

Sisyphean Efforts?

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State Policy and Child Labour in Karnataka

By

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P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

Few issues are more heart-wrenching in human terms than child labour in India. That makes it exceedingly difficult for social scientists to analyse in an objective manner. Strong emotions can easily get in the way. But objective studies are essential if we are to understand the problem – so that we can find ways to tackle it.

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju provides us with just such a scrupulously objective analysis. This is not a dispassionate study – his acute concern with vile injustice lies at the root of his enquiry. Let no reader doubt that he cares deeply about it. But he wisely keeps his outrage in check, so that he can offer us the objectivity that is so essential. This is no easy task, but he accomplishes it admirably.

He also explores a strange puzzle. Child labour persists with special tenacity in *South* India which has achieved more – often much more – than other regions of the country in promoting development and social justice. How can child labour have survived when so much has been done to address other issues? The author rightly sets his analysis against the background of the growth of rights-based development programmes and laws that have gained ground in India, especially since 2004. That makes the puzzle more difficult to unpack, and it makes the persistence of child labour a more vivid eyesore. And yet, here again, the author's meticulous investigation provides crucial insights.

This comes as no surprise. Anil Kumar Vaddiraju has produced a remarkable number of perceptive studies in recent years. Some of them – for example, his writings on Telangana – have fundamentally altered our understanding of key themes. This book deserves readers' careful consideration, and a warm welcome.

James Manor
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PREFACE

Karnataka is a fast growing south Indian state with thriving information technology and biotechnology sectors. The state has made impressive economic strides over a period of time and has earned the name of being the silicon valley of India. Even President Barack Obama has cast envious eyes on the state capital Bangalore and has suggested that Information Technology jobs and IT-enabled services being outsourced to Bangalore be brought back to cities such as Buffalo in the US. The state has also seen rapid growth in urbanisation and other economic and social indicators, and has a progressive tradition of cultural assimilation, having been formed out of five heterogeneous historical regions – Mysore Karnataka, Western Ghats, Hyderabad Karnataka, Bombay Karnataka and Central Karnataka. Each region brought with it its historical advantages and burdens. Generally, the southern part of Karnataka is said to be more advanced socially and economically as well as in the human development index than northern Karnataka. Being a product of such diversity, Karnataka has also evolved a liberal culture of tolerance, moderation, accommodation and assimilation. Another point often claimed in its favour is that Karnataka never actually had landlordism or feudalism of any variety whereas the neighbouring states such as Andhra Pradesh have had a feudal past. As a small peasant economy during most of its recent history, the state also developed a tolerant and benevolent rural economy. Its social relations of production, particularly caste relations, have never been oppressive unlike the rest of India. Thus there are many positive features for the idea of Karnataka.

While one may appreciate these exemplary features, it is also true that Karnataka has a considerable amount of child labour. Of course, many Indian states in general and south Indian states in particular suffer from the stigma of child labour. This is quite a paradox. With south Indian states being ranked as exemplary within India by eminent people such as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and development economist Jean Dreze, we fail to understand why societies that are so conscious of human development tolerate so much child labour. Three of the south Indian states, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, have rampant child labour. This book deals with some of these questions.

In this book the first chapter deals with State Child Labour Project and the state policy of dealing with child labour in Karnataka. Chapter two explores the question as to whether vocational education can become a solution to the tragedy of child labour. This is done with the example of one district in Karnataka namely Bidar. The third chapter is where we present our findings of our primary survey held to estimate the extent of child labour in Karnataka; the survey was done in Haveri district and shows how, after all the state policies being implemented by way of State Child Labour Project and National Child Labour Project etc., the presence of child labour and exploitation is so prevalent in Karnataka. Neither Haveri nor Karnataka are exceptions in India. In the fourth and last chapter we discuss some theoretical and empirical questions about rights in liberal democracy and the relationship between rights-based development policies such as National Rural Employment Guarantee and Right to Education with reference to the entire nation (an absolutely shameless nation when it comes to dealing with its children) called India.

A note of acknowledgement is necessary before I take the reader to the text that follows. Chapter 1 was earlier published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*. Chapter 2 has appeared as an ISEC Working Paper. Chapter 4 was earlier published in the *Journal of Parliamentary Studies*. Chapter 3 and the plates are exclusively part of this book. The first chapter was discussed in a UK-India collaborative seminar at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. The third chapter was discussed at a seminar in Mysore University; the fourth chapter was presented and discussed in a public policy conference at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIM-B). All the chapters contained herein have been discussed in different fora and/or have been fully refereed.

INTRODUCTION

Three of the four south Indian states — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu — share a national shame that has few parallels in the developed and emerging countries: rampant use of child labour. The only south Indian state free from this scourge is Kerala. Andhra Pradesh is second only to Uttar Pradesh in the extent of child labour in the country. Karnataka stands at the seventh place and Tamil Nadu at the tenth position in the list. This is somewhat surprising as south Indian states are historically advanced in human development, women's empowerment, demographic indicators and governance. Also, after the launch of economic reforms, they have been growing at a rapid rate economically. Why do societies that have relatively high literacy and health indicators, well-developed women's agency and relatively better governance fail to protect their children from exacting labour? Why do these societies, which are so conscious of human development — right now in Karnataka every district is preparing its human development report — tolerate so much child labour? Why is this particularly glaring in states like Andhra Pradesh which were among the first to champion good governance and push through economic and governance reforms? To blame child labour on capitalism only begs the question. More probing is necessary to answer the question why the state, society and intelligentsia are maintaining a conspiracy of silence over the problem. This is particularly true for Andhra Pradesh which ignominiously and shamelessly occupies the second place among states with the highest child labour in the country. That state boasts of a highly radical intelligentsia that thrives on pretending to stand for every progressive cause. Yet its 'radical thinkers' are all silent. The same more or less holds true for Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, though the latter do not bear the stigma of standing at the forefront of child labour.

Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have devoted at least three volumes to elaborate on how the rest of India should learn from the south on human development, women's empowerment, demographic indicators and food security, which were all made possible because of better governance, enlightened civil societies and public action. Where do all these go when it comes to child labour? While the purpose of this book is not to analyse this puzzle exhaustively, it appears that insensitivity to child well being exists secularly across the country. South India is not much of an

exception and, in this case, only mirrors the rest of India. The problem of child labour can never be solved by the efforts of the state alone; larger society and civil society organisations have to be deeply involved in rooting it out. However, the articulate and growing middle class of India, which makes up the bulk of civil society in a broader sense, is notoriously insensitive to the problem of child labour. After all, the state bureaucracy also comes from the same middle class and carries the same class callousness towards child labour. And worse, sometimes the state agencies and bureaucracy collude with the perpetrators of child labour. Therefore, the high prevalence of child labour in India in general and south India in particular points to the failure of both the state and the society towards ensuring child well-being. I do not speak for the other states because the condition of children in many other states, particularly in north and east India, is unspeakable. This is not an exaggeration by any standards. The list below of states that have the highest prevalence of child labour in the country speaks for itself.

Number of Working Children in Major Child Labour Endemic States during 1991 and 2001 Census in the Age Group 5-14 Years

Sl. No.	Name of the State/UT	Census 1991	Census 2001
1	Uttar Pradesh	1410086	1927997
2	Andhra Pradesh	1661940	1363339
3	Rajasthan	774199	1262570
4	Bihar	942245	1117500
5	Madhya Pradesh	1352563	1065259
6	West Bengal	711691	857087
7	Karnataka	976247	822615
8	Maharashtra	1068427	764075
9	Gujarat	523585	485530
10	Tamil Nadu	578889	418801
	All India Total	1.13 crore	1.26 crore

Be that as it may, the purpose of this book is only to shed light on the situation in Karnataka. We do not address the entire south Indian scenario in this book. Before moving on to the rest of the material, a few brief observations appear necessary.

Among political scientists writing on India, Myron Weiner was the only one to have addressed the issue of child labour in India. Other political scientists, including those from India, have shown a benign neglect of the problem. In fact, those from other social science disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology and social work have shown

more sensitivity to the plight of children. The problem partly is that if one is constantly writing about the elite and the powerful, and also happens to be living among them, the likelihood of the former ending up as part of the latter is higher. There is no claim that this book is any breakthrough, and this author is not part of any elite. But we certainly plead for more work on this issue from political scientists in India following the trail left by Weiner.

In the following chapters, the first one deals with the State Child Labour Project (SCLP) in Karnataka and is a result of one of its evaluations. The paper discusses how state and civil society collaborate for such causes and the problems and dilemmas inherent in them. This is based on an empirical study on the collaboration between the state and NGOs in three districts of Karnataka — Kolar, Bidar and Davanagere. Civil society, by way of NGOs and activist campaigns, has shown great sensitivity to the child labour issue and that has to be properly garnered for addressing the issue.

The study for the second chapter was done closely after the first one. But the chapter was written much later. The second chapter addresses the question as to whether vocational education in its present condition can become a solution for child labour. Here we see that much of what goes by vocational education is, among other things, a highly privatised affair and is beyond the reach of ordinary child labourers. The study is based on empirical research in Bidar district but can be generalised for much of Karnataka without any hesitation and indeed, for other sectors of education in Karnataka as well. This chapter discusses, in a considered manner, one major putative alternative solution to child labour.

The third chapter is based on an attempt to estimate child labour in one of the districts in Karnataka and is mainly a number crunching exercise. If only the reader can understand with what pains these numbers were collected, and understand their import, the purpose of the chapter will have been well served.

In the fourth and final chapter, we discuss how rights are realised in a developing liberal democracy like India. The point is that unless enabling conditions exist, rights cannot be realised even when they are fully granted by the state. Enabling conditions are extremely important for realising child rights more than any other. We attempt to relate the rights question with the human development situation in Indian states and attempt to argue that in order for formally guaranteed rights to be realised, human development is a basic pre-condition. And for realising the rights of children, nothing could be truer. Before children need the right to education, they need the right to food, nutrition and health and also other

rights like right to play and entertainment as well. With this we conclude the book. All in all, we do more than put a project report between the two covers. The discerning reader has much food for thought and for the more enthusiastic, valuable reasons for action.

CHAPTER ONE

STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE ERADICATION OF CHILD LABOUR IN KARNATAKA

Introduction

Public-private partnerships have become buzz words in policy discourse today. These partnerships are being defined as the partnerships between the state (public) and private (corporate) sector. By a curious twist of the definition, the 'private' in the definition also includes non-profit, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs from hereon). NGOs actually do not fall in the private domain; they fall in the space between the private and the public. The point is that in the present discourse on public-private partnerships, the state (government) actively seeks and enlists the support of NGOs even in the sphere of welfare programmes¹. Whether these partnerships are successful is a moot question; for the government and NGOs represent two widely different organizational strengths, organizational cultures and material resources.

There is a lively discourse on the partnership between the government and NGOs in the literature on Karnataka. The Karnataka Human Development Report of 2005 has an entire chapter on NGO-government partnerships and is upfront about the advantages as well as the limitations of such partnerships. In the first place, the report acknowledges that there is a role for partnerships in the human development of the state. While noting that Karnataka was the first state to enter into such partnerships in the country, it says:

¹ The Karnataka Human Development Report (KHDR, 2005) for example notes: 'The sheer diversity of NGO activity is testimony to the range, professionalism and expertise of these organisations. NGOs have been instrumental in the provision of healthcare, literacy, poverty alleviation through sustainable development, rehabilitation, women's rights, engendered human development programmes, environmental protection, HIV/AIDS support programmes, agriculture extension services, to name a few. They supplement government services in a significant way although their methodology is different' (KHDR, 2005 pp.279).

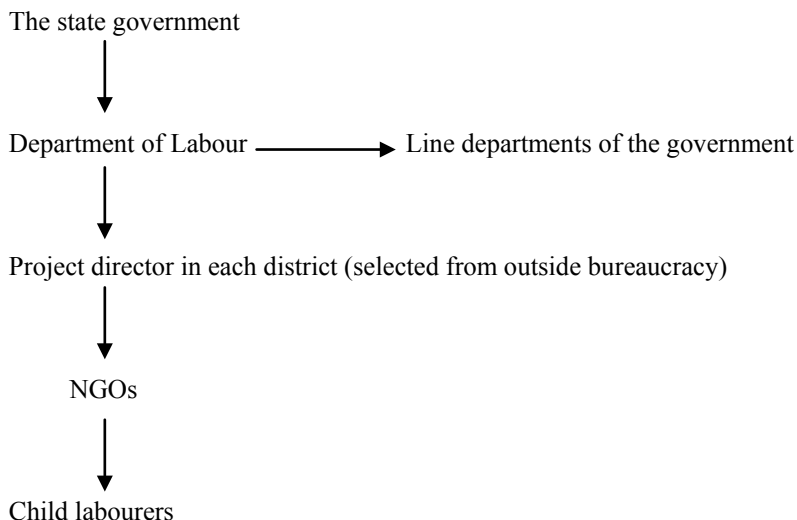
“Karnataka enjoys the distinction of fostering a healthy relationship between the government and NGOs. Such partnerships are established in the hope of greater synergy, and even though they may bring conflicts in their wake, Karnataka has chosen to manage these tensions rather than abandoning NGO partnerships altogether.”

There are at least two views regarding government-NGO partnerships in Karnataka. One view, advocated by Rajasekhar and Birader (2004), sees the NGO-government partnerships as ‘reluctant partnerships’. The second view, proposed by Kudwa (2008), conceptualizes these collaborations as ‘uneasy’ but fluid. The Karnataka Human Development Report of 2005 produced by the Government of Karnataka too deals with these issues. What emerges from these discussions is that not all is smooth and even in these collaborations and partnerships. Our focus in this paper is on child labour and so we skip that discussion. However, in regard to the State Child Labour Eradication Programme (SCLP) in Karnataka, the partnerships mentioned above are crucial.

SCLP

The State Child Labour Eradication Programme (SCLP) is an ambitious project of the government in the sense that by 2007 the programme aimed at abolishing child labour all over Karnataka. The SCLP was to achieve this with the help of NGOs. The partnership between NGOs and the government is the fulcrum of the programme, which envisaged three stages: the identification and rescue of child labourers, their rehabilitation and their ‘mainstreaming’. The programme is run basically through the Department of Labour of the Government of Karnataka (GOK hereon) and sought to enlist NGOs all over the state in the effort to eradicate child labour. The process through which it happens is as follows.

The Department of Labour issues a public notice to enlist NGOs with at least two years of experience in child labour related work. The NGOs should have had a track record of doing such work, should be registered and have some infrastructure, besides being located at the district or sub-district (Taluka) level. Once the NGOs are selected, all the line departments of the government are to assist them in the identification, rescue, rehabilitation and admission of child workers to schools. There are four tiers of implementation involved in this. The organization of SCLP looks as follows:



The process of collaboration or partnership is that while selecting NGOs the Department of Labour also selects a project director in each district from outside its bureaucracy. Usually these directors are chosen from people who have a background in either social work or law. Both men and women can be selected as directors depending on their qualifications. Once the project director is selected she/he in collaboration with the NGOs should conduct a comprehensive survey in the towns and throughout the district. This survey is to be followed up by a rescue effort, with the help of all the line departments such as labour, police, health, education, social welfare etc.

There are many problems in the identification and rescue of child labourers: the employers are antagonistic, the line departments lack coordination, some of the line departments such as the health department do not participate at all and finally the parents of the children too are unwilling. The identification and rescue form the basis on which child labourers are brought in by NGOs for rehabilitation. In three districts where we conducted the study (Kolar, Davanagere and Bellary), the rescue efforts faced problems. In Kolar district, some of the employers of children beat up both the Project Director and two police constables who accompanied her in identification and rescue work. In Bellary district, local illegal mining is so widespread that no one knows the exact magnitude of child labour, and from where the child labour can be rescued, and to what extent. Besides, in Bellary district, the illegal mining lobby that employs local children and children of migrant families is

powerful. The complicity of corrupt local officials cannot be ruled out. In Davanagere district, child labour in puffed rice industry is pervasive and the industry lobby mobilizes local politicians on its behalf whenever officials attempt a rescue of child labourers. Physical assaults on NGO and project staff are not uncommon and make the identification and rescue effort difficult. NGOs take up this work because they are committed and need the project money to do some work and survive. This is indeed the true state of affairs.

Despite these hurdles, NGOs with the collaboration of line departments do succeed in rescuing child labourers. They rehabilitate child labourers in special rehabilitation centres. Each NGO is allowed and funded to rehabilitate up to 50 child labourers. In the process of identification, some NGOs concentrate on localities where child labour is likely to be common or on communities in which child labour is high. These are working class communities often consisting of Dalit and minority children of either sex. The government gives sufficient freedom for the NGOs to choose their strategies. In this, the ideology and vision of NGOs matter to some extent. Some NGOs concentrate on Dalit children, some on children from minority communities, and some exclusively on girl children. But out of the 31 NGOs we have studied none have said child labour is rare. There were enough child labourers in the working class localities to be brought to rehabilitation centres. Some NGOs claimed that their other work related to women's Self Help Groups has helped them in identifying the child labourers.

Rehabilitation of child labourers is done at temporary hostels and bridge schools. These hostels usually host around 30 to 50 children – the upper limit allowed by the government is 50 – and provide food, shelter and education to the rescued children. These are funded by the Department of Labour of the Government of Karnataka but managed by the NGOs.

There are significant problems in this mode of rehabilitation. First, the per capita food allowance for a meal is Rs 5, hardly enough for providing subsistence-level food, leave alone nutritious food. NGOs have a tough time making ends meet. Second, the hall or halls needed for the shelter of children have to be spacious and taken for rent. The rents allowed by the government for a shelter is Rs 1000 per month and that is often not adequate even in small towns such as Kolar or Bellary or Davanagere. Therefore again NGOs are hard put to arrange for shelter. Most NGOs do not have their own infrastructure for this purpose. Finally, NGOs provide education in what they call bridge schools where crash courses are arranged based on material provided by the Department of Education. This is most often not sufficient. Besides, different children come to the

rehabilitation centre with different levels of learning capacities, adding to the problem and making the bridge course less effective. There is very little vocational training except in some centres in Kolar district where girl children are rehabilitated and taught knitting, tailoring etc.). In other cases even this does not exist.

A serious problem that the government should pay attention to concerns the duration of rehabilitation. The official policy of the SCLP was that children should stay in the rehabilitation centre for more than one year. The government then reduced the period to one year, a time span that many think is too short to give a permanent solution to the problem of child labour. A boy or a girl who has spent years as a child labourer cannot acquire sufficient learning skills in one year to join a regular school. NGOs argue that the children need more time, but government officials suspect that the NGOs are making the case for a longer period of rehabilitation for their own survival, highlighting the lack of trust between the two. Our own field observations indicate that the NGOs have a solid case in their favour. The period of rehabilitation ought to be longer than what it is now; and only then the collaboration can become successful in the full sense of the term. Resource mobilization by NGOs on their own is one option to supplement the efforts of the state. But often NGOs participating in SCLP are small town NGOs without any infrastructure worth calling their own, and do not have the clout to mobilize resources. Therefore, they depend on the government to run the programme.

This dependence of NGOs on government support brings out the unequal quality of the public-private partnership in the entire programme². Often both for the NGOs and the government eradication of child labour is a one-off programme. There is no continuous and consistent policy. This means that while the problem of child labour is deep rooted, the efforts of the government are short term and episodic. Even in the short-term programmes, however ambitious and progressive, the attitude of the government is patronizing.

The ultimate aim of SCLP is to 'mainstream' the child labourers. Mainstreaming means admitting them in regular government schools and taking them out of work permanently in their childhood. This works only

² The KHDR says this in the following manner: 'The ability to influence policy is also conditioned by the bidding process. NGOs argue that bidding for contracts to implement programmes announced by the government ties the hands of the bidding agency and puts it at a disadvantage if it were to question the contents and implementation strategies and programmes. However NGOs do bid for contracts and the Government then deals with NGOs as contractors'. (KHDR, 2005, pp 282-283).

if the child, after spending one year in the rehabilitation centre, joins a regular school at the appropriate class. The schools that take them have to have hostel facilities also so that they can be retained in the schools. Even this minimal notion of mainstreaming is still a far cry. Our study report (Rajasekhar, Gayathri Devi and Anil Kumar, 2007) on the mainstreaming effort notes these points:

- One of the foremost problems was the lack of facilities at the bridge school. ‘Lack of good lodging and boarding facilities, improper attention given at the school and insufficient follow-up from the teachers [in the bridge school and rehabilitation centres] contributed to this problem. In this the NGOs had played an important role. Good NGOs generally provided considerable attention to the above, and succeeded in the good retention rate of children joining the bridge schools’ (Rajasekhar, Gayathri Devi and Anil Kumar, 2007: 73-74)
- ‘Of the children dropping out from the efforts of SCLP, a majority (i.e., 52 percent) did so after they were actually mainstreamed. To some extent, the problems mentioned above are... relevant... Some children joined regular schools in the hope that they would get hostel facility; when they did not get hostel facility, they simply dropped out. Second, skills obtained in bridge schools were not adequate to continue in regular schools. Third, some children were admitted into private schools [and] since the parents had to comply with the rules of private schools such as uniform, tie etc. they could not afford [private school education and dropped out]’.(*op. cit* pp.73-74).
- Our study of SCLP clearly notes in the conclusion that ‘the mainstreaming requires the availability of hostels and residential school facilities in relation to the number of children completing the bridge school education. This hampered the success of the project in terms of mainstreaming. *This is a major problem and unless the Government and Department of Education see to it that the mainstreaming is successful and sustainable the entire effort goes waste*’ (Rajasekhar, Gayathri Devi and Anil Kumar, 2007:pp79-80, italics in the original).

The above situation clearly brings out the limitations of the process of ‘mainstreaming’ children. Household poverty is the most important reason for dropping out of rehabilitation centres and government schools, more so in the case of the latter. In SCLP, rescue and rehabilitation were to some

extent successful whereas mainstreaming in the sense used was not. Child labour eradication programmes such as SCLP have limited goals and limited scope in practice.

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CHAPTER TWO

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOUR IN BIDAR DISTRICT

Introduction

The problem of child labour continues to elude effective solutions in developing countries, especially India, owing to various socio-economic and political factors. While there has been significant progress in reducing the number of child labourers, its actual magnitude remains a major concern. Even as earnest remedial efforts continue, one important solution that is being considered is vocational education. That vocational education at an early or adolescent age can help children escape 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.

Most writings on child labour often lack a theory or theoretical base for understanding the issue. 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 a poverty of theory – is also applicable to child labour. Poverty under a capitalist model of development is a systemic feature involving or requiring cheap labour force. The distributive regime under the capitalist development process is systemically skewed towards owners and managers of capital and its knowledge workers – the middle class. Therefore, the outer peripheries of this distributive regime remain generally impoverished and economically deprived, becoming a haven for child labour. And as long as the system reproduces and does not make any significant and effective state intervention regarding the distributive regime of capitalism, child labour is likely to persist. The state can intervene by filling the void caused by systemic failure, but such state-led alleviation cannot 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, and takes less interest in labour than in capital. This is further compounded by regime-specific features such as spatial concentration, orientation towards global markets and insensitivity and indifference from other social classes towards the problem. As mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph, the state does from time to time attempt to solve the systemic problem by implementing measures such as vocational education. That is why this chapter deals mainly with vocational education and child labour. This chapter is majorly empirical in nature. Often it is not possible to develop a full-fledged theory based on rigorous empirical work in a short piece of writing. Therefore, this chapter 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 child labourers in accessing vocational education and the limitations of the government and private vocational educational institutions in reaching out to them. We also deal with the aspirations of child labourers and their parents in the context of vocational education. Our data is, to a large extent, primary in nature based on field notes but 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? 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 aspects of vocational education, 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 in vocational education is not

known 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 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 does not include 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 child labour through vocational education. The peer groups among children are also unlikely to provide information regarding vocational education; and even if they become aware of the potential benefits 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 have no formal schooling. They are condemned to be out of the vocational educational opportunities.

This calls for proper policy responses. First, 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 students in schools at a very early stage. Second, 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, vocational education is run as a business. But it 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 a 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 (Secondary School Leaving Certificate i.e., 10th Standard). Unless a student has passed SSLC, his/her enrolment to any of the vocational courses is not possible. That is, a child has to undergo a minimum of 10 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 a 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 10 years of education to take up the vocational courses. 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 a school is even more pathetic. In the present context, they are nowhere near accessing vocational education, with a large chunk of them remaining totally deprived of the opportunity. 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 have become inaccessible.

We now come to the question of affordability of vocational education for child labourers. This is important because in a country with a large number of poor people and child labourers, for vocational education to become a solution it should be affordable. Moreover, education should be meaningful enough to lead to sustainable livelihoods. Both are at present less than adequate or satisfactory. Vocational education as it exists now is firstly, largely privatised and secondly, even after affording it there is no guarantee that it will lead to a livelihood.

Analysis of Field Survey Data from Bidar District

The field experience in the sample villages of Bidar District shows that students and children from 11 villages access vocational education through government-run institutions. In 29 villages, students access training from private institutions. The data clearly shows that training in electrical and electronics courses is most popular with students in 18 villages opting for this, 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. Also, the range of options available for potential vocational training is 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 take over 12 months to complete while courses lasting less than 12 months number only 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 the most preferred ones in Bidar district.

It is very clearly evident from the field data that students falling under the age group of 15 to 18 are the ones who attend 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. 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 high 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) spend over Rs. 20,000 for accessing VTE while another eight spend between Rs 12,000 to 20,000. Four out of 32 spend about Rs 6,000 to 12,000 and those who spend less than Rs 6000 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 colleges because although there are two 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 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 private ones in Karnataka. Any student between 14 to 40 years can pursue an ITI course. Further, there is 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 ITIs is huge when compared to the government institutions – 37 private and unaided ITI institutions across Bidar district. The total adds up to 43. However, one or two of the 37 private ITIs may not be working. The 43 institutes cover approximately 900 students in the district.

Government ITI

The government industrial training institute in Bidar offers six courses but the one at Humnabad offers just two. 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 Table 2 the details of the Government ITI in Humnabad.

The fee structure in government industrial training institutes remains within the reach of most of the aspirants unlike the private ones. The annual fee for a student, common for all the courses, comes to Rs. 1200. In addition, the examination fee 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 these 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 for these courses is conducted 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