

# The hidden face of female child labour!!

One of the most indispensable persons in the lives of those settled in urban areas in India is a domestic help and she assumes great importance in my house as well. Although she is mostly invisible to everyone as she does the household chores and leaves immediately once done, a day of her absence creates havoc in the



*Image Source: The News Minute*

house. However, we forget the hardships and sacrifices they make to make ends meet. We cease to think of her elder girl child who fends for herself and her younger siblings while her mother is away at work. She has opted to stay out of school to look after her siblings and at times accompanies her mother when required. In her mother's absence, she has been compelled to work as domestic help to compensate for loss of wages. Nonetheless, it is unfortunate that we were ignorant of her age too, and directly or indirectly, we were taking away her right to education, health and honestly her right to childhood.

Adherence to traditional gender roles puts a dual burden of housework, work outside home, sometimes paid or unpaid, on these girls. It throws light on the issues we come across everyday but tend to ignore for our own convenience.

Although India is showing exponential economic growth, it still has myriad challenges to tackle, one of which is gender discrimination particularly towards girl child at all levels. Article I of the United Nations Convention ratified by India, defines any individual below 18 years as a child. It goes without saying, the younger the child, the more vulnerable s/he is, in terms of being exploited and abused.

According to the fact sheet of Andhra Pradesh Child Rights Advocacy Foundation (Wikigender), 186 million children in the age group of 5 -14 are engaged in child labour worldwide, out of which 49% are girls. In India, child labour is still prevalent in many states despite the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016. As per the Census 2011, 3.9% of the total child population (5 -14 years) are employed either as main or marginal workers in India (International Labour

organization, 2017). There is hardly any data available on girl child labour although it does contribute widely to the family, community and society at large.

An econometric analysis on female child labour in India indicates that the proportion of a girl child in the age group of 5 to 14 years being out of school is 4 percent more than that of a boy. Also as age increases, girls not attending school surpasses that of boys by almost 3 percent as they are responsible for the household chores. The proportion of girls remaining out of school in rural areas is 10 percent higher than in urban areas (Nongkynrih & Chakrabarty, 2014)

Various studies have revealed (Burra, 1997; Dev and Ravi, 2002; Allais, 2009) that the employment framework does not cover all the aspects of a child's work. The most important example is unpaid domestic and household work done by girl children which is mostly unrecognised because house work is considered unskilled in nature and is unpaid as it is seen as a responsibility, a labour of love.

Considered a liability for most parents, girls are valued less and hence the probability of being sent to school is also less than that for boys. Lack of education or any further training opportunities hinders her ability to move up in life. This vicious cycle is hard to break and this girl child becomes an exploited adult woman, and her contribution to economy is considered negligible as her work is un-recognised and under-valued. It also limits her possibilities in the labour market and further relegates to low grade jobs.

As per an article on Wikigender titled, "*Girl Child Labourers in India*" the reasons for choosing female child over male child labourers are; they are timid, compliant, responsible, do not have any addictions, are more hardworking than boys and invariably there is tremendous pressure to conform to stereotypical norms of being a good girl". Girl children are mostly engaged in industries such as glass making, beedi tolling, carpet weaving, agriculture, domestic work, rag picking, textiles and sometimes sex work. Although there are various laws to protect child rights, we seem to fail our girl children when it comes to protecting their rights and their childhood.

The International Labour organisation (ILO) launched the World Day against child labour in 2002 to focus on the extent of child labour globally and concerted efforts needed to eliminate it. Population First's interventions *Laadli* and AMCHI strives to create awareness regarding gender issues and promotes equality through various platforms across India. But PF's interventions alone will not suffice to address these deep-rooted gendered mindsets and prejudices. Unless we all come together and invest towards educating not just girls but communities, the future of our girl children remains bleak and we will continue to remain a developing nation, and not a developed one.

## Bibliography

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