

# Combining Work with Education

## The Girls' Involvement in Agricultural Work: a Review

### Abstract

Children are the future citizens of every nation and their adequate development should be therefore the utmost priority of any country. But unfortunately, child labour engulfs children across the world. The issue of child labour is a frontline concern in almost all parts of the developing countries in the world, especially in India. In India, it is about 12.6 million (5-14 age group) according to the census 2001 and major engagements are in agriculture and the allied sectors. An immediate problem arises with it is, hindrance of attendance at school among children in general and girl child in particular 'invisibly'. Thus, girl children are the major victims and vulnerable in the context of working and education due to the parental attitudes towards girl child.

**Key Words** Child labour, Girls, Agricultural sector, Education.

### Introduction

It is beyond the shade of doubt that socially, economically and politically, a child is the need of future and the future of a nation is based on the development of children. But unfortunately child labour overwhelms children across the world. The issue of child labour is a frontline concern in almost all parts of the developing countries in the world, especially in India, for example-early entry into labour market at formative stage of life and absconding from proper schooling leads to the loss of future scope towards better livelihood. Global estimates of the International Labour Organization (ILO) show that the incidence of child labour is very high in developing countries and statistics reveal that India is the highest in the world (Das 2012). Today, child labour is adversely affecting 24.6 crore children in the developing countries and India has the largest child labour in the world (Dixit 2004; Rustagi 2002). Children under the age of fourteen comprise 3.6% of the total labour force in India and nearly 85% are engaged in the agricultural sector which is ten times higher than the number of child labour in other sectors (Bhattacharya 2007). Taking into account of child labour, more number of boys work outside their homes than girls in India. But the girls work in some particular areas as agricultural workers and domestic maids. It is difficult to obtain accurate figures of children engaged in agricultural activities and household works, since many of them may be perceived as assistants to their parents rather than labouring and therefore, they are not counted in the total number of workers. Unfortunately, girls working in agricultural fields can often be invisible, and their work is typically not given the same value as boys and a distinct majority of economically active children in many developing countries are involved in agricultural work (Murray and Hurst 2009; Kim 2009). But girls face double burden of domestic work, on top of agricultural work and spend more time in unpaid household work than boys (Iravani 2011). Now, children's participation in agriculture as well as in household works straightaway hampers their education which is of paramount importance. Moreover, involvement in agricultural work hinders the attendance of children at school in general and girl child in particular. Naidu and Ramaiah (2006) state that any child out of school is a child labour.

### Child Labour Issues and Challenges in India

The statistical figure of child labour is very alarming globally as well as locally. It has been estimated that there are about 186 million child labourers worldwide and incidentally, 96% of child workers are from developing countries. And interestingly, in India, it is about 12.6 million (5-14 age group) according to the census 2001 and major engagements are in agriculture and the allied sectors (Srivastava 2011). The actual statistical figure of child labour (both boys and girls) would be more than the present figure but the fact is many children are "hidden workers" working in homes



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or in the underground economy (Agnihotram 2005) and it mostly operates in the unorganized, informal, and unregulated sectors of the economy. Hence, it has not been adequately reported. They constitute around 3.6% of the total labour force in India and have the largest percentage of child labour in the world contributing to about 20% of India's GNP. Nine out of every ten of them work in their own rural family settings and nearly 85% are engaged in traditional agricultural activities (Rustagi 2002). The preference of girl child in agriculture and other activities by the contractors is due to a number of labour supply traits that have been highlighted in literature, such as their docility, obedience, stability and so on and so forth (CSWI, 1975; NCSEW, 1988; Krishna 1996). As a result, the participation of girl child in labour force is increasing day by day. Thus, the great challenge before India, as a developing country, is to provide nutrition, education and health care to these uncared children. Therefore, many policies and programmes have been launched for effective education, even laws have been enacted to eradicate child labour with a special attention towards girl children. Yet, it has failed to come up to the satisfactory level. The economic compulsion induces the child labour, though it is essential, poverty is not the only determining factor for employment of children in the labour force (Bhatty 1996; Burra 2001; Chaudhri 2000; Kulshrestha 1994; Nangia 1987). But even the distinct majority of economically active children in many developing countries are involved in agricultural work (Kim 2009). The other factors such as opportunities of work place in the locality, cultural role/tradition are also the main forces which compel them to send their children into work market instead of schools. Children of rural families who are ailing with poverty perceive their children as an income generating resource to supplement the family income (Nitheshkumar, Kiranmai and Ramyacharitha 2012).

#### **Education and Work**

Working children face attendance disadvantage in schooling and many evidences reviewed by the scholars substantiate that the child labour or work carries negative impact on school attendance leading to inadequate performance, which further obstructs children from obtaining Education (Guarcello 2008). Since child workers cannot attend normal school during the usual school hours; the only alternative left is to provide them some agency of education at the time when they are free (Bhat and Rather 2009). Combining school education with child labour is an effective and inevitable means of ensuring children to obtain an adequate school education. So, it is necessary to reconsider the assumptions that child labour is inevitable and that combining work with schooling is the best way to ensure most children to have access to basic education (Kim 2009). But many children work in hazardous occupation or activities that are harmful which interfere with their schooling and deprive them from the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely (Srivastava 2011). However, many policies and programmes have been initiated by the government of India to enroll child labour into school and this might only be possible by means of

SarvaSikhshaAbhijan (SSA), going on extensively all over the country since last ten years (Das 2012). The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme has also been launched in high child labour endemicity region of the country through which child labour can obtain education. However, even where girls enroll for education, they soon drop out or are directed to opt for work, either within the household or outside, as unpaid or mostly as low paid workers (Rustagi 2002). In a study by Nath and Majumdar (1991), 44.8% of child labour never attended the school and similar study by Banerjee reports the incidence to be 56%.

#### **Issues of Gender and Child Labour:**

Almost in all the societies, boys and girls are assigned with different societal roles and hence experience different perspectives of life as males as well as, as females. Such differences have a gigantic impact on their lives as a whole, in India particularly. By affecting segmentation and segregation of tasks, the labour markets for children, ensure an enhancement of demand for girl children. On the supply side, in spite of the non-economic considerations which constrains and prevents the supply of girl child labour, the economic compulsions and motivations push girls into the labour market, (Burra 2001; Deshpande 2000). For girls in particular, there are factors that create a conflict between child labour and education which reflects in the large gender gaps in schooling: sixty percent of the children around the world who do not go to school are girls (Mishra and Mishra 2004). Girls' education is threatened in many countries by the frequent preference for sons to be educated. Factors like early marriage of girl children, social inheritance and social security laws have for years become a continuous disadvantage for women (Bhat 2010). The societal preference for male children results in girls being valued less, fed less and most importantly educated less but worked harder in return. In short, they are deprived of every opportunity to broaden their personal, social and intellectual horizons (Bhat and Rather 2009).

#### **Girl Child in Agricultural Sector**

The agricultural workforce remains one of the largest workforce sectors in the world and in India evidently. The workforce in agriculture is being increasingly feminized with self-employed women farmers, waged agriculture women workers and sadly, girl child labourers (Murray and Hurst 2009). But unfortunately girls' work in agriculture can often be invisible, and their work is typically not given the same value as boys as mentioned above. As a part of her 'social schooling', a girl child is trained very early in household chores, which are defined socio-culturally as women's role and responsibilities. She helps in a number of tasks like caring and nurturing. Her participation in the collection of fuel, fodder, water and livestock maintenance mostly remains unaccounted. Since more importance is given to the girls' learning of household skills, formal schooling and education are not considered essential in the perception of society in general, and noticeably by their parents/guardians themselves. The illiterate status of women in general, and that of their mothers in particular, does not help the cause of schooling of

the girl child. Thus the involvement of girl child in agricultural work and other household work does not have the statistical figure and in some cases they are not perceived as labourers. However, their very much involvement may hamper their schooling and education miserably.

#### Case of Odisha

Children of Odisha work in different occupations such as agriculture and allied works, collection and processing of minor forest produce, domestic work/help, hotels/motels/road-side eateries (dhabas) etc. Apart from these occupations, children are also engaged as apprentice, which is taken as normal process of growing up by their parents and communities. Mute acceptance towards this normal process of growing up in the name of child-help has encouraged child labour in our society, which needs to be discouraged, on the contrary.

Study by different NGOs, claims that 15% of Odisha's child population within the age group of 5-14, works as child labours including those who work on their family farm. In Odisha, there is a preference among employers for girl child as part-time domestic workers, as studied by Department of Applied Economics, Utkal University in 1997. The study found that nearly 90% of girl children start working before the completion of 12 years of age. More than 75% belonged to the age group of 12-14 years. In addition, a study carried out by Campaign against Child Labour (CACL) in 2001 on child domestic workers of Odisha, reveals that lack of regular income by the head of the family (mostly daily-wage earners or small cultivators and fathers addicted to liquor) is a major reason for the incidence of child domestic labour. Sheer poverty in backward areas where alternative avenues for earning are non-existent is solely responsible for the practice of child domestic workers (Mishra 2012). And consequently, it hinders the education among children in general and girl children in particular. However, recently it has been observed by the National Review Mission Team of Government of India, that the innovative interventions initiated by our State Government in the primary education wing are quite commendable after the introduction of the RTE Act in the state. Around 95% of the total children in the age group of 6-14 years have been enrolled in the state. But the state has performed a low gender parity index in the process of overall admission (Shadangi 2012). Girl children are being deprived by the various factors in comparison to their male counterpart.

**Table: 1**  
**Position of Male and Female child labour in Odisha.**

Sl. No	Districts	Male	Female	Total
1	Anugul	3641	3472	7113
2	Balangir	8153	6697	14850
3	Baleswar	9873	7664	17537
4	Bhadrak	3603	3842	7445
5	Boudh	2887	3055	5942
6	Bargarh	10947	9075	20022
7	Cuttack	7798	6711	14509
8	Deogarh	4915	5026	9941
9	Dhenkanal	5327	4960	10287

10	Gajapati	11327	12336	23663
11	Ganjam	33463	25498	58961
12	Jagatsinghpur	2453	453	2906
13	Jajpur	5755	4395	10150
14	Jharsuguda	4110	3935	8045
15	Kalahandi	20093	21558	41651
16	Kandhamal	1020	520	1540
17	Kendrapara	5678	3015	8693
18	Keonjhar	6155	2487	8642
19	Khurda	5772	2925	8697
20	Koraput	16789	15002	31791
21	Malkangiri	8810	9587	18397
22	Mayurbhanj	16849	15905	32754
23	Nayagarh	5076	3327	8403
24	Nawrangpur	8873	8221	17094
25	Nuapada	8239	8781	17020
26	Puri	3163	1524	4687
27	Raygada	18730	17792	36522
28	Sambalpur	8560	8811	17371
29	Sonepur	6521	5777	12298
30	Sundargarh	5825	2845	8670
Total		260405	225196	485601

Source: Labour Statistics in Orissa 2010

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

Using the above facts and literature, this paper has examined whether combining school education with child labour is an effective and inevitable means of ensuring children obtain an adequate school education or not. Isn't combining child labour with school education the right approach? In addition, this paper also suggests that it is very necessary to reconsider the assumptions that child labour is inevitable and therefore, combining work with schooling is the best way to ensure most children have access to a basic education. Many plans and programmes have been launched and laws have been enacted by the government of India for educating and eradicating child labour. But the involvement of girl child labour in agricultural and household works are not included in the government plans and programmes, since they are perceived as helping their parents and not as a child labour. But, it directly hinders their schooling and education, even though they are engaged seasonally. Hence, the government should take into account the above mentioned foggy facts while planning programmes. Not only that, it is also a wakeup call for each and every citizen to encourage and promote education for children, especially for parents who should never forget- 'Hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world'.

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