CHAPTER-V

PROSPECTS FOR MOBILITY AMONG CHILD LABOURERS

5.1 INTRODUCTION:

One of the reasons for sending their children for work outside for a wage is that parents see no future for them (their children). They also fear that providing them education as an option to work does not ensure jobs for their children in the future. Their argument is that the present jobs they are holding at least, would afford practical training and develop skills in children which would at least open up some prospects for jobs. The employers do not see any harm to the children by employing them as they (children) learn new skills which ensure jobs even in the future. This view is being opposed by some scholars. Deprivation of education and vocational training also has a telling effect on working children. The future of working child is endangered as he cannot go to school or is bound to leave school prematurely or is unable to co-ordinate the two activities. He lacks fundamental general and professional knowledge which is required for normal mental and intellectual development and for making the child into a skilled worker and enabling him to prosper in social and occupational fields. Children thus find themselves locked in unskilled, low paying, unpleasant and unsafe working situations and permanently disadvantaged in the labour market. As adults they are not only unemployed but also an employable.
Prospects for vertical mobility for children depend upon a number of considerations. Primarily, vertical mobility is not equal or the same for all children; caste, kinship and gender issues influence the employers' decision to promote children or consider them for higher wages or employment of higher responsibility. Secondly, children are held up in low paid jobs on the plea that they require extended period of experience to acquire the skills which is not warranted. Thirdly, given the absence of formal training institutes in many places, skills are imparted informally within the production unit. Child workers get to learn the skills from elder workers or doing the tasks of elders when they take a break. Fourthly, there are some serious external constraints that limit the possibility of child workers to establish their own individual units and become entrepreneurs. There is a hike in the rent for space accommodation and often the required investment for the new venture is beyond the financial resources of the poor child workers. In the initial stages at least, the child worker is required to withstand the competition from his or her former employer and employers the gestation period for firmly establishing his or her firm may be prolonged for a considerable length of time. Fifthly, since children are expected to work for long hours in the production unit, it is hardly possible for the children to dovetail their work in the production.

Units with the schedule of schooling hours. Hence, work in such production establishments is by no means compatible with schooling for the child workers. This situation also limits the possibility of child workers acquiring formal knowledge and skills.
5.2 CASE STUDIES:

The four production units in Hubli-Dharwad area construction, garage, rice puff production and rag pickers are tiny establishments with limited investment and mostly catering to local markets. The boys and girls have entered into the occupations hoping to improve their economic status in due course of time. Case studies of some boys and girls in each of the occupations under study have been attempted to examine and assess the extent of benefits or loss the children have received. In other words, the present chapter is devoted to a study of the possibility of vertical mobility for boys and girls in the concerned employments in the Hubli-Dharwad area. Both child labourers and their parents (names of the children and households have been changed to protect identities) have been interviewed to elicit information regarding the actual position held and the benefits (if at all) received by the children.

5.2 (a) Construction Occupation:

(1) Gowsab Budhihal is a muslim boy aged about 10 years. He is a resident of Chappar Band Colony, Dharwad. He joined as a helper in one of the construction works in Dharwad when he was 7 years old. Gowsab's father, Razak was working as a manual labourer in the market and earned daily wages to maintain his family consisting of wife, son and two daughters. Facing utter poverty, Razak could not afford education to his son and daughters. Therefore, he compelled his son to join some labourers and earn some income to make both ends meet.
Gowsab was given the task of shifting sand through a sieve for plastering and polishing walls. His work consisted of attending to the job at 9.00 a.m. and retiring around 7.00 p.m. or sometimes at 8.00pm with an interval of half an hour for lunch around 2.00pm. He had to work in the open ground under the hot sun in the summer and rain in the rainy season.

While shifting sand many times sand and dust particles got in his eyes and because of constant irritation he suffered poor vision. His constant work in the hot sun has caused him frequent illhealth and forced him to lay off work periodically. The boy was not given any medical assistance.

Gowsab did not get work at the construction site continuously. When the building construction work was not in full progress, he was forced to seek work under some other mason in another work site. He commenced work as a labour but he could hardly get Rs.30/- per day and within the course of three years of doing the same work for different masters, he could get around Rs.40/- a day.

(2) Laxmibai aged about 12 years, is a resident of Hubli. She is one of the 10 children. Her father was working for a mason in the city. Since her father started consuming country alcohol, he was a victim of heart disease and could not regularly earn wages to sustain his family. Laxmibai her brother and sisters could not be sent to school because of utter poverty the family suppressed.
Laxmibai got some work in building construction work through the assistance of her neighbours, when she was around 9 years old. She was entrusted with the work of loading bricks in an iron basket and carrying them across the wooden scaffold 10 to 20 feet high to reach the mason engaged in upper structure of the building. Quite often the bricks slipped on her feet causing severe pains in the legs. She started attending to her work in the morning around 9.00 clock but returned home late in the evening. The work of carrying bricks to get great to heights was very tedious and caused heavy exhaustion by evening. Her mason has fixed Rs.35/- as her wages when she was engaged on the site. But he deducted a commission of Rs.5/- per day in her wages on the plea that he had secured work for her. When the work was continuous and nearing completion, she was given Rs.5/- per day as additional incentive. When work in the building site was reduced, she was forced to seek the same type of work in another place and work for another mason. Even though she started working for 4 years and doing the same routine jobs, there was no improvement of skill, and as such, she could not also expect higher wages even though she put in more years of work. Eventually, the money she contributed to her parents to run the household could hardly improve the economic status of her family.

(3) Kariyappa belongs to the Scheduled Caste. His parents were working as agricultural labourers in a village. Since there was severe drought in the village, his parents migrated to Hubli city in search of some manual work and settled down in Hubli city. Thirteen year old Kariyappa was forced by poverty to seek work,
some two years ago, under a mason in a construction work. He was to mix sand and cement with water and carry the mixture to the mason who did plastering of brick walls. Since Kariyappa was found to be very sincere in his work, the mason taught him the art of plastering and polishing the brick walls. The boy was asked quite often to complete the unfinished work, whenever the mason availed himself of a tea break for half an hour or so. This gave Kariyappa an opportunity to improve his skill; he could easily attend to the plastering work. He was paid a daily wage of Rs.30/- when he joined as a manual labourer under the mason, but gradually is daily wages were raised to Rs.40/-. Whenever the need for plastering the walls slackened, Kariyappa had to wait in a market place hunting for work at any wage. Many times, he could get work during the slack season. Even though, there was some improvement in skill in executing the work, the child worker could not help much his parents to maintain themselves properly.

(4) Manjula Walikar aged 14, originally belonged to a neighboring village at Hubli. She belongs to a Scheduled Caste. Her father, who was working in a printing press as a manual labourer because a liquor addiction and because of bad company, the family lost the only source of income. Manjula has two younger sisters and a brother. No one in the family went to school. Manjula joined the construction work some 4 years ago. She is given odd jobs on the construction site. She has to carry bricks, cement mixture to the mason and bomboos for constructing the scaffold. Manjula gets work for 15 to 18 days in a month with a daily wage of Rs.25/-. Her earning along with mother's income
is not sufficient to sustain maintenance for a family of four persons.

Manjula accompanies, her mother every day to the market place and waits for the mason/contractor to get her some work on the construction site. Manjula expresses that they (the family members) had to pass a very hard time during the last five years. She does not get work on the construction site regularly and unable to find work in a factory as she lacks influence. Manjula is very unhappy about her work on the construction site, "Our condition not change for the better", she sighed. She has also expressed that, the mason/constructor makes immoral (advances at her) and wants to take advantage of her youth. She has to work for 8 to 10 hours a day and some times, she does not get time even to take her afternoon lunch. The work is so hard and tedious that if she is a little bit careless in handling materials, she can easily meet with an accident. During accidents, except providing simple medical treatment nothing is paid as compensation. In spite of her hard labour she is rebuked by her mason even if she gets late by 5 minutes to attend to her work or to goes to answer the call of nature. Manjula feels that her work entails hard physical labour. She has to work barefoot and all the day remain exposed to the sun. Her employment is insecure and wages are pitifully low. She is not hopeful of a favourable future for herself.
5.2 (b) Garage:

(1) Abdul Razak, aged about 13 years, is a Muslim boy who works in automobile garage in Dharwad since the last 3 years. The garage consists of 4 boys under the age of 14 years and 3 adults. The youngest one is a boy aged about 10 years has been and working in the garage for the last 6 months.

Abdul has studied upto 3rd standard. He had left his studies as his father divorced his mother, remarried and started living separately. The boy had no option but to stay with his step mother. His mother lives in utter poverty and manages the household income from working on a second hand tailoring machine.

Abdul's working hours are from 9.00am to 7.00pm with rest of half an hour for his lunch. Abdul's main tasks are to pass tools to the foreman at work, clean the spare parts and do the repair works under his guidance. The foreman found that the boy is very sincere, intelligent, hard working and could perform some of the repair work independently. The employer said that he prefers to employ muslim boys and further added that it would take another three years for Abdul to learn the skills matching that of an adult mechanic.

His daily wages depend upon the work order received by the garage. However, he is paid a minimum of Rs.20/- per day for
being present in the garage and the daily wages could go up to Rs.50/- when ever the garage receives heavy orders for repairs.

Abdul has acquired the necessary skills in repairing the automobiles (cars) even though his employer has a lame excuse that he requires a few more years to acquire the necessary skills to attend to repair work independently. He has a very keen desire to set up an independent unit to repair automobiles, but faces a very severe financial constraint in purchasing the requisite tools, paying wages for labourers and rent for the necessary space. Under these adverse circumstances, young Abdul is unable to leave the low paid job and earn more income independently by establishing his own concern. With his meager income, Abdul is not able to help his mother very much financially and enable her to meet both ends.

(2) Ramanna Kundagol, is 14 years of age and a Scheduled Caste boy. He has 3 sisters and a brother. His father is an autoriksha driver. In an accident, he lost his left leg and could not drive the vehicle any more to earn an income and run his family.

Young Ramanna discontinued his studies some 3 years ago. His mother's income through attending to domestic chores of neighbours was not adequate to meet the family's minimum requirements. At this juncture, Ramanna was forced to join a two wheeler garage as a casual labourer. His main task was to wash scooters with a water jet, clean the scooters dismantled parts with petrol and assist the mechanic in carrying out the repair work. Many times, he was asked to unbolt the vehicle,
parts and hand them over to the mechanic for repairs or replacements. When a two wheeler was brought for painting this young boy had to scrap the old paint and prepare it for repainting.

Attending to the washing of machine parts with oil, liquid soap and water, the boy gets his body and dress soiled with dirt. Since he has to handle the heavy vehicles to and fro, he gets jerks in many parts of his body which often results in backaches. The inhaling of dust particles and fumes from the paint causes strong reaction in breathing and head aches. The boy has to attend garage quite early, that is, even before 9.00 O'clock in the morning clean the garage and wait for the owner/mechanic to arrive. He has to work till late in the evening upto 7.00 or 8.00 O'clock with a very short break for his afternoon lunch.

The boy was paid Rs.25 to Rs.30 a day when he started working in the garage some 3 years ago. Now, his daily wages have been raised to Rs.40/- . Ramanna finds that wages paid to him are a pittance and bear no relationship with the hard work he puts in and the greater skill he has acquired, over the years in repairing the vehicles. He feels he is exploited.

Being intelligent, hard working and skillful at repair work, he has a very keen desire to set up an independent garage and earn more income. He does not have the necessary financial resources to set up a small road side repair shop, hire one or two children, pay rent for the shed and buy the required tools.
5.2 (c) : Rice Puff Occupation

(1) Nazir Byadgi was a school drop out after the first standard. He is a Muslim boy and took up work in a rice puff small factory in his neighbourhood when he was barely 9 years of age. His father worked as a manual worker in the bus stand while his mother attended to domestic chores and earned some income. The family is very poor and finds it very hard to maintain 3 children.

Nazir's duty consists of boiling paddy in the big boiler, dry it in the sun take it to the mill. He had also to attend to the final process of turning rice into rice puff. For this, he had to sit continuously before the big burning furnace, mix salt and sand with the processed paddy and put the mixture in the hot iron plate. The boy got his right fore arm burnt. Because the boy has to sit continuously in front of the blazing furnace, he is not only exposed to heat but also gets suffocated from thick smoke emanating from the furnace. First aid is given to the boy in the event of an accident.

The boy has to report for work early morning at 8.00 O'Clock and work throughout the day till 8.00 O'Clock in the evening. For the very hard and tedious work he puts as he is paid pattery sum of Rs.20/- to Rs.25/- a day. When the demand for puff rice is low, the boy is laid off and does not get any wages.

(2) Parveena Narendra is a 14 years old girl. She could not go to school as her step mother started giving her illtreatment. This is
one of the main reasons why she had to take to work some two years ago in a rice puff factory, earn some money and seek shelter at home.

She has been given many tasks in the rice puff factory. She has to keep a watch and guard on the boiled paddy kept under the hot sun for drying. After the paddy is milled, once again it is kept under the sun and she has to look after its drying. She is exposed to the hot sun for 6 to 8 hours. She is also required to provide fuel for the furnace. Cleaning the big iron plate and assisting the adults in packing rice puff in gunny bags are other tasks which she has to attend.

The smoke loaded room and exposure to the hot sun has caused many breathing troubles to the girl. Parveena is paid of Rs. 200/- a month. She has to find a substitute to do her work whenever she is ill and could not attend work.

5.2 (d): Rag Picking

(1) Balanna Gosavi is a rag picker, aged 14 years. He took to rag picking when he was barely 10 years of age. The boy is living in a slum area in Dharwad with his father, 3 brothers and two sisters. He lost his mother when he was a child and his father suffered paralysis attack. Since there was nobody in the household to earn any income, Balanna took to rag picking along with his two brothers and a sister. Some of his friends in the neighbourhood had already been rag picking. Balanna undertook the work of rag picking following the example of his friends.
There is no fixed time for Balanna to start his work. But, however, he joins the group of his friends quite early in the morning, say around 6.30 am or 7.00 am. He travels street lanes, byelanes, in and around houses, municipal dumping grounds, garbage bins and even gutters and sewers. In this process, he walks long distances with a big polythene bag on his shoulders and collects rags, waste papers, plastic bags, polythene sheets and glass bottles, glass pieces, iron scraps, gunny bags, plastic materials and wooden pieces. The boy is required to put his hands in garbage dens. Not only he gets himself drenched with dirt but many time, he gets his hand and feet injured. The job of rag picking is not without troubles. The boy is harassed by the inhabitants of different localities. The collected materials are delivered to the nearest junk dealer in the evening.

The every day earning from rag picking depends upon the collection of materials and the price the junk dealer quotes. When the boy is able to collect more items of iron scraps, glass bottles, gunny bags etc., he earns about Rs.35/- to Rs.40/- a day. But the ordinary scrap collection in a day gets him around Rs.20/-. Balanna feels frustrated about the job he is handling. He got stuck up in the job since he was unable to get any other job. He dislikes the job as he understands that his hard labour is not adequately rewarded by the junk dealer.

(2) Huligemma is a 12 year old girl who belongs to the Scheduled Caste. She studied upto the 2nd standard and discontinued her
education because of poverty at home. There are five members in the family, two younger sisters and a younger brother. Her mother is a domestic worker and her father is a casual labourer in a building construction. She along with her younger sister is working as a rag picker since about 2 years.

Huligemma leaves home quite early and joins a small band of rag pickers. After collecting waste paper, plastic bags, glass bottles, iron pieces etc., she returns home around 1.00 p.m. and classifies them into different categories and sells such materials twice a week to the nearest junk dealer. She takes rest for an hour in the afternoon and moves on to collect scrap materials. She works barefoot in the hot sun. She earns about Rs.20/- to Rs.25/- a day.

5.3 CONCLUSION:

The analysis based on the statistical profiles of the child labourers belonging to different occupations yield a general and average information. But the case studies of child labourers employed in different categories of occupations, have the advantage of providing us with a more detailed and specific aspect of the economic status of the child labourers. The child representatives in each category of occupation have been selected for case studies. The following are the conclusions that emerge from the review of the case studies presented here in above.

1) All the child labourers who are employed are unskilled. Child workers in the rice puff Occupation and rag picking find that their
activities are repetitive in character and, hence, there is no value addition to their skill or knowledge even though they have been employed for 3 to 4 years in a concern.

2) In the case of child labourers working in the building construction and garages, the child labourers have to a certain extent learnt and developed new skills in handling materials and machines when the adult workers entrusted their work to the child labourers. But the child labourers are unable to make any use of acquired skills because the so called acquired skills do not in any way augment their learning capacities as most of the jobs done by them are highly monotonous, low skilled and tedious jobs that condemns them for ever in low paying jobs. Another reason for failure to make use of the skills learnt is that, setting up of a new venture calls for financial help, necessary financial resources to purchase the required equipments, pay for hiring labourers and rent for the shop. Since the child labourers are living from hand to mouth and are unable to achieve adequate savings, it is impossible for them to set up a new venture and earn more. More over, it takes some years to establish one's self in a new set up and overcome established competition. Further more, they are seriously handicapped by the fact that no certificates are issued by the employer to testify to their (child labourers') skills. Thus, the poor child labourers are at a total disadvantage to prove their merits to customers and enhance their credibility in the new set up.

3) The payment received as wages by the child labourers are too low and is not commensurate with the effort put in by the child labourers. The low wages paid to the children are in fact, due to
the supply factors (situations). The child labourers are not considered for higher payment by the employers even though they have laboured for 2 to 3 years to develop in themselves the necessary skills, in the trade to deserve higher emoluments. The money wages paid to the child labourers do not reveal the actual or real wages received by child. The child is made to work for more hours than the money wages paid to him/her warrants. In addition, the child labourers encounter many accidents and diseases due to environmental factors present in the production unit. This actually reduces the value of the real payment. Accidents and ill-health which affect children while the work is in progress are not compensated at all! On the contrary, wages are some money is deducted from wage payment for abstaining from work due to ill-health and accidents. All these point out to the exploitation of the child labourers by the employer. The actual or real wages received by the poor child labourers is a less than what is revealed by money wages. The money wages paid, therefore, actually hide the negative effects and the actual outcome is more than what is seen on the surface.

4) But the greatest challenge comes through the deprivation of education to the young kids. The case studies (already discussed) reveal that all the children left school early in their lives and joined work as child labourers. Once they join work, they have no motive nor money and time to pursue schooling and higher education thereafter, however, much they desire. The boys and girls are destined to remain uneducated. There are reported case studies1 wherein, child labourers despite trying and adverse circumstances could march ahead and achieve success
in academic matters which may not be even possible for children who are placed in more conducive circumstances. One must firmly note that there are exceptions and exceptions do not prove the rule. Such children are endowed with a strong will and talent which cut across all barriers, adverse circumstances and all odds in life that stand in way of achieving progress in education. This is more a case of over compensation. We are concerned with the majority of children who are normal and average and not notable exceptions.

5) The foregoing analysis of case studies and discussion do not support the hypothesis, "employment of child labourers improves children's prospects of jobs". Hence, the hypothesis is rejected.
NOTES

1.(a) Neera Burra (2000), Glass Factories of Firozabad II-Plight of Child Workers, E.P.W., Feb., 12, pp.512 records the case of an extraordinary and exceptionally brilliant child labourer (Mahboob) who has achieved academic distinctions and excellence in education in spite of the adverse and hostile circumstances. Even in the face of the growing harassment of his step mother and employer he studied at night, did odd jobs including giving private tuitions to maintain himself. During the course of his early life, he lost his grand parents who actually maintained him. By dint of hard work and the will to succeed he could not only complete the MSc Engineering course but also registered for a Ph.D. programme.

(b) Sudha, a Kannada Weekly (May, 2005) (Shivananda Honnalli) who cites the story of a child labourer working in a garage. After a good deal of struggle, he was inducted into a school. He bagged the first place both in taluka as well as in the district 200 meter running competition. He was even chosen to represent in national athletic union.

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