on the government bleeding to keep alive loss-making public sector enterprises favours the incumbent workers in these enterprises at the cost of opportunities to the silent majority. 'Directing tax payers' money away from loss-making enterprises to productive, profitable public sector enterprises would create many more jobs in the economy.

The privileged 15% accounts for less than 0.03% of the voting population on average in the 500 odd parliamentary constituencies. In contrast, the silent 85% can account for close to 0.2% of the voting population on average in any such constituency. And policies that help corner 0.2% of the vote are much more likely to swing an election than policies that help corner less than 0.03% of the vote. Even if one accounts for waves that can influence all constituencies, the silent 85% represents six times as many votes as the volatile 15%.

Of course, policies benefiting the unprivileged 85% need to be implemented in the first half of a government's five-year term so that the incumbent political party can reap the electoral rewards from its policies. While

such policies do involve greater risk, they can generate disproportionately greater electoral rewards than policies that cater to the privileged 15% only.<sup>12</sup>

The CPM used land reforms in West Bengal in its initial years to empower the landless and thereby generated a loyal vote bank that remained grateful for three decades. Similarly, jobs created in the organized sector can provide the best form of social and financial inclusion for the unprivileged 85% that gets economically uplifted from one of its members getting a job in the organized sector would remain grateful for a long time. Thus, any political party that has the courage to chose this course of action can generate disproportionate rewards, besides serving the country well.

### **CONCLUSION :**

The process of growth is unlikely to face the challenge of poverty and child labour. The prospect of making India's growth process more inclusive is not encouraging. Even if the rapid growth continues it may not necessarily and automatically 'trickle down' and help the poor, and it cannot check the further incident of child labour and poverty in India. The capacity of Indian states to implement pro-poor, redistributive policies has always been limited. This limitation is because of the emerging alliances in India. This alliance at its core is an alliance of state and capital for growth. The growth has already lost its significance for the poor. It highlights the poverty of anti poverty programmes. The gap between the rich and the poor is increasing like anything. The present democratic set up is unable to address this challenge in the era of crony capitalism; although, the role of trans national capital is yet to be studied properly.

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Note : A Version of this article has been also published in a book.