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**CHILD LABOUR IN PETTY SHOPS: A STUDY OF BONGAIGAON TOWN IN ASSAM**

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**Abstract**

A large number of people in India live below the poverty line and even in the condition of absolute poverty, which are unable to meet their basic needs. For which many small children in India are forced to engage in some kind of work and most of the time they are exploited and exposed to hazardous work conditions, many times neglecting their studies.

Hence, the present paper is an attempt to study the socio-economic background and working condition of the child labourers and to study the perception of the child labourers about their working condition. The study is based on the children working in petty shops of Bongaigaon town as almost all the petty shops are employing at least one child labour at their shops. The study is both descriptive and analytical. The data is collected from 40 male child labourers by purposive sampling with the help of structured interview schedule. The children are further selected by using convenient sampling. It is observed that the economic conditions of the child labour is poor and majority of them are illiterate and they themselves does not like to go to school which is similar in case of their siblings also. The child labourers are satisfied with their present job which is so hazardous and are poorly paid, as they are comparing this with their life prior to joining this profession in the clutches of extreme poverty.

**Keywords- Child Labour, Education, Poverty.**

**Introduction**

In India, according to Article 25 of the constitution of India, "no child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment."<sup>1</sup> Many laws and provisions have also been mentioned in the articles of the Constitution of India to eradicate the child labour as the **Article 39(e) and (f), Article 45, Article 23, Article 21-A**. Besides constitutional provisions, there are at present 13 major legislative enactments which provide legal protection to children in various occupations. As The Children (Pleading of Labour) Act, 1933, The Employment of Children Act, 1938, The Factory Act, 1948, The Plantation Labour Act, 1951, The Mines Act, 1952, The Merchant Act, 1958, The Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961, Bidi and Cigar Works (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, Shops and Commercial Establishment Act, 1969, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. Even in Assam according to the Assam Shops and Establishments Act, 1971, the minimum age for employment in shops and commercial establishment is 14 years. But all these laws hardly can check the existence of this social evil from our society as it is still very common in India. A child chasing goats or cows, cutting grass or young girl washing utensils, carrying a pot of water, etc. are commonly seen in rural areas. Similarly, the shoeshine boy or the little child serving a cup of tea in hotel or dhaba is commonly visible in urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

In India, child labour is seen from the earliest time. The parents used to put their children as trainees under them to learn their craft. The main reasons for existence of child labour in India are mainly due to

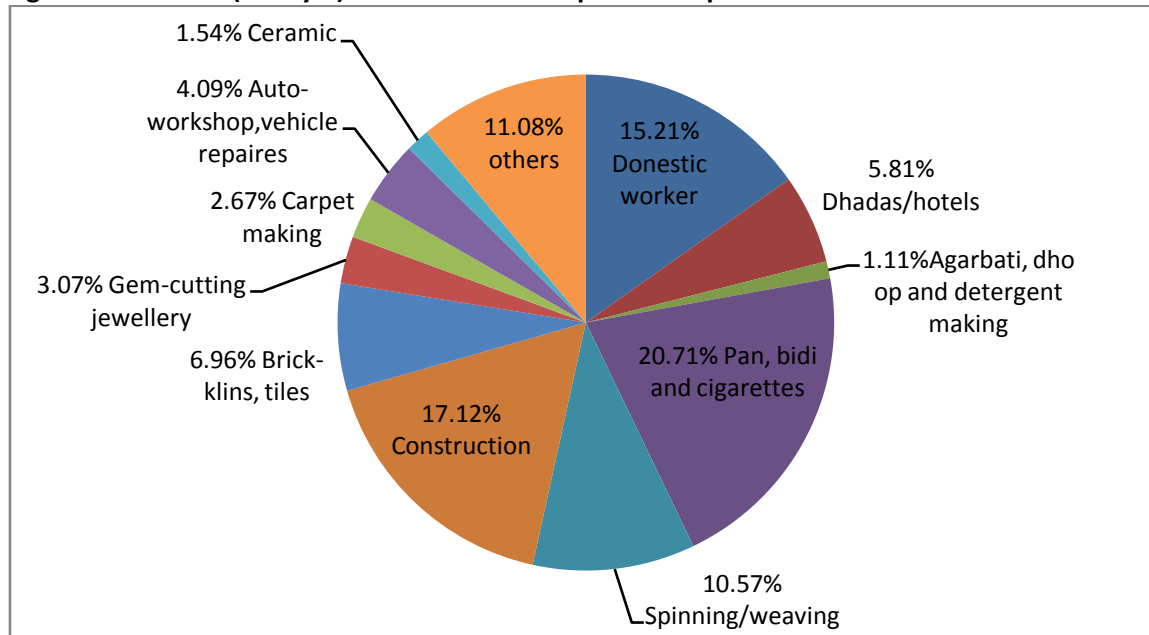
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<sup>1</sup>Naidu Y. Gurappa, Child Rights, Laws and development— Emerging Challenges, New Delhi, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Sharma Usha, Child Labour in India, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2006.

poverty, illiteracy, poor educational quality, etc. The children are employed for a gainful occupation which is not suitable for their age and are exploited. It includes any occupations which are dangerous to their mental, physical, moral and social development and denied from educational opportunities. The major occupations engaging child labour as per Census 2001 of India are Pan, Bidi and Cigarettes (20.71%), Construction (17.12%), Domestic workers (15.21%) and Spinning/weaving (10.57%), which is shown in the following figure.

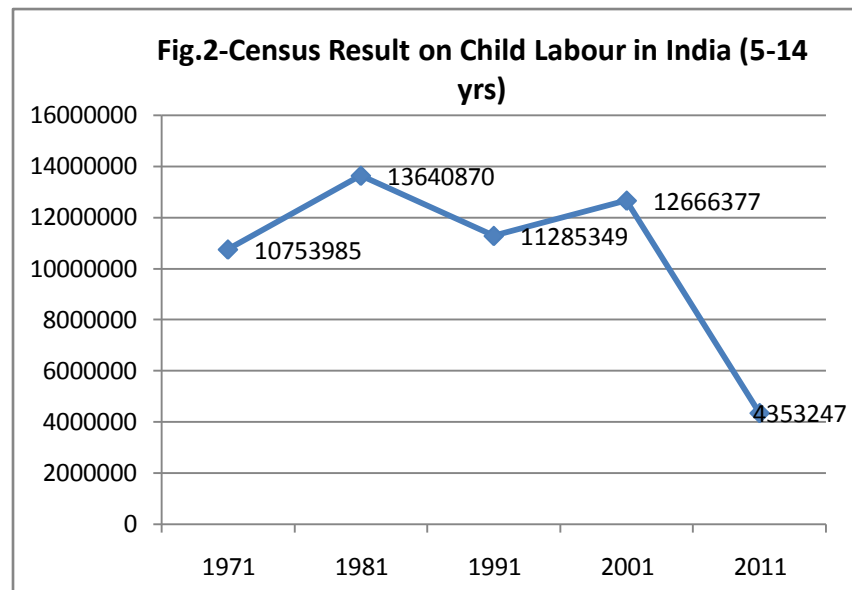
**Fig.1-Child Labour (5-14 yrs) in Hazardous Occupations as per Census 2001 of India**

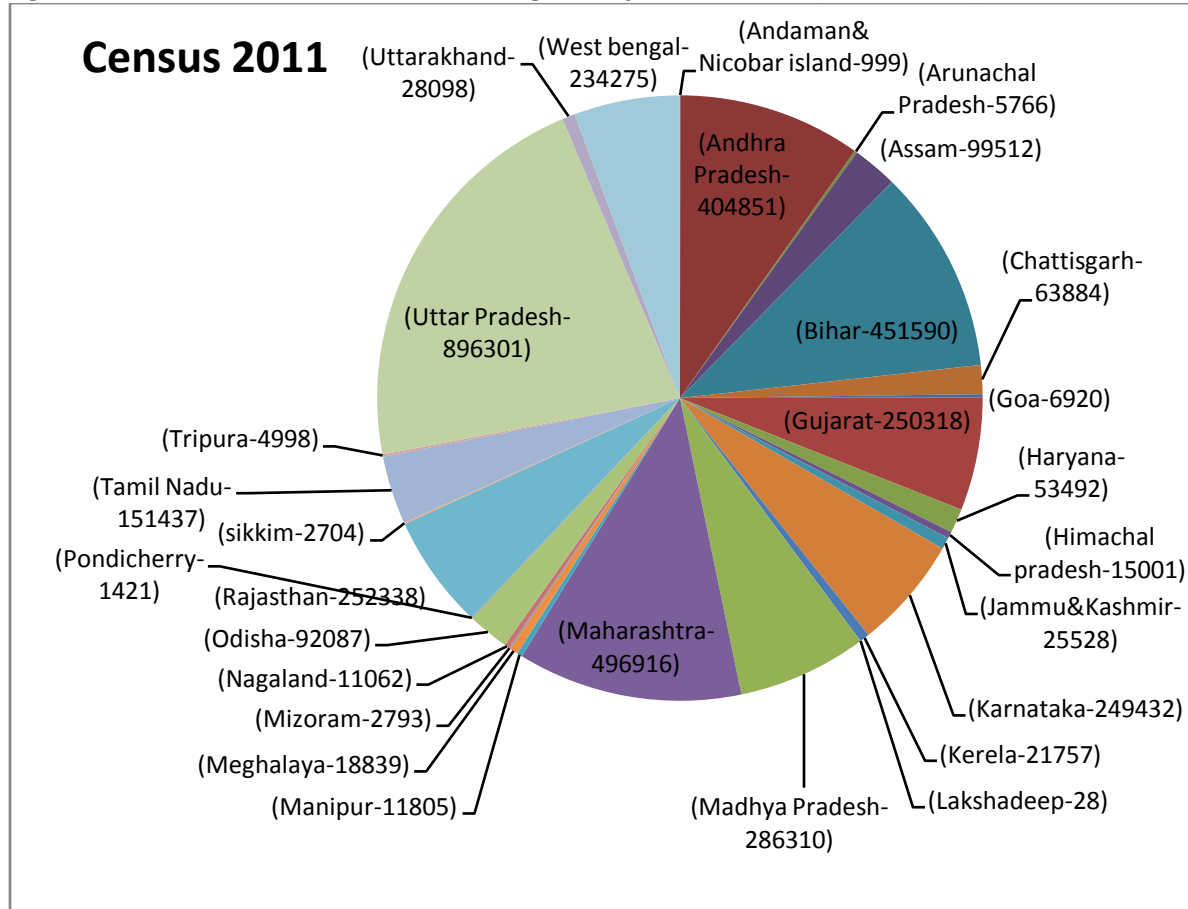


Source: Census 2001

### Status of Child Labour in India

Child labour is a social problem in India. In fact, India is the home to the largest number of child labourers in the world. Child labour is seen in almost every society and in all the sector of employment. But, the total number of child labour keeps on changing from time to time. The figure shows the census result on child labour which keeps on fluctuating over the years and has declined in a large quantity in Census 2011.



**Fig.3-Total number of Child Labour in the Age Group of 5-14 Years (Census 2011)**

Source: Census 2011

Child labour also differs from place to place and from region to region and from state to state. According to Census 2011, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of child labour followed by Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, while Sikkim has the lowest number of child labour. Among the union territories, Delhi has the highest and Lakshadweep has the lowest number of child labour.

The data shows that the status of child labour in Assam is much better than the other states, also decreasing in a large quantity which is a positive sign.

#### Statement of the Problem

As the child labour is not a unique problem in India, it is seen in almost every part of the country. The 2011 National Census of India found the total number of child labour, aged 5-14, to be at 4.35 million and the total child population to be 259.64 million in that age group. The problem of child labour is a complex issue. Though the government has taken many steps to eradicate the child labour in India like the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986; Indian Factories Act 1881; etc. but still the child labour can be seen in non-organized sectors. At Bongaigaon the child labour are also seen as the street vendor, hotel boy in dhaba, domestic worker, handimen, garbage picker, etc.

The present study is to know their problems, economic and the working conditions of the child labour in the Bongaigaon town and to acknowledge the main reason of the child labour.

#### Methodology

The present study is both descriptive and analytical. The data is collected by purposive sampling, as the children are working in petty shops are only found in Mayapuri, Borpara, Chapaguri, New Bongaigaon, BOC Gate and Rolling Mill areas of the Bongaigaon town. The children are further selected by using convenient sampling. The data is collected with the help of structured interview schedule and the tools

of data collection are camera, voice recorder etc. The secondary data is collected from census 2011, Statistical Hand Book Assam 2013, etc.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study has certain specific research objectives-

1. To assess the socio economic background of the child labourers.
2. To study the working condition of the child labourers.
3. To study the perception of the child labourers about their working condition.

### **Rational for Selecting the Study Area**

As child labour is a social problem it is prevalent in almost every place in the country, but more predominantly found in urban areas. In Bongaigaon town, the children are seen working as child labour in almost every sector of employment. The present study is based on the children working in petty shops in Mayapuri, Borpara, Chapaguri, New Bongaigaon, BOC Gate and Rolling Mill areas of the town as any lehrman can very easily observe the existence of child labour in those area as almost all the petty shops are employing at least one child labour at their shop and the child labours play a significant role in the economy of these shops in those areas of the town.

### **Study Area**

As per 2011 census, Bongaigaon district has an area of 1093 sq. km. and its total population is 738804. The density of population in Bongaigaon district is 676 per Sq. Km. which is higher than Assam with 398 per Sq. Km. The percentage in the age group of (0-6) in Bongaigaon district is 15.75 5%. The literacy rate of the Bongaigaon district is 87.37.<sup>3</sup>

Here, the study area includes the Bongaigaon town. The town is situated at a distance of 210 km west from the state capital and occupies an important place in the communication network in Assam as well as North East India. The town occupies an area of 6sqkm and its population density is 18,000/km<sup>2</sup>. Its literacy rate is 96.42% (Census 2011). The locality in Bongaigaon town includes Mayapuri, Borpara, Paglasthan, Mahabeersthan, Chapaguri, Dhaligaon, New Bongaigaon, Borsongaon, Deuripara, BOC Gate, Rolling Mill, Dolaigaon, Notunpara, Kururmari, Hatimutra.<sup>4</sup> Hinduism is the major religion. Some of the major communities of the district include Koch Rajbanshi, Bengali, Assamese and Bodo and the languages spoken in the district are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Hindi. The study area includes the areas of Mayapuri, Borpara, Chapaguri, New Bongaigaon, BOC Gate and Rolling Mill.

### **Socio-Economic Background of the Child Labourers**

The study of the socio economic background of the child labourers tells us about their background from which they belong and hence help us to locate the reasons for their preference to opt the profession of child. The variables as income of the family, number of family members, education of the child labourers and their siblings, type of house, etc. gives the picture of why they had to opt for the profession and also helps to establish a relationship between the socioeconomic background of the child labourers with their choice of the present occupation.

The data was collected from 40 male child labourers and all the child labourers practice Hindu religion. The data reveals that most of the child labourers (92.5%) are from 10-14 age groups. The study also shows that more than one third of the child labourers' mother tongue is Bengali (37.5%), followed by Assamese (32.5%), Hindi (17.5) and Bodo (12.5). Moreover 40% child labourers are from general caste category, followed by Scheduled Caste (22%), Other Backward Cast (20%) and Scheduled Tribe (17.5%). The data shows that more than half of the child labourers (57.5%) are illiterate and more than one fifth of the child labourers (22.5%) studied up to primary level and (20%) studied up to class (6-8). Hence, the data shows that the child labourers are mostly illiterate and only a few were going to school before joining their present occupation. It is observed that as many as 65% of the child labourers have (1-5)

<sup>3</sup>Statistical Hand Book Assam, 2013.

<sup>4</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bongaigaon>, 21 June, 2015, 8:00 p.m.

family members and 35% have (5-10) family members. Therefore most of the child labourers (97.5%) belong to nuclear family and only (2.5%) belongs to joint family. Furthermore, 92.5% of them have siblings and (7.5%) are single child.

**Working with Parents**—The data shows that most of the child labourers (87.5%) are not working with their parents and only (12.5%) are working with their parents. It shows that most of the child labourers are independent workers and only few are working with their parents.

**Fondness to School**—It is observed that more than half of the respondent (77.5%) does not like the school and (22.5%) likes the school. The data shows that it is mostly the children who do not want to go to school and only few child labourers feel that they are deprived of their education.

**Person Responsible for the Dropout from School**—It is observed that more than half of the child labourers (57.5%) have never gone to school, (27.5%) left the school by their own wish and only (5%) have left the school on their parent's insistence. The remaining 10% child labourers are still going to school. The data shows that maximum number of the respondent have never went to school and the child labourers themselves did not like to go to school.

**Reasons for Choosing not to go to School**—The data shows that more than half of the child labourers (65%) are of the opinion that it is not necessary to go to school, (22.5%) thought that it is too late to go to school and (12.5%) were dissatisfied after going to school. The child labourers are of the view that it is not necessary to go to school and are disappointed by the school.

**Sibling's Enrolment at School**—The data shows that more than half of the respondent's siblings (65.0%) does not go to school and (35%) of the respondent's siblings are going to school. It is found that not only the child labourers but their siblings also did not go to school.

**Staying away from Native Place**—It is observed from the data that most of the child labourers i.e. (75%) are working from the home and only (25%) were staying away from their home and the main reason for leaving their native place is the job. The child labourers are mostly of local areas.

#### **Working Condition of the Child Labourers**

**Duration of the Work**—The study indicates that more than half (55%) of the child labour started working recently from 0-6 months, (40%) from 7-12 months and only (5%) are working from more than a year i.e. 12-24 months. Thus, most of the child labours have started working recently and only 5% started working for more than a year.

**Reason for opting the Present Job**— From the data it is observed that (65%) of the child labourers are of the view that they have chosen their present work because they feel that it is easier than other types of work. (17.5%) felt that there is no other work available suitable for them, (10%) are of the opinion that they want to help their parents and only (7.5%) felt that it is more paying. Most the child labourers are of the view that the occupation they are doing is suitable for them and they have chosen their job according to their will.

**Types of Work**—The data reveals that more than half of the child labourers i.e. (55%) are working as a helper and other child labourers working as waiter and washing utensils are(22.5%) each.

**Hours of Work**—It is observed from the data that (75%) of the child labourers are working between (8-12) hrs and (25%) are working less than 8hrs. The most of the responds are working for the long hours which are not suitable for them.

**Interval Between the Works and Weekly Holidays** — Out of 40 child labourers, (75%) of the child labourers have interval between their works and (25%) of the child labourers does not have any interval between their works. And, out of 40 child labourers, (57.5%) of the child labourers does not have any kind of holidays and only (42.5%) enjoy holidays on Sunday.

**Treatment of the Employer**—The data also reveals that most of the child labour (72.5%) responded that they are not scolded by their employers. But as many as 15% of the respondent admit that they are scolded by their employers and the rest 12.5% did not responded.

**Monthly Earnings**—Most of the child labour (77.5%) is earning (Rs1000 -1500) and (15%) of child labour are earning (Rs600-1000) and (7.5%) are earning (Rs.300-600) monthly. Thus, the data shows that most of the child labours have very less earnings and they are not able to do any kind of saving for any kind of uncertainty in future.

**Job Satisfaction**—The study reveals that half of the child labour i.e. (50%) is satisfied by their occupation. Those who are still satisfied are mainly because of the extreme poverty that they experienced prior to joining this job. While, the other half, i.e., (50%) is not satisfied by their occupation. And mainly the reasons are low wages, low respect for the job and long hours of work.

**Planning for Different Job**- From the data, it is observed that most of the child labourers (85%) do not have any planning for going to the other job and only (12.5%) are planning for looking into different job while (2.5%) did not respond to it. Thus, most of the child labourers do have any future planning.

#### Findings and Summary

The study of the socio-economic background of the child labourers shows that all of the child labourers belong to Hindu religion. The data shows that majority (40%) of the child labourers belongs to the general caste category and most of them (57.5%) are illiterate and most of the respondent (97.5%) belongs to nuclear type of family. It is observed from the data that more than half of the child labourers (57.5%) and their siblings (62.5%) have never gone to school and the child labourers themselves did not like to go to school. As many as (27.5%) child labourers believe that they themselves are responsible for their dropout from school. The data also shows that more than half of the children labours (65%) are of the opinion that it are not necessary to go to school.

The study of the working conditions of the child labourers reveals that more than half (55%) of the child labourers started working recently from (0-6) months and majority of the child labour (55%) were not engaged in any kind of work before joining the present job. It is also observed from the data that (65%) of the child labourers are of the view that they have chosen their present work because they feel that it is easier than other types of work. The study reveals that more than half of the child labourers i.e. (55%) are working as a helper and other child labourers working as waiter and washing utensils are (22.5%) each. Most of the child labourers are earning a meager amount of Rs 1000-1500 monthly, and that is too after working for 8-12 hours by most (75%) of them, but surprisingly only half of the child labourers are not satisfied with their present job, and may be because of dearth of good job most of them (85%) don't have any plans to leave their present job.

Hence, the present study reveals that though there are many factors as easy income, poor performance in schools, self-dependency out of that and the increasing number of educated not getting jobs are all encouraging these kids and their parents to engage them as child labours. But the core of the crisis is poverty which is reflected in the dropout rates of the children from schools and which eventually compelled them to start their profession as child labour in these petty shops. This is why most of the child labourers are satisfied with their present job which so hazardous and poorly paid, as they are comparing this with their life prior to joining this profession in the clutches of extreme poverty. Thus, the study clearly reveals particularly in case of the working hours and the condition of working by the child labours and the minimum age allowed to work as labourers in the study area is noticeably violating the Assam Shops and Establishments Act, 1971 together with other laws as the Apprentices Act, 1961, the Shops and Commercial Establishment Act, 1969 and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

#### Policy Recommendation

The following policy measures can bring changes in the status of this acute problem.

- **Anganwadi Schools**—In several areas, anganwadis along with similar facilities are a must. This must be built adjacent to the regular schools, furthermore, the working hours of the anganwadis must match those of the regular schools otherwise the purpose is lost.



- **Vocational and Skills Training**—Vocational, pre-vocational and skills training has a crucial role to play in rehabilitation of former child workers. But if it is to function effectively as prevention of child labour. "Education for All" should lead to decent work for men and women.
- **Enforcement of Labour Laws**—There is various articles in the Indian Constitution safeguarding the interest of the children. Such rules and regulations that exist under the Indian labour laws should be strictly enforced by the labour departments. All our preaching is no use if there is no practice.
- **Community Mobilisation**—Community mobilisation action is preferred to enforcement by many engaged in the battle against child labour. This may prevent child labour as well as cure it.
- **Awareness Programmes**—The need for major improvement in Indian schooling system can only be the answer to eradicate child labour in India. Food programme should be extended to cover working children as well to make people aware of the problem of child labour. The importance of education the administration taking help from NGO's and civil societies should launch and awareness campaign using mass media.

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