VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOUR IN BIDAR, KARNATAKA, INDIA

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Abstract

Can vocational education solve the problem of child labour? By this we mean, are the existing facilities in the form of effective infrastructure, facilities and reach of the vocational education a solution to the question of child labour? This requires a comprehensive examination of the problem. The question involves a certain assumption that in the prevailing situation child labourers possesses an adequate level of awareness about and access to vocational education in the first place. Here, we attempt to examine some of these dimensions of vocational education, as they exist now.

Introduction

The problem of child labour continues to elude effective solutions in the developing countries, especially India owing to various socio-economic and political factors. While there is a significant progress made in reducing the number of child labourers, the actual magnitude of it remains a major concern. Even as earnest efforts are on towards eradicating the problem, one important solution that is considered a way out in respect of the problem of child labour relates to vocational education. That vocational education at an early or adolescent age of children can take them out of child labour is something that deserves some attention. Hence the purpose of this paper is to examine the proposition that vocational education can be a practicable solution to the child labour problem. The study district happens to be Bidar in Karnataka, India[1].

Most writings on child labour often lack a theory or theoretical base in understanding child labour. In fact it is difficult to find a theory, if one ever existed, that explains the dynamics of child labour. That the problem is related to poverty in a significant manner is often recognised. Therefore the theory of poverty-- which often is also reflected in poverty of theory-- is also applicable to child labour. Poverty under a capitalist model development is a systemic feature involving/requiring cheap labour force. The distributive regime under the capitalist development process is systemically skewed towards owners/mangers of capital and its knowledge workers-the middle class. Therefore, the outer peripheries of this distributive regime remain generally impoverished and economically deprived. The child labour phenomenon exists in these outer social and spatial peripheries. As long as the system reproduces without significant and effective state interventions in terms of altering the distributive regime of capitalism, the phenomenon is more likely to persist. The state can intervene by way of filling the void

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[1] While discussing the situation of vocational education we have to mention at the out set that our data is limited to Bidar district only and this data is largely generalizable for the other districts such as Chamaraja Nagar.

caused by the systemic failure, but this state-led alleviation syndrome can not take us far unless the distributive regime is altered significantly. Besides, the state in developing countries is also ineffective besides being insufficiently motivated to deal with such tasks. Often the enthusiasm shown towards labour is not as towards capital. This is further compounded by the regime-specific features such as the spatial concentration, orientation towards the global markets and the insensitivity and narcissism of other social classes towards the problem. As mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph, the state does from time to time point towards solving the systemic problem by pointing to measures such as vocational education. That is why this paper deals mainly with vocational education and child labour. This paper is majorly empirical in nature. Often it is not possible to develop a full fledged theory based rigorous empirical work in a short paper. Therefore, this paper is subject to these limitations.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in the paper is to move from discussion of the general situation of vocational education and problems therein to the particular case of Bidar district. We discuss the constraints faced by the child labourers in terms of accessing vocational education and the limitations of the government and private vocational educational institutions in reaching out to the labouring children. We also deal with the aspirations of child labourers and their parents as against vocational education. Our data is, to a large extent primary in nature based on field notes and we also make use of the secondary data provided by the authorities concerned with respect to vocational education in Bidar district.

Discussion: Providing Vocational Education as a way out of Child Labour

Can vocational education solve the problem of child labour? By this we mean are the existing facilities the form of effective infrastructure, facilities and reach of the vocational education are solutions to the question of child labour? This requires an examination of the problem. The question incorporates a certain assumption that in the prevailing situation, child labourers are adequately aware of the availability of vocational education in the first place. Here, we attempt to examine some of the aspects of vocational education, existing as of now based on our field work.

First, we need to deal with the assumption that vocational education, as it exists now, is known to every child labourer as a potential solution. Our field insights indicate that most of the child labourers across various sectors ranging from agriculture to urban garages do not know that they can come out of their problem by taking up vocational education. This is particularly the case with children involved in agriculture, livestock rearing or some other rural activities. Even peer group information regarding the availability of opportunities vocational education is unlikely to come by in the rural sector. This seriously affects the aspirations of both child labourers and their parents.

Besides, the existing schooling system does not generate among children regarding the availability of any awareness about the possibilities of vocational education. This creates difficulty even for child labourers who have been to schools but dropped out at some stage. This problem can be overcome by conducting some awareness campaigns about the opportunities and possibilities in the

vocational education field. The present schooling system, both in rural and urban areas, is restricted to numeracy and literacy and not to any information or knowledge about livelihood opportunities either for the drop outs or for those who continue their education even up to High School.

A more difficult problem concerns children who have not been able to go to school at all. The number of these children in both rural and urban areas is quite high and these children fall completely out of the network of vocational education infrastructure, as it exists now. Their parents also come mostly from the marginalised sections and are unlikely to be aware of the way out of the practice of child labour through vocational education. The peer groups among children are also unlikely to provide information regarding vocational education; and even in case they become aware of the potential benefits of vocational education and aspire to take it up, they may not be able to pursue vocational education as it exists at present, because they lack the required eligibility criterion to join the institutions of vocational education. Therefore, the problem is more acute for child labourers who with no formal schooling. They are condemned to be out of the vocational educational opportunities.

This calls for proper policy responses. Schooling curricula have to be modified to include information about vocational courses. The opportunities that are available for livelihoods through vocational education must be brought to the attention of the students in schools at a very early stage. Secondly, policy responses would hold critical implications for those children who have never attended school. These children need to be given an opportunity to access vocational education that can lead to their sustainable livelihood. At present the vocational education is run as a business. Vocational education needs to be provided by the state.

Access to and Affordability of Vocational Education:

More difficult problems are involved in terms of affordability and access to vocational education. Here, we briefly discuss the accessibility part of the problem before we move on to the discussion of the availability part of vocational education. Vocational education as it exists today presupposes certain educational attainments and skills. For example, for all vocational courses that are available in India in general and Karnataka in particular, the minimum educational attainment is SSLC. Unless a student is SSLC passed her enrolment to any of the vocational courses is not possible. That is, a child has to undergo a minimum of ten years before he or she can think of vocational training. This eligibility criterion, whatever may be its merits, excludes a large number of children who have dropped out of school and of course those who have never been to school. Thus, access to vocational training, even in a formal sense, is very limited. There is a need to rethink this criterion and ways have to be found for enabling even those who have not completed ten years of education to take up the vocational courses, as they exist now. Accessibility certainly needs certain educational skills such as elementary mathematics or computational skills, but these should not become a major hurdle in the pursuit of vocational education.

The case of those who have never been to school is even more pathetic. In the present context of vocational education, they are nowhere near accessing vocational education. Thus a large chunk of child labourers remains totally deprived of the opportunity of acquiring vocational education. Let us remind ourselves of the fact that this is happening in a context where traditional, informal modes

of vocational training have all declined while the new and modern modes of vocational education are inaccessible.

With this, we come to the question of affordability of vocational education on the part of child labourers. This is interesting because in a country with a large number of poor people and child labourers, for vocational education to become a solution there should be accessibility in monetary terms. More over education should be meaningful enough so as to lead to sustainable livelihoods. Both are at present less than adequate or satisfactory at present. Vocational education as it exists now is firstly, largely privatised; secondly, even after affording it there is no guarantee that the vocational education will lead to a livelihood

Analysis of Field Survey Data from Bidar District

The field experience shows that in Bidar District across the sample villages students and children from eleven villages access vocational education through government run institutions, while in around 29 villages, students access training from the private sector institutions. The data clearly shows that training in Electrical and Electronics courses is most popular as it is accessed by students in 18 villages closely followed by training in Mechanical trades such as plumbing and fitting in 12 villages.

It follows from our field study that the courses offered, and the courses accessed are the most conventional courses available with conventional Industrial Training Institutes and that there is no innovativeness in the courses. Secondly, the range of options available for potential vocational training are very narrow. They have to choose from among the conventional courses offered by the VTIs.

It comes out very clearly from the data we have collected from the field that most of the vocational education courses offered in Bidar spread over 12 months duration while the courses lasting less than 12 months number a few. That is a short and quick training in VTE is not available in Bidar as per our data. Electrical and Electronics courses are most preferred ones in Bidar district.

It is very clearly evident from the field data that the students falling under the age group of 15 to 18 are the ones who attend the vocational education courses to a large extent. In Bidar district, according to the data that we have collected in 33 out of 39 cases students belong to the age group of 15 to 18 years. Among these boys outnumber girls-- out of a total, of 33,23 are boys while the remaining 10 are girls. This is the age profile of students attending VTE courses. Of these again as we have noted above, the preference for Electrical and Electronics Courses appears to be higher in Bidar district.

The field work done in Bidar clearly shows that a overwhelming proportion of students that is, more than half (17 out of 32) students spend more than Rs. 20,000 for accessing VTE in Bidar district while another eight spend between 12,000 to 20,000 for accessing vocational education 4 out of 32 spend about 6,000 to 12,000 and those who spend less than six thousand per course constitute only three.

Vocational Education in Bidar District

In all, there are four types of vocational education being offered in Bidar. They are: Polytechnic colleges, Industrial Training Institutes, Job Oriented Courses and Job Linked Courses. We discuss the

details below. In the following discussion we have not, however, dealt with Polytechnic collages because although there are two Polytechnic colleges in Bidar, they cater basically to students who have completed PUC(Pre-University Course or intermediate level of education) and require higher levels of education as compared to Industrial Training Institutes or other courses mentioned above. Therefore, in the following, we basically deal with the latter.

Industrial Training Institutes

Vocational education in Bidar consists of three types: Industrial Training Institutes, Job linked Courses and Job Oriented Courses. First we deal with the information related to Industrial Training Institutes followed by Job Linked Courses and Job Oriented Courses.

As in other Indian states, there are government ITI colleges and privately run ITI colleges in Karnataka. There are two Government Industrial Training Institutes in Bidar district, one is situated in Bidar and the other is in Humnabad. Any student between 14 to 40 years can pursue an ITI course. Further, there is a 33 percent reservation for girls in Government colleges but the Private ITIs do not follow this. The details of ITIs in Bidar district are provided below.

There are only two government ITIs: one in Bidar and the other in Humnabad. There are four government aided private ITIs; located in: Bidar, Humnabad, Bhalki and Aurad. The number of private ITI s is huge when compared to the government institutions. There are 37 private and unaided ITI institutions, across all the district of Bidar. The total number of ITI institutions in Bidar adds up to 43. However, one or two of the 37 private ITIs may not be working. All these total 43 Industrial Training Institutions in Bidar cover approximately 900 students in the district.

Government ITI

There are six courses offered in Bidar while only two courses offered in Humnabad in the Government Industrial Training Institutes. The Government ITI in Bidar offers the following courses: Electrician, Electronic Mechanic, Fitter, Welder, Computer Operator and Programme Assistant (COPA), Dress Making. Table-1 provides details of these courses; and the details of the Government ITI in Humnabad are provided in Table–2.

Table-1: Details of ITI Courses in Bidar Town

Sl. No.	Course	Duration	Strength at Present Senior (II yr)	Strength at Present Junior (I yr)	Eligibility Criterion for the Course
1	Electrician	2 years	19	16	SSLC
2	Electronic Mechanic	2 years	19	16	SSLC
3	Fitter	2 years	19	16	SSLC
4	Welder	1 year	24	--	SSLC
5	COPA: Computer operator and Programme Assistant	1 year	20	--	PUC in any discipline
6	Dress Making	1 Year	32	--	SSLC
			Total=133	**Total=48**	**Grand Total=181**

Source: The Govt.ITI, Bidar,March,2006.

Table - 2: Details of courses offered at Government ITI, Humnabad, Bidar

Sl. No.	Course	Duration	Strength at present Senior (II Yr)	Strength at present Junior (I Yr)	Eligibility Criterion for the Course
1	Fitter	2 yrs	19	16	SSLC
2	MRAC: Mechanic-Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	2 yrs	19	16	SSLC
			Total=38	**Total=32**	**Grand Total=70**

Source: Govt. ITI, Bidar, March 2006.

The fee structure in Government Industrial Training Institutes remains within the reach of most of the aspirants unlike in Private Industrial Training Institutes. The Per Annum /Per Student fee, common for all the courses, comes to Rs. 1200. In addition the examination fee is works out to Rs. 270. The total fee for a two-year course adds up to Rs. 2670; however, for one-year courses the total fee works out to Rs.1470. The fee structure in private colleges is the same, but the private colleges charge huge sums as donation or capitation fee in addition to this.

The final examination for the ITI courses is a National Examination conducted by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT), with its head office in New Delhi. This examination is conducted for these courses all over India at the same time and on the same day and month of the year. This is a common National Examination. The NCVT comes under the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET from hereon), New Delhi. The Karnataka State office of this is called Directorate of Employment and Training or DET, which is situated in Bangalore.

While the above are the basic facts about the Industrial Training Institutes in Bidar District, there are two apparently important issues that have come out of the discussion held with the faculty of these institutes. The first is about the revising and updating of the syllabi of these institutes; the second is about the introduction of new courses relating to emerging sectors such as Information Technology and up gradation of the Institutes so that they become more relevant in the present developmental context as both the aspects are inter-related.

Regarding revising of the syllabus there are already subjects such as Computer Hardware Mechanic called CHM, included in the list of subjects of DGET, which is not yet implemented in Bidar and Karnataka. The existing syllabus on computer courses can be improved by adding this subject /course. Regarding new courses, there are about 36 other courses, which are icluded in the introducable list of the DGET; however, some of these are implemented elsewhere but not in Karnataka in entirity and Bidar in particular.

The upgrading of Industrial Training Institutes is very much essential in the present context. This involves upgrading of both the syllabi and the facilities of learning in the existing courses. Even in the conventional courses such as fitter, electrician and so on, it is now imperative for the Industrial Training Institutes to upgrade their teaching and learning facilities. This is particularly important in order to meet the demands of the market that are fast changing. Since technologies in industries are fast changing as the industry is using more and more advanced technologies than can be met by the existing courses and training facilities at the Industrial Training Institutes. This requires up gradation of

existing institutes both in terms of courses and facilities. Two suggestions emerging sharply from the discussions with government Industrial Training Institutes are that first, courses such as Computer Hardware Mechanic (CHM) should be immediately introduced by the Institutes. Secondly the conventional courses such as Fitter; Electrician should also be upgraded with improved teaching facilities.

There are some particular problems pertaining to Bidar as reported by the representatives of the institutes. These are problems such as backwardness of industrial development in the district of Bidar. This lack of development of industry in Bidar, particularly the manufacturing industry forces quite a number of successful students to migrate in to long distances in search of employment. The faculty of these institutes just believing that for vocational education to become successful they need both training and industrialization, as the latter can absorb the trained students.

Job Oriented Courses (JOCs) and Job Linked Courses (JLCs):

In all, there are twenty-eight Centres of Job Oriented Courses (JOCs) and Job Linked Courses (JLCs) in Bidar District. These two courses come under the Deputy Director of Pre-University and Vocational Education at the District level. There is a difference between JOCs and JLCs, even though both are of two years duration. While the JOCs are equivalent to PUC, the JLCs are not. The JOCs are more detailed courses in vocational education than the JLCs. The eligibility criterion for both the courses is, however, SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate). The JOCs in Bidar district in every batch train around 1000 to 1300 students in vocational courses. During our field study the total number of students in the first year of JOC stood at 1333 while the total number of students enrolled in second year of JOC were about 1000. Unlike ITI courses, the upper age limit for JOCs and JLCs is 22 years for boys and 26 years for girls. JOC is equivalent to PUC and is recognized by the Government of Karnataka. In addition to the vocational training, the JOC students also receive instruction in two languages of which English is compulsory, and the other language is optional. On the other hand JLC is not equivalent to PUC. It is also a two-year course but is not recognized as being equivalent to PUC. The above point makes some difference to students. While the JOC students can pursue graduate degree, i.e., engineering degree in the same subject but the JLC students cannot. But inspite of this facility, teachers of JOC inform us that the JOC students still face some disadvantages in studying the technical graduate degree as compared to the regular PUC students.

While the total number of students trained by JOCs and JLCs is high, the interviews with the students reveal that private manufacturing firms and industries basically prefer ITI students to JOC or JLC students. Therefore, there is a high demand for ITI courses in the education market. Given the above demand for ITI instruction, the private institutions have been making huge profits by charging a high capitation fee from each student, any where from Rupees 20,000 to 40,000 per course. This has been a major disincentive for poor students aspiring to take up vocational education that can potentially lead to employment.

It should, however, be noted that even after completing the courses, after paying hefty amounts to private colleges, the students have not been able to get employment locally and within the

vicinity of their villages. They travel far and wide in search of employment after completing the Industrial training courses. All this holds major policy implications for this front. We turn to that.

Conclusions and Policy Implications:

What policy implications does the above scenario hold for vocational education? First, the entrance criterion required for joining a vocational course should be reconsidered. Even those students who have not been able to clear SSLC should be allowed to pursue vocational courses. The eligibility criterion should not be SSLC but 7th standard or so. The age limit can also be relaxed.

Secondly, the number of government colleges or the number of seats in the present colleges should be increased in order to accommodate aspiring students: both girls and boys.

Thirdly regarding the private colleges, which are quite large in number, there should be regulatory mechanisms in place such as a cap on the capitation fee, enrolment of students with merit without capitation fee, and provision of scholarships for meritorious students from out of the profits they make. Presently the ITI market is highly unregulated and hence proper regulatory mechanisms have to be put in place.

Fourthly, the quality of the existing government ITI colleges has to be upgraded by improving facilities as well as curricula. This should be done keeping in mind the emerging market demands both in respect of the manufacturing and in the software/hardware sectors. Up gradation of vocational training institutions is very important in the context of fast changing technological development. Therefore, the government should take vocational education seriously and syllabi, facilities and curricula should be upgraded on a regular basis.

Fifthly, vocational training as a way out of child labour should be popularised among students studying in high schools and middle schools. A certain extent of awareness generation regarding the opportunities in vocational training is important.

Sixthly, there should be enough courses in vocational training institutions that can also accommodate the girl students.

Seventhly, the local government institutions should maintain information regarding all the available vocational education opportunities at the Taluk, intermediate and District level offices. This information providing function can be undertaken by the local self-governments both in Panchayats and Municipalities without much difficulty. In ideal circumstances, the local self governments should be given a lead role in maintaining a register of all child labourers in villages; municipalities; and citizens can look forward to local governments to maintain these registers; so that the child labourers thus identified can be guided towards some or other vocational education.

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Annexure

Table - 3: Details of JOC and JLC courses in Bidar District

Sl. No	Name of the College	Course Name	Number of Students in Iyr.	JOC / JLC
1	Akkamahadevi Women's P. U. College Bidar	C G D M *	33	JOC
2	Pannalal Heralal P U College Bidar	1. Electrical Wiring 2. Sericulture 3. Automobile servings	38 33 35	JOC JOC JOC
3	Renuka P.U.College Bidar	C G D M	26	JOC
4	S. S. Khuba College Basavakalyan	1. Electrical Wiring 2. Audio Visual Technology 3. Automobile Servicing	38 30 30	JOC JOC JOC
5	Channabasweshara College Bhalki	1. Electrical Wiring 2. Computer Technique	40 40	JOC JOC
6	Amareshwar Degree College Aurad	C G D M *	28	JOC
7	Shivaji P.U. College Bhalki.	1. Computer Technique 2. Civil Construction Technology	31 25	JOC JOC
8	Akkmahadevi P.U.College Bhalki	C G DM *	33	JOC
9	S.P.K.P.U.College Basavakalyan	C G D M *	28	JOC
10	Govt Boys P.U. College Humanabad	Automobile Servicing	40	JOC
11	Al-Ameen P.U.College Bidar	1. C G D M 2. Computer Technique	35 40	JOC JOC
12	Priyadrshni P.U College Kamalnagar (Aurad Talluk)	1. C G D M 2. Electrical Wiring 3. Library Science	28 32 29	JOC JOC JOC
13	Chandrashekhar P.U.College Mannaekhelli Humnabad	Electrical Wiring	40	JOC
14	S.V.E.T. P.U.College Humnabad	1. C G D M 2. Electrical Wiring	33 39	JOC JOC
15	Nittur P.U. College Nittur (Bhalki Talluk)	C G D M*	35	JOC
16	Janatha Praveen P.U. College Santhpur	Banking	25	JOC
17	M J P P.U. College Nittur (Bhalki Talluk)	Pre-School Education	34	JOC
18	S.L.Kamthne P.U.College Bidar	C G D M*	39	JOC
19	K.L.E.P.U. College Bidar	1. Computer Technique. 2. Automobile Servicing	28 27	JOC JOC
20	Guruayyappav Degree College Chitaguppa (Humnabad Talluk)	1. Electrical Wiring	40	JOC
21	Satyniketan P.U.College Bhalki	Two Wheeler Servicing	35	JOC
22	Chandrashekhar P.U.College Chitauppa (Humnabad Talluk)	C G D M	25	JOC
23	A.I.M.E.S. P.U.College Bidar	C G D M	32	JOC
24	Govt Girls P.U.College Humnabad	Computer Technique	30	JOC
25	Siddharth P.U.College Bidar	Automobile Servicing	39	JOC
26	S.PK. P.U.College Basavakalyan	C G D M	30	JLC
27	Govt Polytechnic College Bidar	Electrical Wiring	38	JLC
28	Nittur Polytechnic College Bidar	1. Personal Computer. 2. Refrigeration and Conditioner	30 30	JLC JLC
	Total		**1333**	

*C G D M: Commercial Garment Designing and Making