

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FACED BY RAG-PICKERS

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Abstract

Child labour, and in particular child ragpickers reflect the callous attitude of our society. The apathy, with which child ragpickers are treated, must disturb the conscience of the society, the planners of the countries progress. While this malaise is recognized and acknowledged as a serious and challenging issue in the civilized world around the globe, the problem still remains in most developed countries, with its creeping ill effects. A child ragpicker is deprived of his human rights even as a child. He/she is prone to unhealthy risks, habits and disease. The child thus ends up as a deprived adult, with his/her human development deformed and stunted. This certainly must be remedied with all resources available at hand.

Introduction

Though we are at the dawn of 21st century, child labour persists on a mass scale in most of the developing countries and India has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of child labours in the world. Child labour is the work by children which interferes with their full physical development and their opportunities for a desirable minimum education and recreation. Child labour is economically unsound, psychologically disastrous and physically as well as morally dangerous and harmful.

According to UNICEF, rag picking is the worst form of child labour. Ragpickers have emerged as a community in almost all, the cities of every developing country. They are quite vulnerable in the society and prone to diseases. As it is well know, ragpickers collect recyclable things from the garbage and also from dumping sites usually in the outskirts. Rai writes in his book

“Child Labour-A Reality” about the informal non-wages sector-ragpicking that children earn an income in the informal non-wages sector such as garbage collecting. It also includes such illegal activities like begging, petty theft and prostitution. Their activities are vital to the survival of poor people, especially in urban areas. Misra explains in his work “Problem of Child Labour in India” about the working condition of child ragpickers. Most dangerous, demanding and destructive of self worth is the job of scrap-collectors or ragpickers. They scrounge dustbins and garbage dumps in search of paper, rags and scraps of tin, iron, glass and even food that others have thrown away. Sometimes they are seen fighting with dogs for a piece of mildew bread.

In spite of a great deal of debate and discussion condemning the involvement of children in rag picking the problem is so acute in a developing country like India that the number of children working and their suffering increases day by day.

Meaning of Rag-picker

Ragpicker is term for someone who makes a living by rummaging through refuse in the streets to collect material for salvage. Scraps of cloth and paper could be turned into cardboard, broken glass could be melted down and reused, and even dead cats and dogs could be skinned to make clothes. The rag-pickers in 19th and early 20th Century did not recycle the materials themselves; they would simply collect whatever they could find and turn it over to a "master rag-picker" (usually a former rag-picker) who would, in turn, sell it generally by weight to wealthy investors with the means to convert the materials into something more profitable. Although it was solely a job for the lowest of the working classes, rag-picking was considered an honest occupation, more on the level of street sweeper than of a beggar. In Paris, for instance, rag-pickers were regulated by law: their operations were restricted to certain times of night, and they were required to return any unusually valuable items to the owner or to the authorities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tiara (1968) found that "Rag picker" is a generic term denoting anyone who stoops to pick waste of any kind for a living. The object picked is not limited to mrag. In resource-poor Japan, large amounts of materials used in industry are recouped from discarded products. Rag picking is part of the first-line activity in what the Japanese call the "resource regeneration industry." As early as the twelfth century, the indigenous paper industry was using waste paper as part of its raw material. Brick (2002) found that the turn of the twenty-first century has seen a sea change in most of the writing concerning street youth. The term street children itself has almost disappeared from the welfare and analytical literature, which now uses different appellations to refer to street children and other underprivileged groups. Children themselves, of course, are still on the streets, easily visible in the greatmajority of urban centers. What has been called the global or "worldwide phenomenon of street children" (le Roux 1996) has neither vanished from sight nor effectively been solved. However, current perspectives tend not to demarcate street children so radically from other poor children in urban centers or to conceptualize the homeless in isolation from other groups of children facing adversity.

Sachdeva (2011) found that rag pickers remain in isolation since they are discriminated by the society; they play a very crucial role in the society, though, without them, the issue of waste would have never been reduced in the society they are known as the invisible environmentalist. Kamat (1999) found that rag picking is a hazardous occupation several studies point out that these children were prone to illness like malnutrition, respiratory, tract infection and cancer; they were also engaged in activities that bade risk for their health and well-being, such as, substance abuse (alcohol, and commercial sex work).

Savita (2013) found that besides these they were prone to suffer from malnutrition, cancer, respiratory, tract infection and engaged in substance abuse, however, she further stated that they also involved in anti-social activities like pick-pocketing and the.

Problems Faced by Rag-Pickers

The problems faced by rag pickers are multifold. Most waste picking activity is illegal or unpermitted, so waste pickers commonly face harassment by police and authorities. Also, there is widespread public scorn against waste pickers due to their poverty and perceived lack of hygiene. Their livelihood due to acute poverty or run away from home or no education, or frustration or it is the only self employment etc. Once they are in the profession of rag picking they face still more problems by the police, by the public, by the middle men, by the other rag pickers and so on. Apart from these problems they face acute health hazards, no proper place of sleep, exposure to evils of society (like ganja addiction, alcohol, smoke, sex, etc.), which are forcefully imposed or thrust upon them due to their profession as rag pickers. All the problems associated with them be it social or economic or psychological no one can attribute a specific cause for it, we see the very problem involves lots of uncertainties and ambiguities so the data associated with this is only an unsupervised one. The police exploit the rag pickers, for they find it easy to register petty cases of theft etc., falsely.

ii. The health hazards faced by them are very acute. Most of them suffer from seasonal fever, malaria (due to mosquito bite) and other skin ailments due to very bad hygiene.

iii. These children become easy victims of all bad habits and become real criminal due to misuse. Unless some sympathetic/understanding social workers help them with good guidance and protection they will die at an early age for they are unaware of any health problems they face due to their profession. They do not know the means to save or use properly the money they earn by rag picking

Social and ecological benefits

Waste picking offers significant ecological, economic, and social benefits: Job creation: Waste picking provides a source of livelihood to extremely poor people with few other employment opportunities. Though many waste pickers practice their trade as a full-time profession, its flexible hours make it accessible to women with other care responsibilities and to people looking to supplement income from other jobs. During times of need, waste picking serves as a safety net to street children, orphans, the elderly, widows, migrants, the disabled, the unemployed, and victims of armed conflicts. Waste picking also benefits the broader economy by supplying raw materials to industry and creating many associated jobs for middlemen who purchase, sort, process, and resell materials collected by waste pickers Public health and sanitation: Waste pickers collect garbage from neighborhoods that lack public services. Without waste pickers, residents would be forced to burn trash, or dispose of it in rivers, streets and empty lots. Waste pickers provide the only solid waste removal service in

many cities Municipal savings: Waste pickers provide between 50 and 100% of waste collecting services in most cities of the developing world, according to a 2010 UN Habitat report. This is effectively serves as a mass subsidy for city governments, who do not pay for the labor. Moreover, recycling expands the lifespan of city dumps and landfills. Reducing pollution and mitigating climate change: By cutting the quantity of virgin materials needed for production, waste pickers save room in landfills, lessen water and energy consumption, reduce air and water pollution, and abate climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The current study that was done by the research on problems faced by rag pickers in, the following recommendations he would like to make.
- Free and compulsory education is a policy for all young children regardless of caste, religion, financial background.
- It was found that majority were children and they have no mean of availing the services. It is recommended that NGO as well as the Government do something and arrange for the necessity.
- Information, education, communication can play vital role in extending awareness regarding rag picking, their rights and how they can be protected. It is recommended that NGO must take up this aspect and focus on it in order to bring about a better awareness on regarding rag picking.
- Government should provide free medical services for the poor. According to the research the researcher found that their daily income is low it is recommended that to increase their daily vocational training should be provided in order to develop the skills and knowledge that would allow them to access to the various opportunities that would help them attain a life of decency and dignity.

CONCLUSION

After going through all process, findings and research, the researcher would like to conclude that the lives of the rag pickers are filled with several problems and faced with many difficult circumstances in their lives which are social in nature. Failure of the implementation of the various policies have made even more vulnerable, be it physically, emotionally, spiritually or mentally of such poor rag pickers. The study found that most of the rag pickers live in poor huts and unhealthy environment. Due to the vulnerable condition the rag pickers are likely to be harassed by public, law authority and any other kind of abuses. Government should really look after these deprived people and must provide them with social status, job opportunities, and education and look after their health and shelter related problems Despite performing a very useful social service at great risk to their health and well-being, for little money.

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