

Book Review

Children at Work Depriving Future Generations of Intellectual capital

*Prof. Nazir Ahmad Gilkar**

In Review

Child Labour in Jammu and Kashmir

by Dr Fayaz Ahmad Nika,

M/S Meezan publishers, Srinagar;

280 pages, Rs. 595

Year of Publication 2010

The problem of child labour has been the focus of proper attention in India since 1980's as a sequel to a fatal accident that took place in the industrial town of SIVAKASI, popularly known as 'Mini Japan' in Tamil Nadu. The constitution of J&K puts an obligation on the State of Jammu and Kashmir to provide all children their right to happy childhood, health care and equal opportunities in education. But, despite that it is a harsh reality that children constitute a sizeable portion of the work force in the state. The presence of child labour is observed in every segment of economic activity in Kashmir.

The children at work are deprived of opportunity to pursue education in schools. They stand debarred from enjoying even a

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minimum amount of recreation. They are forced to put in hard labour in hazardous jobs at a tender age. The society and future generations are also deprived of intellectual capital. However, despite strict regulations to stop child labour, around 2.4 lakh such workers are in J& K. Unfortunately, not a single study has been carried out by the state Government to ascertain the exact number of child labours in the valley (Nika; 2010).

The book "Child Labour in Jammu and Kashmir" under review written by Dr. Fayaz Ahmad Nika has taken up an exhaustive study of this problem. The author is a college Professor and has obtained his Ph D from Kashmir University. He regularly presents his research findings on the subject at national seminars and conferences in and outside the State. And, his research papers find a due place in various professional journals published country-wide. The book under review primarily is the outcome of his doctoral thesis.

The forewords contributed by two eminent personalities.

- The first foreword by Justice KG Bal Krishnan Hon'ble Chief Justice of India is an acknowledgement of the merit of the book and Scholarship of a Kashmiri author on the subject by a constitutional luminary of international standing. This is highly lauded and applauded. The contents read, "It is every ones interest to invest in welfare of children.... an empirically grounded study as the present one.... could prove to be of immense value to policy makers as well as Judges and lawyers".
- The second foreword by Jenab Abdul Gani Malik, Hon'ble Minister for Higher Education, Labour and Employment, Jammu and Kashmir Government also speaks volumes about the content, essence and utility of the book. The Foreword reads, "By studying this thesis, one is forced to think about those who are future of the nation, but are being deprived of the basic facilities like nutrition, health care and education. The thesis can help me and my department to work with more zeal for the eradication of the menace of child labour from our society".

Both these revelations by two important personalities are highly encouraging and praise worthy. In addition, the apex court of the country

and Jammu and Kashmir Ministry of labour have been impressed by the in-depth analysis, elaborate discussion, real findings and workable recommendations put forth in the book under review. The author has felt the pulse rightly by presenting the manuscript to solicit valued and honored opinions on the subject-matter the book deals with, to add its value and offer a road map to weed out this menace from the society. This gesture also reflects the intellectual courage on the part of the author to make his research findings public and expose his research work to constructive criticism for further improvement in successive editions.

The specific objective pursued in this volume is narrated by the author in his preface which reads, "to study the magnitude extent and causes of child labour in valley of Kashmir where children (locals and non-locals) are working in the hilltops and hard to reach areas in life threatening cottage level handicraft units besides restaurants, automobiles, trash collection, brick making and so on".

The author *inter alia* expresses his sincere gratitude to the educational institutions of higher learning and advanced research centers in the country for their academic support he received while compiling this work. A detailed content analysis and list of diagrams, charts and graphs follow a brief content account.

The review of relevant literature in consonance with the title of the book gathered from the available fund of knowledge in the form of survey reports, research theses, books, journals, periodicals and visiting websites in the context of global, national and local scenario since 1975 onwards till 2005 spans almost three decades is a Herculean task and an evidence itself of the hard work the author has invested in this study.

The comprehensive study and rigorous analysis of literature thus gathered enabled the researcher to attain successfully twin purposes:

- To develop as clear and unambiguous conceptual and contextual foundation for the investigation and
- To identify relevant gaps in the existing research on this problem conducted already with a view to avoid any repetitions. It is based on painstaking efforts and above all the academic and research orientation that the author constructed appropriate research problem for analysis, formulated study objectives and

hypotheses and conceived relevant research methodology by creating adequate space for conceptual, exploratory and empirical investigation and analysis.

The two operative chapters viz: (1) child labour in Kashmir (Magnitude and extent of Government Intervention), and (2) Socio-Economic-Ethical Dimensions (Data Analysis and Discussion) constitute the core cluster of the book. The author has conducted a detailed field work and one-to-one interactions with the working children and their parents as a sequel to which he identified multi-dimensional; social, economic educational, psychological factors at least 20 in number responsible for this menace. Each factor identified has been put to contextual and statistical analysis for verification as a wide canvas in respect of its pros and cons with due support of references to the context.

The book accordingly delves deep in;

- Analysing legal frame work on labour legislations enacted within the provisions for prohibitions and in certain cases for regulation of child labour.
- Probing into total disagreement to the principles of ethics based on theoretical construct followed by empirical evidence to assess the real situation in violation of ethical norms.

The divergent views advanced by the propounders of children at work are deep rooted in various myths associated with this problem. The author has employed adequate academic input in exploring the validity of such arguments during his empirical investigation. An objective analysis and elaborate discussion there upon in the spirit of a debate has been attempted and all those unfounded assumptions stand negated. This exercise differentiates the book under review from the existing inventory on the subject. A few misconceptions advanced for perpetuating the menace of child labour critically deliberated upon in the book are quoted thus:

- that child labour is an off shoot of poverty which is a law of nature;
- that children are inquisitive and can learn the skill better;

- that employers oblige poor families by employing their children;
- that nimble finger argument advanced by some people;
- that child labour is better alternative to child begging;
- that end justify means.

The book under review has advanced a variety of superb counter arguments to cut the aforementioned arguments. As for instance following extract referred to *ipso facto* suffices how brilliantly the author puts forth his argument to verify a particular assumption. It reads, "Child labour and child begging are undesirable practices due to their social stigma and a misdirection to human resource development. The adverse effects of both are almost similar. Efforts are on to keep the society away from both. However, it would not be wise to substitute one wrong for another. If the rights of children are to be protected then they have to be saved from ill effects of both...."

The book also documents short case studies based on interactions with child workforce which constitute a very important segment of the core cluster. These case studies are developed, framed and drafted so well meticulously and lively as if the reader is in direct confabulations with the children at their work spots. This speaks volumes about the scholarship and exhibits the real beauty of the book. The aforesaid ruthless stories present sufferings and the author in this context claims, "that veil from certain ugly realities to which the children are subjected to, has been pierced". These case studies can provide a relevant study material for a Programme on child labour.

The book at the end proposes varied recommendations based on fact findings in the context of J&K state and have for reaching policy implications to eradicate this evil from the society. These workable measures are explained in all niceties to ensure their implementation. This can be a classical example of a good connect between operational experience and strategic to eliminate this menace.

The book is appended with research instruments like questionnaires and interview schedules to facilitate future research. A detailed bibliography and subject index also form part of the book. .

The book has a natural flow, consistency and continuity in presenting varied ideas as the subject with due appreciation for aesthetic taste of readers. And this is an interesting read for all engaged in managing labour, entrepreneurs, Government functionaries, legal experts, social workers, academics, students, civil society organizations and so forth.

The book has been published in 2010 by M/S Meezan publishers, Srinagar; hard bound, ISB numbered, priced at Rs. 595 spread over xv+280 pages. The coloured Jacket offers glimpses of tender hands engaged in world of work. In a snap shot children voice their concern by carrying placards in their hands invite attention of society towards their rights.

The present review offers certain suggestions:

- that the author while attempting the second edition may revisit and redesign the entire structure of the book to give it a new look. The present volume sans list of tasks, Glossary of important terms on child workers given at the end may be repositioned to form a part of start-up enabling readers to be fully conversant with the terminology to study the matter in its right perspective.
- that the first two chapters (introduction and review of literature) may be merged and re-arranged in a proper content sequence. Similarly, acknowledgment may form a part of the preface. Further, commentary testing of hypothesis based on x^2 and inferences drawn accordingly in respect of certain phenomena, like:
 - i. Education status of children and parents, and
 - ii. Job satisfaction and gender difference need to be highlighted in the relevant analytical tasks (Table 4.6 and Table 4.7). A book has a different flavour contrary to a research thesis.
- that the text and reference books brought out by the local publishers is highly encouraging and well appreciated. However, they are required to work a bit more with enthusiasm in order to stay in book publishing business in a neck bending competitive

environment when the opportunities are available to the authors only at the distance of a click of the mouse.

The shrinking space for research in higher education institutions is a matter of serious concern especially in the era of assessment and accreditation. The need of the hour is to re-energize research activities in the colleges to perform in line with the national policy.

The book has been published in 2010 by Mrs. Meera publishers, Srinagar, hard bound, ISBN numbered, priced at Rs. 395 spread over xv+280 pages. The coloured jacket offers glimpses of teacher hands engaged in world of work. In a snap shot children voice their concern by carrying placards in their hands, invite attention of society towards their rights.

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