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Socio – economic status of child labourers in Patna Municipal Corporation Area

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Abstract : *One of the greatest maladies that has spread across the world today is that of child labour. ILO defines child labourers as all those children belonging to the age less than 12 engaged in any economic activity. In India the working children between the age group of 6 – 14 are considered to be child labourers. India has the largest numbers of child labourers in the world and Bihar stands fourth in the country in this particular aspect. In spite of several policies and rules implemented, a large number of child*

labourers are employed in various spheres of activities all over the country. Amid these circumstances the present study attempts to examine the socio-economic conditions of child labourers working in the Patna Municipal Corporation Area. The study has been carried out specifically in two circles of the PMC Area namely the New Capital and Patna City Circles respectively, in order to furnish the intra-city variations regarding the overall socio-economic status of child labourers. The findings reveal that the overall status of the working children in the study area is far from being satisfactory. However, there have been certain noticeable spatial variations regarding the different aspects related to the socio-economic standards of the child labourers working in the PMC Area. The child labourers working in the New Capital circle which is incidentally the newer part of the city have shown slightly better socio-economic status, especially in terms of income and living conditions than their counterparts in Patna City circle, the oldest part of Patna.

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Introduction :

The term Child Labour is used for employment of children below a certain age, which is considered illegal by law and custom. Child labour is carried out by any working child who is under the age specified by law and incidentally the stipulated age varies from country to country and government to government. Broadly any child who is employed in activities to feed self and family is being subjected to 'child labour' (Ahuja, 1997: 234-241). International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 (1973) and 182 (1999) define child labourers as 'all children younger than 12 working in any economic activities, children 12-14 years old engaged in more than light work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour – in which they are enslaved, forced into illegal activities or exposed to hazards' (Tieney, 2009).

In India the working children belonging to the age group of 6 to 14 are considered to be child labourers (Mishra, 2010:5). There is no definite or even an approximate estimate of the number of children at work in India; primarily because of various reasons like differences of definitions, typology of the work involved, guess estimates and varying perceptions of the different agencies working to curb this problem (Prayas, 2010). According to the ILO estimates, there were 250 million children involved in child labour in the world in 2004; with the largest number being in India. According to the figures furnished by the Bihar State Child Labour Commission (2009), Bihar stands fourth in the country after Andhra Pradesh, U.P. and M.P. in terms of child labour population with the number of child labourers in the state being more than 11 lakhs.

There exists an array of provisions in the Indian constitution and legislations to safeguard the

children in general and prohibit the child labour in particular. Some such legal safeguards are The Employment of Children Act (1938), The Factories Act (1948), The Plantation Labour Act (1951), Mines Act (1952), The Bonded Labour Abolition Act (1976), Child Labour Prohibition & Regulation Act (1986) and Juvenile Justice Care & Protection Act (2000). In addition there are constitutional provisions like Article 23 forbidding forced labour, Article 24 forbidding child workers in hazardous occupations, Article 32 prohibiting unsafe working conditions, Article 39 (e) & (f) safeguarding children from entering jobs unsuited to their age and so on. In spite of all these provisions, policies and regulations; one comes across the brutal reality: a large number of child labourers employed in various spheres of economic activities all over the country and in the state of Bihar as well.

Objectives of the Study :

Amid this existing scenario, the present study aims:

1. to find out the different fields of employment of the children under review;
2. to observe the economic conditions and social structures of child labourers working in the study area;
3. to examine the spatial variations at intra-city level if any, regarding the overall socio-economic status of child labourers in Patna Municipal Corporation Area; and
4. to suggest certain remedial measures for this social evil.

Hypothesis :

The study is based on the hypothesis that the malady of child labour is a result of poverty and social backwardness; and the socio-economic status of the child labourers in general is poor and far from being satisfactory.

Methodology and Database :

The research is based on a distinct methodology, which follows the three stages:

- (i) **Pre Field Survey:** the study of relevant literature; and collection of secondary data and maps from government offices and NGOs.
- (ii) **Field Survey:** preparation of questionnaire and generation of primary data through a schedule survey covering 100 samples by applying random sampling method.
- (iii) **Post Field Survey:** tabulation, cartographic representation and analysis of data.

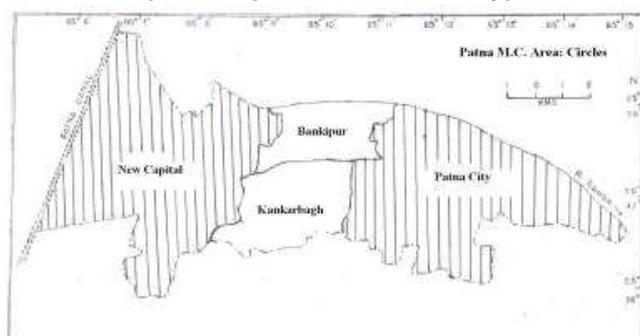
The total sample size in the present study has been 100, 50 each from the New Capital and Patna City circles respectively.

Study Area :

Patna, the capital city of Bihar is situated at a crossroad of 25°36'0" N latitudes and 85°7'0" E longitudes. It is the largest city of the state spreading over an area of 99.45 sq. km. The population of Patna is over 14, 42,992 (Census of India, 2001). Patna Municipal Corporation Area has been divided in 72 wards, which have been further re-arranged into 4 Circles, namely- New Capital, Bankipur, Kankarbagh and Patna City respectively (District Gazette 2007). The present study has been carried out in the New Capital and Patna City circles of the P.M.C. Area, which incidentally occupy the western and eastern parts of the city (Figure – 1).

Figure – 1

Study Area: Patna Municipal Corporation Area
(New Capital and Patna City)



Findings, Discussion and Analysis :

A detailed analysis of the status of child labourers of the study area suggests that the children working as labourers are of very young age and their work is against the laws of government. The sexual composition of child labourers under review has been distinctly inclined towards the males; the concerned sex ratios being only 180:1000 in New Capital and 240:1000 in Patna City circles respectively.

The working children generally come from the socially backward stratum of the society and often belong to large families with low income standard (Sinha, 2008: 172-176). The pattern of family income of the children under review speaks volumes about the apathy and helplessness of these juvenile workers, as more than 90% of the working children are found to be from the families living below poverty line. It is interesting to note that among the child labourers covered by the survey, the share of the migrated ones is as high as 67%; 74% in New Capital and 60% in Patna City circles respectively. The findings reveal that the large share of working population including the children come from the rural or the suburban belts around to the city of Patna for employment. Here both the push and the pull factors of rural-urban migration seem to have worked. Poverty, lack of job opportunities, growing population and pressure on land in villages as push factors and that of the opportunities of jobs in urban areas as the pull factor must have influenced the parents to send their wards to seek employment in the nearby city of Patna.

Economic Status :

In the present study carried out in the Patna M.C. Area, the child labourers are found to be engaged both at domestic as well as at commercial sectors. However, the shares of the children working in the commercial places such as shops, tea stalls and roadside eateries have been distinctly more than those of whom working in the houses as maids or servants (Table –1).

Table – 1

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Nature of Employment (in %)

Type of Work	New Capital	Patna City
Vendor (Chat/ Gupchup/ juice etc.)	10	12
Kirana/ Grocery Shop	18	22
Dhaba/ Eateries/ Tea Stalls	16	22
Domestic Help	10	12
Vegetable/ Fruit Seller	20	10
Others (motor garage/ repair shop/ rag pickers etc.)	26	22
Total	100	100

Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

The child labour being an illegal phenomenon does not follow any stipulated working hour. The working children seem to be at the mercy of their employers as far as the working hours are concerned. The findings reveal certain noticeable spatial variations in this regard. 22% children in New Capital against 8% in Patna City work for less than 5 hours/day. The share of child labourers working for 5 to 10 hours/day have been 58% in New Capital and 48% in Patna City; while that of those working for 10 to 20 hours/day have been 20% in New Patna against 44% in Patna City circles (Table – 2).

Table – 2

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Working Hours (in %)

Hours of Working	New Capital	Patna City
0 to 5	22	8
5 to 10	58	48
10 to 15	18	44
15 to 20	2	0
Total	100	100

Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

The probable reasons behind the regional variations in this particular aspect could be the recent concentration of greater numbers of shopping centres, offices and business establishments in the New Capital area abiding with fixed business timings; and the concentration of

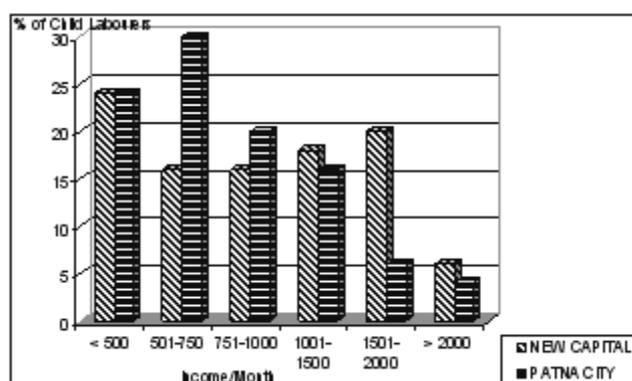
relatively newer settlers and migrants in this part of the city having relatively higher level of awareness related to this particular issue.

In general these children are victims of economic exploitation and the employers seem to extract maximum work from them without adequate remuneration. In fact the respective employers take the advantage in absence of any wage regulations in case of child labour in the country. The Figure - 1 shows the income structure of the child labourers working in the study area of Patna.

The findings reveal that nearly 3/4th of the children under review earn less than 1000 per month for their respective work and only a meager 5% of them earn more than 2000. The rest have a monthly income ranging from 1000 to 2000. In terms of regional variations of the income structure of the child labourers belonging to the two circles of the city, the children of New Capital circle are a little ahead of their counterparts of Patna City circle. The New Capital area houses some bigger and newer business establishments; and also some upcoming residential and shopping complexes. The apartment and mall culture is on the rise and the people coming for various jobs in corporate and government sectors have preferred to settle in this part of the city. Thus relatively better income opportunities are available to the working children here than the older settled areas and commercial establishments in the Patna City circle.

Figure – 1

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Income Structure (in %)



Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

The working children generally do not have control over their earning and they hand over their income to their parents or guardians or send it to their native village. More than 65% of the child labourers send money to their parents or guardians/native places on regular basis; while another 15% do so sometimes. Though there are certain areal variations regarding the amount of income spent on the families in the two areas included in the study, one thing is clear that the earnings of child labourers largely benefit their respective families.

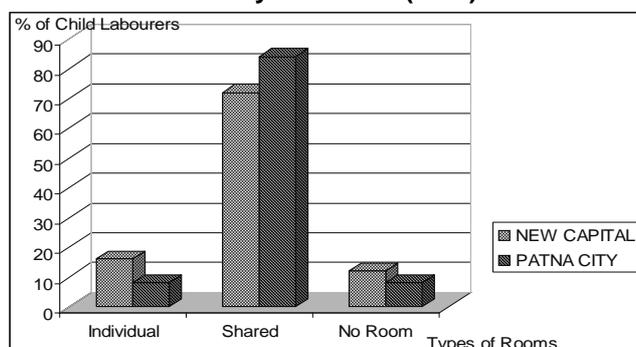
It is indeed difficult for the child labourers to save from the meagre amount they get. The findings reveal that out of the 100 child labourers covered by the survey after sending money homes, only 41% do some sort of saving. The areal variation in this regard is quite prominent. The shares of child labourers going for saving are 52% in New Capital circle and only 30% in Patna City circle respectively. The reasons are clear. The relatively better income status of the children of New Capital circle seem to have influenced them in larger share to go for saving and vice versa.

Social Status :

The overall social status of the child labourers in the present study has been judged by the variables such as housing or room facility and the civic amenities like electricity and toilet on one hand; and those of availability of food and nutrition, health status, level of education, recreational pursuits, leisure activities and social disorder on the other.

Figure – 2

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Room Facility Available (in %)



Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

The Figure – 2 presents the availability of room facility among the child labourers working in the two areas of the city. The findings also reveal that in both the areas the largest numbers of working children live in the shared rooms (72% in New Capital and 84% in Patna City). It is quite obvious that the paucity of money restrict these children to spend on separate accommodation. In fact 12% of the working children of New Capital and 8% in Patna City circles absolutely lack any kind of housing; and are forced to live on footpaths, pavements or some roadside shelters. Regarding the availability of electric supply, the children covered by the survey seem to be more or less fortunate as 81% of them avail this facility with nominal variation (82% in New Capital and 80% in Patna City circles). But still there are 19% of those who are devoid of this essential amenity as shown in the Table – 3.

Table – 3

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Availability of Civic Amenities (in %)

Circles	Electricity	Toilet Facility
New Capital	82	70
Patna City	80	76

Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

However, in terms of the availability of another important civic amenity toilet, the children under review do not seem to be that fortunate. The findings reveal that 27% of the child labourers do not have any toilet facility leaving them to look for a place like open drain, railway track or some wasteland to answer nature's call. Interestingly, in the terms of availability of toilets the children working in Patna City area are marginally ahead as 76% of them have this facility against 70% of those living in New Capital area (Table – 3). The possible reason behind the larger share of children not having the toilet facility in the New Capital circle could be the presence of upcoming newer construction sites, railway tracks and relatively more open lands in this part of the city compared to the congested Patna City area.

Regarding the procurement of daily meals, the largest numbers of working children in the study area depend on self cooked food; followed by those who are given food by their respective employers. These children prefer self prepared food which is definitely cheaper than the readymade stuff or the food obtained from shops and they do not have to be at the mercy of their employers either. However, the share of children buying food from shops is relatively higher in the Patna City area, probably because of the still available cheaper food shops in this part of the city. Quite obviously the child labourers do not get adequate nutrition everyday; and seem to have adapted themselves and appear to be satisfied with the food they receive.

The educational level of these children is understandably found out to be very poor mainly due to poverty, lack of resources and unawareness. Many of these children appear to have dropped out from schools to get into the various fields of employment in order to supplement their families. Some of them do not have any interest in education. Some children seem to have received informal education either from their parents or from their employers. Anyway, a little hope amid this bleak scenario is that more than half of them at least are able to read and write and could be considered literates by the standard laid down in the Census of India.

The child workers under review seem to have satisfactory health and are generally free from noticeable diseases. They generally depend on nearby medical shops at the time of need, the shares of such children being 44% in New Capital and 54% in Patna City circles respectively (Table – 4). At the time of common ailments the child labourers find nearby medical shops quite handy and convenient. For some other diseases they prefer to visit the government hospitals where free treatment is provided.

Table – 4

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Pattern of Medical Care (in %)

Places of Treatment	New Capital Circle	Patna City Circle
Government Hospital	40	28
Doctor's Clinic	10	6
Medical Shop	44	54
Any Other	6	12
Total	100	100

Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

The working children seek to find time for some recreation amid their mundane life; but it is sad to note that nearly one-fifth of them do not get any chance of recreation at all. These children otherwise burdened with workload thus try to entertain themselves by some leisure activities; the notable ones being watching T.V., listening to music, playing and gossiping. Their average days of leave are mainly 4 to 5 days per month. Many of them seem to get long holidays during some festivals. Some children do not get holidays at all indicating the extent of exploitation they have to face.

A sizeable number of the working children have to face harassments from their employers or clients mainly in forms of beating, use of abusive language, mental torture and so on. Though the child labourers of the study area do not seem to face harassment on regular basis, but nearly half of them have to bear this agony sometimes. It is also a matter of deep concern that quite a number of child labourers, precisely 34% of them are found to be habitually addicted with chewing tobacco (khaini), gutkha, cigarette / bidi or betel leaf (pan) which are definitely very much injurious to their health (Table – 5).

Table – 5

Child Labourers in Patna M.C. Area: Pattern of Addiction (in %)

Types of Addiction	New Capital Circle	Patna City Circle
Alcoholism	2	0
Smoking	10	8
Khaini	16	12
Gutkha	28	30
Any Other	20	6
No Addiction	30	44
Total	100	100

Source : Primary Field Survey, 2010.

Conclusion and Suggestions :

In a nutshell it could be concluded that these children of tender age are brought into various fields of employment by their parents and family members. The existing poverty and need for more working hands are the main reasons behind this. The children in general exhibit poor socio-economic structure and are even faced with certain social disorders. The findings of the study thus validate the working hypothesis to a considerable extent.

However, in terms of overall economic and social structures, the child labourers working in the New Capital circle present a relatively better standard than those of the Patna City circle. In general the working children seem to have adapted themselves with the difficult circumstances and compromising situations. They have, to a great extent, accepted this social malady as their misfortune and destiny and have tried to be somewhat satisfied with their present lives.

Amid the existing scenario the findings in the present study lead to certain suggestions for the improvement in the overall conditions of the child labourers and for the total abolition of this social evil; such as effective implementation of the Child Labour Acts, punishments for all who indulge in exploitation of child labourers, implementation of

the government schemes of child and family welfare, efforts for promotion of primary education and reduction of school dropouts, spreading awareness among the common mass, and inclusion of concerned topics in the course curriculum of schools. The need of the hour is to sensitize the enforcement machinery in order to make sure that the existing laws and provisions are well implemented in letter and spirit (Tripathi, 2010: 104-106).

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