

## Economics of Child Labour in Handicraft Industry

<sup>1</sup>MANVIBENIWAL, <sup>2</sup>DEEPAKSHI SINGH

<sup>1</sup>Student, Economics Department, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, India

<sup>2</sup>Student Economics Department, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, India

Email – <sup>1</sup>manvibenibal93@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>depsingh1399@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The paper explores the functioning of the of the handicraft industries in Jaipur, Rajasthan that extensively employ child labour. Jaipur has the largest population of child workers within Rajasthan where most of the child workers are involved in three sectors (gem and jewellery, bangles and embroidery) of the handicraft industries for which the city and the state both are famous. Apart from being a crisis not just for the children employed as labour but also with respect to competition, child labour is not really a long-term survival strategy for these sectors. Since it gets the sectors trapped into a low-productive, low-wage production system, which are then unable to compete on price with mechanized production. The paper suggests a strategic transition to enable child labour free products to compete better in the national and international market by utilizing a combination of primary and secondary data. It reflects on the contemporary facet of the concept of child labour, and focuses on assessing the hypothesis whether child labour is the only way for these traditional handicraft industries to sustain and survive in the market. It examines the elementary, social and ethical perspective of child labour and its regressive impact on the economy and human progress in consideration with the standpoint of all stakeholders involved and affected by it at every stage is assessed.*

**Key Words:** *Child Labour, Ttraditional Handicrafts, Gems and Jewellery, Bangles and Embriodary*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Child labour conventionally refers to the employment of children, between 5-14 years of age, in industries or businesses, especially when illegal or considered to be exploitative, thus encompassing all the 'economically active' children or gainfully employed children receiving a remuneration for it. The ILO defines 'child labour' as 'work that deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their childhood, their access to education and the acquisition of skills, and which is performed under deplorable conditions harmful to their health and their development'. Similarly, the government of India defines child labor as 'employment of any child below 14 years of age in any occupation including domestic help (except helping one's own family in non-hazardous occupations). (1)(2)

'Child work', on the other hand, refers to the positive participation of the children in an economic activity which includes all the paid and unpaid work for the household or the market, whether it is full time or part time, and is not detrimental to their health and their physical and mental development.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

At present, child labor has increased to an unprecedented level and has grown as an area of research since the 1980s. It is increasingly being recognised that many children are out of the school system largely because they are working or are involved in some kind of work within the household or in industries. Recent surveys and researches conducted by ILO in the South Asian regions and national levels have shown that seven south asian countries estimate 30 million children in employment, almost 17 million in child labour and 50 million children out of school. The ILO study Measuring Children's Work in South Asia suggest that among the South Asian countries, child labourers between the age range of 15-17 years is the highest in India (5.8 million). It estimates the number of working children to be around 29 million ( a comparatively low estimate as it excludes a significant number of children in a number of countries and all the children involved in employment in Afghanistan), (International Labour Organization , 2015).It is estimated 168 million children worldwide of the age of 7 years are in child labour, thus statistically making it almost equivalent to 11 percent of the child population of the world ( 6-17 years). More than half of these children are involved in hazardous work, which takes a toll on their health, physical and mental well being and development, either because of the nature of the work or the conditions in which it is being carried out. The report as a whole shows that the number of child labourers has declined significantly by one third between 2008 and 2012, with the Asia pacific region registering the largest decline amongst the 5-17 year olds.

Neera Burra(2005) in her article, Crusading for Children in India's Economy 2005, focuses on situation of Child labour at the national level. She emphasises on the fact that the purist definition of labour should be changed to include both kinds of work, paid and unpaid. According to her study children are hired because workers are to be acclimatised to the hazardous working conditions when young in order to do this work as adults, they are hired also because they do not need any special physical dexterity, which is not possessed by the adults<sup>3</sup>. The ILO/CORT study also depicted why from an industrial point of view children are hired, because they are innocent and less aware of their rights. Neera Burra also takes into account the participation of young girls as child labour and the issues faced by them. The various methods and practices used for recruiting child labour, such as through the intermediation of adult employees who know vulnerable families, with the system of subcontracting, where the work is also farmed out to the children at their homes or work is provided to poor families at home where they can use child labour and pass this off as family labour are also discussed in her paper, (Burra, 2005)(3)

Jain Mahaveer (1992) revealed that the graphic detail on the exploitative conditions and the hazardous nature of work that obtain the brassware industry of Moradabad where a large number of labour force is child labour, (jain, 1992).(4) Jain Mahaveer (1993) discussed in another study the nature of the of work obtained in the carpet weaving industry of Jammu and Kashmir that employs a large work force in the area, (Mahaveer, 1993)(5). Babu (1998) emphasised that 93.4 percent of the total sample male children are concentrated as working than girls, because girls work within the houses. He also observed that a good number of the working children attended school (59.5 per cent) and then go to industry for the other half of the day, (K.S.) (6)

From the preceding detailed literature existing in the field of economic analysis of child labour we find a few shortcomings which include a predominant bias of being macro studies and a lack of micro analysis on the subject. An initiative of dissecting the problem into small places and then making an intensive effort to assess the reality is a must to touch the core reality of the subject.

### **3. OBJECTIVES:**

The paper explores the prominence of child labour within the handicraft industries of Jaipur. This paper intends to evaluate the hypothesis that child labour is the only way for these traditional handicraft industries to sustain and survive in the market. The objective of this paper is to closely look at the value chains of each of three sectors- name them, and how child labour creeps into it. In addition to substantiate this study it is important to identify the key actors in the value chains and the role that each stakeholder plays. The paper also aims to study the character of child labour that exists which includes identifying whether the children are trafficked or are a part of the family depends on the skill requirement furthermore it is essential to determine the role that they play in both low-value and high-value handicrafts. Finally aim to illuminate legal, efficient and alternative strategies to combat child labour and run the handicraft sector profitably without child labour.

### **4. METHODOLOGY:**

We identified and approached various key persons and stakeholders in the various segments of the handicraft industries in Jaipur. The areas of work of all the three sectors ( Bangles, Embroidery, Gems and Jewellery) were identified and it was found that there were a few areas where all these three sectors were functioning simultaneously but in separate mohallas (alleys).

Five interviews of both gems and jewellery and bangle making sectors (as both these sectors have maximum child labour) were conducted and 2 interviews of the other sector ( Aari Taari and Zardozi) were conducted. Apart from that a few wholesalers, retailers from all the three sectors and tourist and tour guides were conducted. A survey of about 50 consumers was conducted and of a few government and international agency representatives such as those from Child Line, SDM's, Police superintendents and AHTU (Anti Human Trafficking Unit) were also consulted. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) working on child rights issues were also contacted.

Secondary data was procured from Census of India 2011, Planning Commission Data of 2016, Department of Small-Scale Industries, along with websites of craft units and industry associations and individual companies. Along with these reports, books and articles were also referred.

The number of units in the above mentioned three sectors put together comes to approximately twenty one thousand. The number of children in a unit as observed by us ranged from four to fifty. But most units have below ten children per unit level. According to NCPCR, the child labour population in the age group of five to fourteen years in Rajasthan was 549,996 and in Jaipur city it is more than fifty thousand.

### **5. BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:**

Jaipur is an attraction to many tourists worldwide due to its rich heritage. Handicraft industries have thus proliferated in and around it. Over time, exports and sale to tourists (domestic and foreign) have become an important part of the market for various handicrafts. Jaipur is known as a destination for authentic and relatively cheap handmade

products. Child rights activists, however, portray a far gloomier picture of the industry that is raking in revenues. Unfortunately, the city is now synonymous with menace of child labour. The following section elaborates the presence of child labour in the three sectors- lac bangle, gemstone and embroidery.

## **6. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:**

### **BANGLES:**

The city is famous for its lac bangles. It facilitates the production of both Cold and Hot Lac Bangles (lac is the scarlet resinous secretion of species of lac insects) . There are about 22 areas with more than eleven thousand units working. The climate of the city is suitable for its making, as the dry atmosphere reduces the risk of mould or fungus. There are two types of lac bangles – hot lac bangles, which require working with molten lac with a furnace, and cold lac bangles. In cold lac bangles, there is a metal or plastic base, on which lac and then stone embellishments (nag) are put. The main demand for bangles is from the marriage market and thus many are for one-time use. The price for cold lac bangles can start as low as Rs. 100 for a pack of eight bangles up to Rs. 1,200. But the largest market is in the price range of Rs. 260 to Rs. 420 per pack. (7)

The key actors in the value chain of the lac bangle industry are- the Owners, who are largely artisans from the local Muslim Manihar community in the case of hot lac bangles while in the case of cold lac bangles it is the migrants from Bihar, who are also largely Muslim. The main production areas of hot lac bangles in Jaipur are Maniharon ka Rasta (Manihar street) and Jhotwara (Madina Colony and Raghunathpuri). These are home- based units, with the whole family being involved. Women and girls carry out the production, while men and boys do the outside work of marketing or delivering to the wholesalers. Yet another key actor in the value chain is the wholesaler, who provide raw materials and buy back finished good.

However, behind the vibrant hues of shimmery bangles lurks a darkness. Behind glitter of lac bangles is the labour of innocent children who work endlessly in basements welding pieces of glass into circles of bangles. The process of making and polishing bangles subject these children to an extremely dark and dingy environment and very high temperatures which are harmful for their health. The lac bangle production units are mostly home-based workshops employing a large number of child workers. Such workshops are owned by wholesalers or artisan owners and mostly employ around 10 child workers. The first issue is that of the children working with their parents. Within that category, there are girls who work with their mothers in hot lac bangle manufacture. For children who work with their parents, most work is done during after-school hours but working children are unable to keep up with their studies and tend to drop out. Older girls, in particular, are withdrawn from school in order to care of younger siblings. The second issue of child labour is that of migrant/trafficked boys from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in cold lac bangle manufacture. These boys work along with their families for the workshop owners. They are introduced as relatives. Their parents are paid a small advance and promised that the boys would be sent to school. But the boys are not sent to school. They are paid only a small amount of approximately Rs. 50 per week for expenses. Often their parents are not paid the promised monthly wage. The boys have to work very long hours, right after breakfast till 11 p.m. or 12 midnight, with short bathroom breaks and breaks for food. They usually stay for a year with one employer, later returning to their parents. But they end up coming back to Jaipur again. Boys may be as young as 6 years of age, but mostly are around 10 years, (Mukherjee, 2016).(9)

During our survey children informed about their experience at work and how they are exploited. They revealed that when they make mistakes while working, artisans in the workshop or the workshop owner resort to violent methods, such as beating them in order to teach them a lesson. They also revealed that they were made to work for almost 12 hours a day. Although they were provided with food to eat thrice a day with a little snack in the evening, the quantity and the quality of food served to them was insufficient and deplorable. Moreover, since the children were not allowed to bathe on the working days, they only had a Sunday on which they could take a bath and wash their clothes. Thus, this handicraft segment blurs the possibility of any progressive future for these young children by trapping them in this spiral.

### **EMBROIDERY:**

Embroidery is of three types – computerised, as in export factories; mechanised, with sewing machines; and handmade, as ‘aarti tari’ and ‘zardozi’. While computerised embroidery has a few limitations such as certain specific designs and large batches of production, it is used to manufacture only small things such as logos of t-shirts. Both machine and hand embroidery are also very similar, except that tasks like stitching sequins or pearls cannot (currently) be handled with machines. Hand embroidery can be of both relatively simple and complex types. In the former, hand embroidery competes with machine embroidery. There are fifteen areas in Jaipur with two thousand plus units..Production is concentrated in the areas of Galta Gate, Amer, Bhatta Basti, Sitapura Industrial Area, RICCO Kanota and Sanganer, behind New Sanganer Railway Station. The key players of this sector are the wholesalers, international buyers, designers, owners of workshops, artisans and other strategic actors. In this sector a few basic measures to stop child labour include sewing machines as a substitute for hand embroidery of low-end products with relatively simple

embroidery. As yet, only the task of stitching beads has not been mechanized, but it is only a matter of time before that is also mechanized. Since the designs are complex and cannot be easily produced with machines; however, sewing machines can be used in medium-value embroidery. Furthermore, in high-value embroidered garments, there is a premium on being handmade.

The workshops which harbor child labor can be identified by their bright lighting set-up, which is easily noticeable from the streets. Some of the workshop owners are from Jaipur and others are from parts of Uttar Pradesh, such as Bareilly, Rampur and Agra, which also have a tradition of hand embroidery, including zardozi. The owners (and artisans) who move to Jaipur from elsewhere are the ones who usually bring trafficked children from their hometowns to work. Owners are usually artisans who have acquired enough capital to buy raw materials and pay wages to workers/artisans. Besides workshop owners, child labour is also supplied by agents. Workshops usually have from 5 to 20 artisans. They are mainly Muslims from Jaipur, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They learn the craft either from their parents or from working as helpers in workshops. They earn between Rs. 300 and Rs. 500 per day. Most artisans are men, but there are also women. And there are children who work along with adults.

There are two types of child workers: one, who work along with their families and the other includes those who have been brought or trafficked, mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and some from West Bengal. Such children are often portrayed to be family members.

### **GEMS AND JEWELLERY:**

The gems and jewellery are distinct, although related, value chains. The output of the gems value chain becomes an input to the jewellery value chain. Jaipur is a centre for the manufacture of both coloured gems (precious and semi-precious stones, other than diamonds) and jewellery. There are evolve areas in Jaipur city with around six thousand units working in this sector, While some jewellers and manufacturers stated that children are not suitable for this kind of skilled manufacturing work. Since the skill of jewellery production is passed on from father to son, it is very likely that boys work with their fathers. Gems are purchased as roughs by the importers, who are also usually the manufacturers and exporters. For high-value gems, such as rubies and emeralds, the importers have the stones processed or manufactured in their own workshops by master craftsmen.. The finished gems are then sold to brokers, who then sell them to exporters or jewellers.

The key actors of this value chain are the traders, importers or the exporters, generally known as jewellers. Indian exports of gem stones was US\$100 million in the period April–June 2018, (Export of gems and jewellery, 2018) and about US\$420 million for the financial year 2017–2018. According to the same source, about 200,000 workers are employed in this industry in and around Jaipur.

The ILO Work in Freedom has a figure of 13,000 children working in the gem polishing industry, (International Labour Organization). Since the artisans who polish the stones may employ a couple of workers, they also end up employing some children, at times up to 10, and juveniles (between the age of 15 and 17). The children stick stones to the sticks for cut-polish work and as they get to know the craft, they also being to polish low value stones. In higher value stones the work assigned to children is confined to just sticking stones on the stones and to cleaning. At times they also handle various chemicals used in the processes. Since jewellery -making is a highly skilled work, the makers do not risk the children damaging the work, and hence are assigned ancillary tasks such as cleaning. Majority of the jewellery artisans are from Bengal, they work in rooms and their own children do not work with them but go to school, (Cantera, 2014).(10)(2)

### **7. RESULT:**

This paper explores and brings to light the prevalence of child labour in three handicraft industries of Jaipur and elucidates the functioning of this nefarious phenomenon. The employment of child labour is a business strategy, one driven by the attempt to reduce wage cost by using illegal means. However, in the long run child labour gets the sector trapped into a low-productive, low-wage production system which then becomes increasingly unable to compete on price with mechanized production.

### **8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:**

To overcome this issue, a key proposal is to substitute adult labour for child labour, which will inevitably cause an increase in wage rates. In a competitive market, where the product sellers are price takers, there will have to be some way in which the higher adult wage rates are absorbed in the production process. For instance, this burden of an increase in cost of production can be shifted on to the consumers, as the consumer survey showed that some consumers were willing to accept a higher price ( about 10%) for a child labour free certified products.(11)

Another way is to bring a change in the production process that will compensate for higher wage rates. Changes in production process can be of 2 types, the first kind includes changes in production method which involves embracing modernization and mechanization to a certain degree. Thus, businesses and workshop owners should consider moving towards mechanization and to semi-mechanization when a part of the product demands to be handmade and when the

capital required for this transition is not much- as the cost advantage of low cost labour can easily be lost to mechanization with expensive labour. The other kind involves a change in organization of production, it is often true that small handicrafts units do not run in the most efficient way, for this purpose the existing process should be carefully examined. In some handicrafts production units, artisans make the complete article; in others, a part only. Where division of labour applies, the artisan does not have the benefit of seeing the finished product, but total output might be greater, (Millard, 1987).

The work location should be examined. Often, handicrafts work is done at home, and it may be that communal working is impracticable. For instance, Dileep industries in Jaipur has its unit set up in outskirts of the city and organizes its production in the form of an assembly line, rather than artisanal production. Other mechanisms to be cost efficient include organizing artisans in groups to secure benefit from financial, technical and other economies of scale thus promoting their organization in the form of cooperatives. In addition, formation of community centres provide the families of artisans with the moral support to contribute in the production process while taking care of their holistic needs. Other important ways aim at increasing efficiency of human resource through regular training to sharpen and enhance the skills of the workers and that of material resource by acquiring inputs at an off-peak time and in bulk to take cost advantages.

Some low-value handicrafts can be made cost effective with the help of semi mechanization, however for most high-value handicrafts a premium is attached to its value for being hand made thus a higher price can be charged in that case which offset the cost increased due to increased adult wage. Many established businesses in handicraft industry are well known for their quality and finesse and thus branding their products gives them a favoured public image which allow them to charge relatively higher prices for the increased value of their product. Another noteworthy mechanism, to make higher prices justifiable in the market and to the consumer, is to tag the products as 'child labour free' as many consumers are willing to pay extra for such ethically made products, in this respect formal certification of products plays an important role in the realization of this objective just the way the "good weave initiative" did in the carpet manufacturing industry, with such endless opportunities available with great potential to increase productivity, child labour is definitely not the only means of survival and growth of these industries even in the face of fierce domestic and international competition, (Child labour cant be carpeted over by a logo, but its a step in the right direction). These are few ways that can be adopted to eradicate child labour by developing an accountable, transparent and sustainable system.(8)

Jaipur being is a popular tourist destination has a large number of both- international and local tourist visiting it. The results of the consumer survey showed that the tourist have a great trust on getting good quality handicrafts from Jaipur rather than other tourist destinations in the country. According to the consumer survey most ( 80%) of the tourist visiting Jaipur with the motive of shopping and purchasing handicrafts, looked majorly for three things; value for money, good design and the quality of the products. The survey showed that the people were aware about child labour being a human rights violation, but at the same time had little knowledge about the prevalence of child labour in these sectors, other than the carpet and jewellery industry. It was also found that the consumers had little knowledge about the work areas in Jaipur, where these children were employed.

Apart from the above given suggestions creating awareness regarding this issue in a strategic manner, without shaming Jaipur would help alleviate child labour from its Handicrafts industry.

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