

CONFLICT, CHILDREN AND SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF CRITICAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF CHILDREN IN KASHMIR

Manzoor Hussain*

ABSTRACT

The present research paper examines the problems and prospectus of children in general and that of Kashmir in particular. It analyses the various issues and concerns about the children who are socialized in a state of confusion and chaos, where excessive obsession breeds fear and nervousness marrying the prospects, where physical, mental, cultural, intellectual or emotional well-being is endangered, and where the bigotry and hegemony have claimed the lives of thousands of children. A special mention in the paper has been given to causes and consequences of problems of children in Kashmir enumerating their psychological, social, educational, political economic and cultural dimensions. It also highlights the critical outlook of child development aiming at their needs, aspirations and attitudes. Children are among the most neglected, abused and exploited segments of the population. Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist. Slavery, debt, bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work are all defined as worst forms of child labour. It is in this light that the present paper has been formulated and developed with the objective of developing a sociological understanding of problems and prospectus of children in Kashmir.

Key words: Child development, Socialization, Child Problems and Issues, Implications.

Introduction

What would you do if your baby cried continuously but was not ill, hungry or in need of a diaper change? Would you hold your baby, roll back and forth, walk around and sing gently until the crying stopped, even if it takes hours. Your action will depend on your culture. The traditional *Navaho* Indian response usually was to remove the baby from social contact until the crying stopped. After making sure that the baby was not ill or in any physical distress, he or she would be taken outside of the small single room house and left in a safe place until the crying stopped. Then the baby would be brought indoors again to join the family; perhaps as a result *Navaho* babies in this way are usually very quiet. They learn early that making noise causes them to be removed from the social contact. An integrated personality emerges only when a child develops the right attitude towards life, positive quality of sincerity, honesty of purpose, total commitment to whatever one undertakes to do and supreme concern for the well-being of all whom he or she comes into contact with. This is the outcome of proper socialization. Now a million dollar question is what about the children who are socialized in a state of confusion and chaos? The children in Kashmir are neglected, abused and exploited and there is need to restrict and eradicate the most intolerable forms of child labour. These problems rob children of their health, education, freedom and their prospectus for a better future.

Socialization

Human infants are born without any culture. They must be transformed by their parents, teachers and others into social and cultural animals. The general process of acquiring culture is referred to as socialization. It is the process whereby one internalizes the norms of his group so that a distinct self emerges, unique to this individual (Horton and Hunt). Socialization may be differentiated from sociality, socialism and maturation. Sociality may mean the capacity to mix with others, to enter into relations with them easily and comfortably. Socialism is a theory, not a quality or a process. It is a theory that the means

*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir, Srinagar

of production, exchange and distribution should be owned and controlled either by the state or by other associations. Maturation refers primarily to the physical and chemical process of development over which man has comparatively little control. It is growing up and gradual changing of the organism from birth to this last breath. During socialization we learn the language of our culture is born into as well as the roles we are to play in life. For example, girls learn how to be daughters, sisters, friends, wives and mothers. In addition, they learn about the occupational roles that their society allows them. Looking around the world we see that different cultures use different techniques to socialize their children. There are two broad types of teaching methods, formal and informal. Formal education is what primarily happens in a class room. It usually is structured, controlled and directed primarily by adult teachers who are professional “knower’s”. In contrast informal education can occur anywhere. It involves imitation of what other do and say as well as experimentation and repetitive practice of basic skills. This is what happens when children role play adult interactions in their games.

The Childhood Lost: Issues and Concerns

Children in Kashmir are socialized in a state of confusion and chaos, where excessive obsession breeds fear and nervousness, where physical, mental, cultural, intellectual or emotional well-being is endangered and where the bigotry and hegemony have claimed the lives of thousands of children. Response to such situations by children in Kashmir leads to defective Developmental Quotient (DQ), a measure of the development of perception, bodily functions, social relations, memory, imitation, manipulative ability, emotional balance and intelligence. Defective socialization may result in sever retardation in physical, social and moral growth and development; the effects on the development on personality and behaviour appear to be even more severe.

Delinquency has emerged as a common feature among the children in Kashmir. There may be several factors responsible for delinquency. Broadly, they may be divided under two categories: individual factors and situational factors. Individual factors consist of personality traits like hostility, feeling of insecurity, fear, emotional conflict, defiance etc. The situational factors include family environment, peer group influence, school environment, and influence of movies and so on. While individual factors are no doubt important, the changing social environment has become more significant in inducting young people to delinquency. The harmful and immoral acts like smoking, drinking, drug abuse, violence and brutality depicted in everyday life, movies, and story books leave a lasting impression on the fragile minds of the children. They learn new techniques of violence and crime directly or indirectly supported by disorganized social system of Kashmir.

It is indeed criminal injustice to children when they work out of their sheer poverty or out of ignorance and lack of motivation on the part of parents. Hundreds of thousands of children work in handicrafts (*Shawl embroidery, wood-carving paper-machie, Gabba and NambaSazi*), other cottage industries, hotels and eateries, auto workshops or other vocations. At a time when a child ought to be playing or studying in a school, many children carry too heavy burden on the frail shoulders. What a waste of young human resources!

Stress has become an integral part of life in Kashmir and spares none. Anxiety and fear stalk every one child or youth, man or women, house wife or working women, persons living in cities or villages, the rich man or the poor man. Only a few know how to tackle stress. But what about children who get socialized in a stressful social atmosphere? The competitive world demands them to reach the peak of excellence they themselves could not achieve. On the other hand, the disturbed situation does not allow children to exploit fully the potential and reach the peak of excellence. For this they have to struggle a lot.

According to Strategic Foresight Group of International Centre for Peace Initiatives, Mumbai, August 2004 about 45,000 stress related cases in Kashmir were expected per year in next five years.

Many children face emotional deprivation, absence of mothering, lack of love experiences which cause tragic ill effects on personality development. For the new born baby, survival is of the first importance. But survival alone is not enough and in most cases it is doubtful whether mere satisfaction of his physical need will secure even that. We know that love is the essential part of the nourishment of every baby and unless he is loved he will not grow and develop as a healthy organism: socially, psychologically, spiritually and physically. But the question remains to be seen what about the children who lost one parent or both in a chaos and confusion prevailing in Kashmir for two decades now?

Reports of ill-treating young, impressionable children are on the rise. This leaves their minds damaged and often results in retaliatory action. The major motivation sometimes is not robbery; aggression becomes a means of taking out frustration. Many people treat their child servants like 18th century slaves, while in the same house they continue to shower affection and wealth on their own children. This disparity tempts a child servant to steal or, commit a crime out of sheer jealousy. Employer's responses to their child servants and child servants to their employers are conditioned by their social environment and that is where the trouble begins. Equal opportunities to all are the base of all democracies and education is one of the strongest tools for empowering any section of society. We no longer talk these days in terms of familiar concept of literacy; we are now more interested in what is called computer literacy or E-literacy. Children basically enjoy the same rights as adults. However, because they are minors, they need special protection. They are most vulnerable section of our society. They need special care and protection if their future is to be made secure. Ultimately child development and welfare is in the interest of social development.

Nowhere, perhaps are children so widely and mercilessly exploited as a work force as in Kashmir and despite legislation to curb exploitation of child labour, the practice continues unabated resulting in the violation of thousands and lakhs of children. They are forced to work for long hours but paid low wages. Many a time they don't get a penny. The children face a host of problems including lack of basic amenities and wage disparity on the basis of sex. Most of the children have left schools after the death of their fathers in different militancy-related incidents. It had become impossible for their families to send them to schools.

According to unofficial estimates, there're about 300,000 child labourers in the state. In the 2001 census, the number was pegged at 1, 75,000, with 70% of the teenagers belonging to the Valley and most of them orphaned in the conflict. Majority of them were females working in unorganised sectors like handicrafts.

The main causes of child labour in Kashmir include conflict situation, poverty, unemployment, and excess population. Among these, conflict situation and poverty are the primary cause of child labour. These poor orphaned families struggle for survival which makes their children work in factories, shops, even selling items on streets. Child labour does more than deprive children of their education and mental and physical development - their childhood is stolen. Immature and inexperienced child labourers may be completely unaware of the short and long term risks involved in their work.

Working long hours, child labourers are often denied a basic school education, normal social interaction, personal development and emotional support from their family. Beside these problems, children face many physical dangers - and death - from forced labour. Physical injuries and mutilations are caused by badly maintained machinery on farms and in factories, machete accidents in plantations, and any number of hazards encountered in industries such as mining, ceramics and fireworks manufacture.

Growth deficiency is prevalent among working children, who tend to be shorter and lighter than other children; these deficiencies also impact on their adult life. Long-term health problems, such as respiratory disease, vision loss, and a variety of cancers, are common in children who are forced to work long hours. A significant majority of children suffer from myopia due to the constant eyestrain while others faced immediate and long-term implications including accidents, cuts and burns, chronic bronchitis, chest pain, cough and dysphasia.

Causes and Consequences

India is one of the countries with the highest level of children population in the world. It has also the highest level of child labour and other problems. Kashmir is no exception. Poverty and its related problems are some for the main causes of problems of children. Poverty in Kashmir is chronic due to, among others, population pressure, land degradation, unemployment and under-employment among adults and school leavers (youth). Children are paid lower wages than adults, not unionized, and do not demand workers' rights. They are thought to be more efficient in certain types of work and thus prepared for such type of jobs. Poverty is undoubtedly a dominant factor in the use of child labour; families on or below the poverty line force their children into work to supplement their households meagre income. Eradicating poverty however, is the only first step on the road to eliminating child labour. Most children in Kashmir work in handicrafts, in which boys and girls as young as 8 to 10 years old usually work from morning to evening. Other common jobs are collecting firewood, tending to animals, begging, domestic labour, dying cloth. Children that work are not only subject to the strains and hazards of their labour, they are also denied the education or training that could enable them escape the poverty trap. The other main cause of child labour is cultural values. The Kashmir culture encourages children to work to develop skills. Children are considered as assets to generate income in time of poverty. Children should, therefore, be given work at home early in life and be obliged to assist parents. Other reasons include educational problems, like distance from school, poor quality of education, over-crowding, inability to support schooling; family disintegration due to divorce, death, armed conflict, and rapid urbanization.

Child labour does more than deprive children of their education and mental and physical development - their childhood is stolen. Immature and inexperienced child labourers may be completely unaware of the short and long term risks involved in their work. Working long hours, child labourers are often denied a basic school education, normal social interaction, personal development and emotional support from their family. Besides these problems, children may face many physical dangers, death and forced labour. Physical injuries and mutations are caused by badly maintained machinery on farms and in factories, accidents in plantations, and any number of hazards encountered in industries such as handicrafts, ceramics and fireworks manufacture. Pesticide poisoning is one of the biggest killers of child labourers. In Kashmir, pesticides have killed many children. Exhaustion and malnutrition are a result of underdeveloped children performing heavy manual labour; working long hours in unbearable conditions and not earning enough to feed them adequately. Growth deficiency is thus prevalent among working children, who tend to be shorter and lighter than other children; these deficiencies also impact on their adult life. Many children in Kashmir face homelessness through poverty or migration, or because they have been abandoned, or orphaned. It was not unusual to see whole families living in open air after devastating October, 5, earthquake in Kashmir. Homeless children have the odds stacked against them. They are exposed to the elements, have an uncertain supply of food, are likely to miss out on education and medical treatment, and are at high risk of suffering addiction, abuse and illness. Poor health is a chronic problem for children in Kashmir. Many children are malnourished and underweight. The working children live and work amidst

trash, fields, animals and open sewers. Not only are they exposed and susceptible to disease, they are also unlikely to be vaccinated or receive medical treatment. Child labourers suffer from exhaustion, injury, exposure to dangerous chemicals, muscle and bone afflictions.

Paradoxically, in Kashmir child labour may not even be recognized when children work as part of the family unit. This is particularly common in agriculture, where an entire family may have to work to meet a particular quota or target and cannot afford to employ outside help. Children may also be expected to act as unpaid domestic servants in their own home, taking care of the family's needs while both parents work. Employers often justify the use of children by claiming that a child's small, nimble hands are vital to the production of certain products such as handicrafts. These young children are unaware of their rights and less likely to complain or revolt. Drug abuse, depression, damaged self-esteem; behavioural problems are other psycho-social problems of children in Kashmir. Looking at gender discrimination, females are often discriminated against. Their health, education, prosperity are all impacted. The problem is worse in conservative rural Kashmir than urban centres. Because girls carry the liability of dowry and leave the family home after marriage, parents prefer to have male offspring's. Many female babies are aborted, abandoned or deliberately neglected and underfed simply because they are girls. Gender discrimination is particularly evident in education where boys are more likely to attend school and to so far more years. The traditional place of women is in home and many parents and children consider education for girls to be a waste of time, especially when the child can instead be working or performing domestic work.

Child neglect is an act of omission, or the absence of action. While the consequences of child neglect can be devastating, it leaves no visible marks. Moreover, it usually involves infant and very young children who cannot speak for themselves. James M. Gandin Jr. in "Child Neglect: Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes, reported that compared with non-maltreated and abused children, neglected children have the worst delays in language comprehension and expression. Psychologically neglected children also score lowest IQ (Intelligence Quotient test. Emotional neglect, in its most serious form, can result in the "non-organic failure to thrive syndrome" a condition in which a child fails to develop physically or even to survive. Parental neglectful behaviours' include not keeping the child clean, not providing enough clothes for keeping warm, not making sure the child attended school, not caring if the child got into trouble in school, not helping with homework, not helping the child do his best, not providing comfort when the child was upset, and not helping when the child had problems. This parental negligence has significance for children in Kashmir as well.

Child Development in Kashmir –A Critique

The issues and concerns of children in Kashmir are a complex reality, inextricably linked with underdevelopment and apathetic attitude on the part of society. Legislative measures and protection made available to children through various enactments have not prohibited child problems and issues. The psycho-sociological implications of these children are particularly bad as the life chances of the children who work on carpets, paper-mashie, agriculture, streets, hotels, restaurants and other objects which are an integral part of tourist trade. The grave problems are nutritious food of mother and child, vaccination and general medical care, legitimacy, physical and social environment, education, recreation, prevention of exploitation and hazards, bonded labour, children for smuggling and other nefarious activities, like physical and mental torture. The problems of child labour has assumed menacing magnitude and intensity which have given rise to multidimensional problems and have adverse implications on child's physical, social, psychological, educational, moral development. That children have to work is sad, but they should work in conditions dangerous to their health and safety is totally unacceptable. Nor can the problem of child labour

be left untracked until economic conditions and social structures are fundamentally improved. Toiling long hours for a pittance, these little breadwinners accept exploitation as a way of life. They only know their sorrows; silent acceptance is *writ large* on their faces. These child workers have no shelter, no food and no education and run the risk of contracting various ailments and skin diseases; they are vulnerable to exploitation by almost anyone- the employer, the parents, the cops, and even the common man; they become easy targets of drug pushers and are even sexually abused. Certain policies and legislative measures exist but the question is that why despite these policies and legislations grave problems and issues of children exist?

There is need of a sensitization programme for the awareness of common masses so that comprehensive social action programme/policy could be formulated for short-term and long-term planning which will focus on crucial social problems of children in Kashmir.

Conclusion

Human infants are born without any culture. They must be transformed by their parents, teachers and others into social and cultural animals. Children in Kashmir are socialized in a state of confusion and chaos, where excessive obsession breeds fear and nervousness, where physical, mental, cultural, intellectual or emotional well-being is endangered and where the bigotry and hegemony have claimed the lives of thousands of children. Delinquency has emerged as a common feature among the children in Kashmir. The children work out of their sheer poverty or out of ignorance and lack of motivation on the part of parents. Hundreds of thousands of children work in handicrafts (*Shawl embroidery, wood-carving paper-machie, Gabba and NambaSazi*), other cottage industries, hotels and eateries, auto workshops or other vocations. Stress has become an integral part of life in Kashmir and spares none. Anxiety and fear stalk every one child or youth, man or women, house wife or working women, persons living in cities or villages, the rich man or the poor man. Many children face emotional deprivation, absence of mothering, lack of love experiences which cause tragic ill effects on personality development. Reports of ill-treating young, impressionable children are on the rise. This leaves their minds damaged and often results in retaliatory action. The major motivation sometimes is not robbery; aggression becomes a means of taking out frustration. The main causes of child labour in Kashmir include conflict situation, poverty, unemployment, and excess population. Among these, conflict situation and poverty are the primary cause of child labour. Working long hours, child labourers are often denied a basic school education, normal social interaction, personal development and emotional support from their family. Growth deficiency is prevalent among working children, who tend to be shorter and lighter than other children; these deficiencies also impact on their adult life. Long-term health problems, such as respiratory disease, vision loss, and a variety of cancers, are common in children who are forced to work long hours. The conflict situation has deep implications for children in Kashmir. They represent an extremely suffering group and their life conditions are pathetic, miserable and nasty, feeling of social stigma, worst economic conditions, educational backwardness, mental and physical health deterioration, mass humiliation, dehumanization, cultural aggression, political suppression, demographic manipulation and psychological depression, insufficient or no accommodation, feeling of insecurity, deviance, delinquency, total dependence and bleak future.

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