

# SACH



ISSUE NO. 68 ■ OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022

## Inclusion for Every Child for The Future of South Asia

**OUR** children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation.” – Nelson Mandela

Children are the greatest treasure and future of any country. Every child is special and unique and most precious thing in this world is the smile on the face of children. Children need love and care, because the way we bring them up determines the future of the country. Their development is extremely important for creating a better environment by providing them with a good health education, protection and a better livelihood.

On the occasion of World Children's Day this issue of SACH discusses the various factors that need to be addressed for creating more inclusive and equal future of children. Every year, World Children's Day is commemorated on November 20. It is celebrated as UNICEF's annual day of action for children, by children. This year's World Children's Day theme is **Inclusion: For Every Child**. That denotes education as an important right for children across the world. This will build a better future for kids around the globe.

Education and health is a basic rights of children but in present times children of South Asia are facing many challenges like poverty, education, mental health, discrimination and climate change. In past few years they have suffered from endless problems. With rise in Covid-19 and access to technology children have lost their childhood, on one hand there are children who have lost the access to education due to poverty and lack of technology on the other hand children who have accessed all these amenities have been burdened by the parents, society and their expectations. Too much exposure to technology and internet has led to the mental violence due to which they are suffering from mental illness.

Due to climate change and disaster children in Bangladesh and Pakistan have been deprived from classroom education. There are millions of dropouts due to flood and poverty in Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Bangladesh children have come out from classrooms and working as labour for their survival. Similarly in India as well due to pandemic children couldn't go back to school and working as labours in construction sites.

Such stories from different south Asian countries compelled us to think whether this Universal Children Day is really is happy enough to celebrate, can we say that our children are really happy especially after the pandemic and continues climatic disasters that has taken away their childhood.

However the continues efforts of many organisations and child rights activist have helped in bringing light in the lives of many children who are absent from the development dialogues. Since ages voices are being raised on the issues of children in a more equal and inclusive world. There are initiatives in history which were taken by activities but are not very known such as initiatives taken by Bangbandhu to help war children in Bangladesh that are. In present times also many individuals and groups are helping children in their own way. In Nepal a campaign was initiated to provide Dalit children proper education, In India three daughters of Sex worker have become the voice of red light area children. In Iran protest by schoolgirls to demand freedom and equality has shown that how children have become brave enough for their own rights. Such examples around South Asia shows a ray of hope in society and a way out for secure and safe environment for children. The Children of today will be adults of tomorrow. They will become today's leaders and activists. Their quality and personality will determine the kind of destiny that beckons the nation.

# Let The Children Live Their Childhood

By SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

A few days back, my younger sister came to me and asked how she could find the motivation to prepare for her upcoming exams, I found myself confused and unable to answer this simple question. My confusion did not stem from my inability to understand her vocabulary, or phrasing. Rather, it stemmed from my inability to comprehend why a 12-year-old was so distraught about preparing for her midterm exams. What stake is she considering and why does she feel demotivated in the first place?

Later when I revisited the conversation, she added, "Please do not say good grades, that does not help." And that is what directed me towards a point of reflection, that has fuelled this piece.

In today's fast-paced world, children have somehow been placed in a hamster wheel, chasing too much at once. Children are motivated from a very early age to not only put their full focus on school, but they are also expected to take up multiple "useful" extra-curricular activities. If that weren't enough, there is a looming expectation of excelling at each of these endeavours. What children decide to do out of interest, they must be the best at, and it is a waste of effort and their precious time otherwise.

Before we know it, we are subjecting children to the claws of capitalism, and the futile and ever exhausting cycle of achieving and feeling like we must achieve more. Thus, these children with packed and often overscheduled days have little to no time for recreation, personal development and self-reflection, essentialities in the process of

growth.

Instead of living through their childhood and letting them take the natural path towards becoming adults as the years go by, children are often expected to assume adult-level responsibilities to secure a "future," ignoring their age and all other variables that make this even more unfitting. Moreover, most of these children are not even aware of what it is exactly that they are geared towards.

There is this mysterious future that they must work towards, instilling the idea that their present has little to no value, and they must continue to chase something that may give them rewards in the future. Being an adult, I struggle to grasp that concept myself. So, how reasonable is it to expect children to understand the intricacies of a time-bound commitment they are making with themselves?

Not truly comprehending what it is they are working towards, most children tend to make a trade-off and form a reward system for themselves. They work towards goals set by others, and upon achieving them, validate themselves with the appreciation they receive due to the results they have managed to achieve. And thus starts an unhealthy cycle of validating one's existence with the hazardous combination of personal achievements and external validation.

It is universally known that parents want what's best for their children, and it is not in my intentions to assume or express that they have any other motivations in doing these. Of course, parents do not want to take an experience as important as a childhood,

away from their children.

It is understandable that they would like to prepare their children for the future and the unknowns that it holds. However, in the looming anxiety of the global economy, and the rapid changes the world seems to be undergoing, parents often do not realise how they end up transferring the weight of the anxiety onto their children.

When children are expected to burden themselves with adult levels of accountability and responsibilities, they also face troubles we usually associate with adults. Stress, anxiety, poor mental health, and a lack of self-esteem may be a few such impacts that could result from such a life set for the children amongst us.

Enforcing strict expectations and goals on children take away what little agency and choice they have. They lose the ability to discover their true interests, and selves. They are after all people, who deserve to set their own expectations from a life they are to lead.

Infantilising them and making decisions on their behalf only takes away any shot they may have at learning accountability at a healthy pace.

Children truly believe their parents are omniscient. I know I did. We must understand that the ways of the world are forever changing, and they will continue to do so. Assuming responsibility for the future, for ourselves and the children, will not do much to put anyone ahead of this rat race.

We must allow children to read that comic, or paint a picture without the expectation of them becoming an illustrator or a future version of Salvador Dali someday. It is okay if that painting hangs in the living room till it eventually gets lost. It is okay for children to go through a process of trial and error to find out what they want to do. All that they do does not have to be set towards becoming someone or achieving something arbitrary.

*Courtesy: [www.thedailystar.net/](http://www.thedailystar.net/)*

# How Political Violence Affects Children

By MD ASADUL ISLAM

A national election is coming, and it is already causing huge violence among the activists of political parties. Every citizen of the country is concerned because the ruling and opposition parties seem to be gladly inviting one another to the battlefield, i.e., the public streets.

Based on previous experience, it is common for violence to not only stay in the cities, but also spread to rural areas. As a result, many people lose their lives while others become permanently disabled.

However, none of the parties understand how this type of violence can have a significant impact on today's technologically advanced children. A child nowadays has access to a smartphone to watch cartoons on, but these are also full of advertisements, which display violent pictures and videos.

Many children are already victims of virtual abuse, but the growing violence among political activists and the banquet of their photos on online platforms in Bangladesh are going to worsen the situation. It is because a child becomes scared, confused, and emotionally broken after seeing such photos and videos. The resulting damage done to children's mental health can be alarming. When children see violent pictures on smartphones or TV screens, they become perplexed, and can suffer from depression or other mental health problems. It is also similar in the case of teenagers, who become frustrated by regular violence that prohibits their regular entertainment activities. As a consequence, they may engage in criminal behaviours as adults.

The number of smartphone and TV users in Bangladesh has increased dramatically in recent years, but most children are using these

without any proper monitoring from their parents or guardians, who are usually busy. No one is available to shield children from violent content on the internet. This is making things worse for the healthy intellectual development of children in Bangladesh.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), experiencing violence in childhood impacts one's lifelong health and well-being. There is already very little provision in terms of children's recreation centres and initiatives for their mental development in this country. Hence, growing violence within the country will deteriorate the situation. In this regard, the ruling and opposition parties should be cordial to one another. It's the year 2022, and political violence will not only bring societal woes but also make economic growth more unstable.

Media platforms should be careful when using violent photos and videos so that children can be kept out of their reach. Some newspapers highlight violent pictures to increase their sales. But if a cautionary note is mentioned alongside it, adult readers can keep that particular page out of children's reach. That way, children can be protected from mental trauma. A similar request is applicable for TV news presenters, who should also announce a cautionary note before highlighting violent scenes so that adult users can keep their children at a safe distance.

It is important to mention that violent photos and graphics are also displayed on city walls, billboards, and public places which draw the attention of children who are passing by. These definitely impact negatively on their mental health and growth. This also needs to be reduced both for children and adults alike.

*Courtesy: [www.thedailystar.net/](http://www.thedailystar.net/)*

# First Pandemic, Now Floods : Millions of Dropouts Raise Fears of An Education Crisis in Pakistan

By **IMRAN MUKHTAR**, Thomson Reuters Foundation

**WHEN** flooding devastated northwest Pakistan in late August, 8-year-old Sinain Bibi lost out on about two months of education after half of her school building was swept away, along with the wooden bridge that connected her village with the school.

Bibi must now embark on a treacherous trek each day to attend a makeshift school, held in a tent on a riverbank in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. She is worried about the class time she has missed and said it would take her a while to catch up.

"The calamity has seriously disturbed my studies as I couldn't learn a single lesson since my school was closed," Bibi said outside the temporary school in the village of Lagan Khar village, in Swat district.

"I've even forgotten those lessons which I had learned before my school was shut down," she said.

The catastrophic deluge – brought on by record monsoon rains and melting glaciers, both exacerbated by climate change, scientists say – killed more than 1,700 people and has caused over \$30 billion in damage.

Pakistan is now facing not only humanitarian and health emergencies – with 33 million people, about a seventh of the population, impacted by flooding – but also an education crisis, communities and officials warn.

The UN children's agency said last month that the flooding has damaged or destroyed more than 26,600 schools nationwide, while at least 7,060 others are being used as

temporary relief camps and shelters for the displaced.

More than 3.5 million children have had their education disrupted, United Nations Children's Fund said, in a country that even before the floods had the world's second highest number of out-of-school children – 22.8 million of those aged 5-16, or 44% of that age group.

"Having already endured some of the world's longest school closures due to the (Covid-19) pandemic, (Pakistan's children) are experiencing yet another threat to their future," United Nations Children's Fund's global education director, Robert Jenkins, said in a statement.

Pakistan's planning ministry says 197 billion rupees (\$918 million) is needed to meet its education recovery costs – an amount higher than the United Nations' total \$816 million humanitarian funding appeal for the country.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, fears are growing over the availability of funds and other help to repair or rebuild schools following the flooding, with education advocates and teachers concerned about the prospect of more school dropouts.

"The disaster has seriously disturbed the reading, writing and learning skills of the children while they remained away from their books," said Adnan Khan, a teacher at the Government Primary School Bair, which Bibi attended before the inundation.

## **SCHOOL MEANS HOPE**

While the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has managed to establish

makeshift tent schools to educate children whose classrooms were destroyed by the flooding, local activists and teachers say there is a lack of space and basic facilities.

The tent in Lagan Khar village – set up by Sarhad Rural Support Programme, a Non-Governmental Organisation – is too small to accommodate all of the pupils, and lacks electricity, water, bathrooms and heating.

Khan, the teacher, said the latter in particular was a concern with temperatures falling in winter. He worried that a lack of heat would make it impossible for children to continue to learn in the tent throughout December.

About 20 of the damaged school's 60 pupils have not returned since the tent was erected in late October, said fellow teacher Sher Ali, amid concerns in the community that many children in the poverty-hit area would ultimately drop out of education.

Gulab Khan, a 50-year-old labourer, said most of the children who had left school were helping their families to eke out a living in the aftermath of the floods – from grazing livestock to collecting firewood for cooking and heating homes.

"School is the only hope for both parents and children of the village," said Gulab Khan, whose three children attend the Government Primary School Bair. He urged the local education authority to organise funding for a new building.

Zubair Torwali, head of a local non-governmental organisation Idara Baraye Taleem-o-Taraqi, said it was "unfortunate" that only the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation had so far helped to repair schools, roads and bridges in the area.

The provincial government has done nothing to-date, he said.

"The situation is worrisome for us because the agency plans to pack up at the end of November after completing its work and no other organisation so far has extended a hand for the rehabilitation of schools," Torwali said.

The main problem in the area, he said, is that many of the 70-odd local schools damaged by the floods have been cut off from nearby

communities due to collapsed bridges and destroyed roads.

### FUNDING PLANS

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's education secretary Motasim Billah Shah said the local government would "bring all dropouts back to school" as it had done following the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government plans to repair or reconstruct all of the 2,000 flood-hit schools in the province within eight months, with initial estimates showing a cost of at least 10 billion Pakistani rupees (\$45 million), according to Shah.

The official said the government would pay from its own pockets but also rely on financial support from institutions such as the World Bank and United Nations Children's Fund.

In the meantime, the province is renting some buildings to use as makeshift school facilities, he said.

Amid the funding and logistics considerations, Pakistan's prime minister, climate minister and other officials called for support at the UN COP27 summit in Egypt this month.

Pakistan's leaders told the conference that the nation needed not only debt relief but "loss and damage" funding – from a new funding facility agreed at the meeting – to recover from the floods.

Pakistan may also be one of the first recipients of help from a new G7-backed "Global Shield" initiative announced at the UN climate talks.

"We are now in the frontline of vulnerability", despite producing few of the fossil fuel emissions that are driving climate change disasters, said Sherry Rehman, the country's environment minister.

Back in Lagan Khar, eight-year-old Bibi said she was impatient for her school to be rebuilt so she could more easily finish her education and inspire others.

"I want to become a teacher to ensure no girl in my village remains illiterate anymore," she said.

*Courtesy : [www.scroll.in](http://www.scroll.in)*

# Poverty's Impact on Education of Children in Pakistan

By KHIZRA MUSHTAQ

How Poverty is Affecting Education? Through education, one gains knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Whether it be a traditional education or no, every child has the right to one. As a result, man, people, and nations all over the world acknowledge education as a cultural institution. This illustrates why it is man's responsibility to educate both himself and his children's. One of the factors that prevents someone from succeeding in their academic endeavours is poverty. Due to the many different interpretations and complexities of the term, it is impossible to come up with a definition of poverty that is accepted worldwide. However, the definition of poverty is the condition of being poor.

In addition, a low calorie diet, no access to quality healthcare, a deficient educational system, a short lifespan, unemployment, and underemployment are all characteristics of a person living in poverty. In Pakistan, poverty is a significant risk factor-reducer. It will therefore be researched broadly, which denotes that it will be viewed from a variety of angles, it includes one country, state, and hometown. If a country has a very low economic standard, which automatically labels it as underdeveloped, that country may be considered to be destitute on a global scale.

In Pakistan's 260,903 educational institutions, 41,018,384 students are taught by 1,535,461 teachers. There are 180,846 governmental institutions and 80,057 public ones in the system. So, whereas 69% of educational institutions are run by the public sector, 31% of them are managed by the private sector. By taking part in international education and by implementing national education policies, Pakistan has pledged to advance education and literacy in the nation. Urban children frequently believe that they cannot learn until poverty is addressed, which is a common misconception. This is a cosy tale since it exonerates everyone for the poor quality of schooling. Anything can be attributed to poverty. Unfortunately, some people see this as putting the responsibility on the kids and their parents.

When the discussion of "who's fault in this" is discussed? What is the main issue, and what are the ways to resolve it?" in place of "What exactly is the issue, and how can we resolve it? Let's put an end to the blame game when qualified teachers who work in a bad system are made to look bad, politicians hide, and people argue about the wrong topics. Simply believing that disadvantaged kids can't learn paralyses them. Due to the fact that many government school teachers dislike going to the school, pupils who

attend these schools do not obtain the education they are entitled to. As a result, children at government schools do not receive a quality education.

The involvement of the government is the only solution to this issue. It should take measures to track teachers' attendance at classes. Nearly one-third of Pakistan's children, according to the country's economic census, are considered to be living in poverty. Poverty affects a student's ability to grow their brain, create relationships with their peers, and finish their formal education. Recently, legislators from both parties have championed policies like more testing and performance-based evaluations for teachers and school districts, making education reform a hot topic. However, one of the problems that affects public schools the most is rarely brought up in discussions on education.

There are numerous educational difficulties in Pakistan. Even while we may not be able to change the system but we can make an attempt to change ourselves. If we have the resources, we should attempt to educate at least one young person who is illiterate. We can cover the cost of tuition for students who go to public schools. Even while sitting and criticising the administration won't change it, we can still get a lot done. Lack of education is the root cause of poverty. If you can't put in the time and effort at work, you won't have a job.

Despite the fact that the War on Poverty is more than 50 years old and has had very modest success, other initiatives may help to reduce poverty. Because of this, many people who hold positions and power are not concerned with the inadequate facilities of government schools. Every household member in Pakistan must work because the parents' income is not sufficient for supporting the family needs

due to the country's escalating poverty. When a person is starving, how can they care about their children's education? In this dangerous situation, the government must put good policies in place for the poor that would help them support their family's education.

The government should provide educational assistance to the underprivileged since they are the majority and will be crucial to Pakistan's future development. Nevertheless, the limitations mentioned above. Concluding this scenario we can say that this issue can be resolved if Secondary schools ought to offer technical instruction.

The local government system supports the growth of literacy and education across the country. Financial rewards for youngsters may motivate parents to send them to school, hence reducing the dropout rate. Depending on necessity, the community would contribute money to education through the local government system. Corruption in the school system is one of the factors contributing to the low literacy rate in the nation. Education departments need a reliable monitoring system. Any system needs appropriate structures to work successfully. Legislation and organisational structure need to be created in order to prepare for the advancement of education in the nation.

Since the 18th amendment, the provinces have taken responsibility for education, thus they should enact laws and design educational initiatives to provide high-quality education.

It is really concerning how many educated men and women are unemployed in Pakistan. Students should receive career advice in the classroom so they may better understand the job market and hone their skills in accordance with it.

*Courtesy : [www.moderndiplomacy.eu/](http://www.moderndiplomacy.eu/)*

# In Iran, Schoolgirls Leading Protests for Freedom

By BILL VAN ESVELD and ELAHEH SAJADI

*“Women, life, freedom.”*

*“Liberty, equality, no headscarves, no oppression.”*

Protests erupted across the country after 22-year-old Mahsa (Jina) Amini’s death on September 16, following her arrest by morality policy for “improperly” wearing her headscarf. Since then, dozens of videos posted online show schoolgirls protesting in their schools and in the streets, chanting, waving, and burning their head coverings.

But the risk schoolgirls face can be deadly. Nika Shakarami was 16 when she burned her headscarf at a Tehran protest. She was last seen alive on September 20 being followed by security forces. The government claims she fell from a building, the same fate of another protester, Sarina Esmailzadeh, also 16, who allegedly fell to her death in Karaj, west of the capital on September 24. According to media reports, both families were pressured not to contradict the official story.

As of October 11, the Iran-based Society to Support Children claims that 28 children have been killed during the protests, most in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and nine children have been named by rights groups and media outlets as having been killed by security forces. Human Rights Watch has not independently documented these cases, but the reports raise grave concerns. UNICEF has called for an end to the violence against children.

The deputy commander of Iran’s

Revolutionary Guard Corps stated on October 5 that “the average age of most people detained during the protests is 15.”

Yet the deadly repression appears to have fueled outrage among the younger population. Videos circulated on social media show that in Saqez, the home of Mahsa Amini, scores of schoolgirls marched through the streets in protest, while girls in Karaj crowded a man – evidently an official – out of their school gate, chanting “Dishonorable.” In another video posted on Twitter, schoolgirls remove their head coverings and chant against a man who appears to be a member of the Basij, a volunteer paramilitary force that is part of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, who had come to the school to speak about the Mahsa Amini protests.

Senior officials claim that youth have been “trapped” by exposure to the internet, but videos posted online indicate the schoolgirls’ stand is earning solidarity: men and women are seen joining them, and boys are burning headscarves too.

In a country where expressing autonomy as a woman can result in death, the actions of these schoolgirls to demand freedom and equality is heart-stoppingly brave. The Iranian authorities should heed their demands, ensure their safety and security, prevent security forces from entering schools to intimidate or arrest students, and immediately release all children arrested for peaceful protests.

*Courtesy : [www.hrw.org/](http://www.hrw.org/)*

# Dependent, Deprived, Hidden: India's 1.94 Lakh Child Widows

By SHIKHA SHARMA

**WHEN** one talks about widowhood, the underlying assumption is that we are discussing adult women of at least marriageable age. In truth, however, widows in India are of all ages. Some are young mothers, and some are girls as young as eight or ten years old.

In India, child widows – young girls who have suffered both child marriage and widowhood before the age of eighteen – have been a neglected group of vulnerable children historically. — years post independence, the country still has lakhs of child widows, and unfortunately, no champions.

From premature and unlawful marriage to the compounded effects of poverty, lack of education and widowhood, these children experience multiple violations of human rights throughout their life. Invisible in statistics, they are often denied their inheritance rights, evicted from their homes and in absence of any social security, exploited by others, usually their own family members or gangs.

According to experts, child widows are the most vulnerable of all widows, since they are often ordered with adult responsibilities they are ill equipped to handle, unlike adult widows. What's more, these children experience an accelerated journey through childhood, wifehood, motherhood and widowhood, while still being children themselves.

"They suffer a triple disadvantage of gender – due to the low status of women and girls, marital status as a widow (they are often looked down upon), and immaturity – due to their young age, they lack the necessary psychological maturity, life experience and knowledge to survive in an adult world,"

## WHAT DATA SAYS

Worldwide, there is little reliable data

available on child widows, but some estimates say that there are at least 1.36 million child widows globally, with South Asia and parts of Africa having the highest population of child widows.

Data on child widows is limited in India too, but we know that India has a high incidence of widowhood amongst young women under 18 years of age, because of the continued prevalence of child marriage. As per Census 2011, there were nearly three and a half lakh widows under the age of 21 years in the country, with over 50 percent of them under the legal age of marriage. The country still had 1.94 lakh child widows in 2011, despite the existence of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

Experts say that these estimates are conservative and the true number of these children is likely to be much higher not only due to under-reporting of illegal child marriages in India, but also because of availability of limited data on child widows who remarry, and destitute child widows without a permanent residence at the time of a census.

We, however, know that in India nearly 12 million Indian children were married before 10 years of age with 7.84 million (65%) married children being female, as per census data. Nearly 84 percent of these children were Hindu and 11 percent muslim. To put it in context, this number is equivalent to Jammu & Kashmir's population.

We also know that India has also one of the highest rates of child marriage which is the biggest cause of child widowhood, in the world. 1.5 million underage girls in India are married off by their parents before they turn 18. Over 50 percent of Indian women are married off as children in northern states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan.

Scholars say that it is highly likely that the absolute number of child widows in India has increased significantly over the last two decades since child marriage is still practiced in many Indian states and on account of the invisibilization of these children, even though India's child marriage rates have witnessed improvement over the last few years.

Child marriage was banned in India during the British colonial rule in 1929, with marriageable age for girls fixed at 14 and for boys at 18. After Independence, the age for marriage was raised to 15 for girls in 1949. The current age for marriage — 18 for women and 21 for men — was fixed in 1978.

### WHAT DRIVES WIDOWHOOD AMONGST GIRLS

Child widowhood is a consequence of child marriage. If girls are not married off by their parents before they turn 18, studies suggest there would be fewer child widows.

Child marriage, in turn, is mainly driven by poverty, social customs, the desire for large families — especially the desire for sons — and the need for parents to reduce the number of children to feed. In patriarchal societies, where family honor needs to be protected at all costs, early marriage also ensures virginity, and any 'transgression' to family honor.

Status of women as well as their empowerment were found to be significantly associated with child marriage across districts, data from the District Level Household Survey (DLHS) from 2007- 2008 and Census 2011 shows.

Among individual characteristics, the level of education of females has the most profound impact on the age they marry, irrespective of household wealth, locality and other characteristics. It is no coincidence that 5.4 million (44%) married children under ten were illiterate, 80% of them female, indicating how lower levels of education correlate with early marriage.

Another reason for girls becoming widows at a young age is because many girls are married to much older men, with the men's passing away leading to children becoming widows. Girls who marry older men at a young age also risk domestic violence, as per The World's Women report 2015.

### WHY CHILD WIDOWS REQUIRE MORE LEGAL PROTECTION

Even though child widows constitute a small section of the population when compared with adult or elderly widows, it doesn't justify excluding them from dialogue on children's and women's rights.

In fact, it is the cause to undertake more research on this section of the population. To do this, it is imperative to gather data, disaggregated by sex, age and marital status so that appropriate policies can be designed to meet their needs.

We shouldn't forget that many older widows today, must have been child widows decades ago, making it vital to consider any policies we design around widows from a life course perspective. For example, it is important to recognize that child widows are of all ages — from birth to 18 years of age, and therefore, the life circumstances and needs of a 6 year old will be vastly different from that of a 16 year old widow with two children.

Child widows should also be granted greater legal protection under all relevant human rights instruments and government policies. Specific laws and policies should be made for child widows and these should be implemented and harmonized with international standards to protect child widows' rights including their inheritance rights, protection against violence and discrimination and access to education. Compulsory birth and marriage registration systems must be introduced and there is an urgent need to gather reliable data disaggregated by sex, age and marital status in peacetime and conflict settings.

The consequences of widowhood on children makes it necessary to address the multiple forms of discrimination faced by these children, and to empower them to be agents of change in their own communities.

For too long child widows have remained hidden and absent from international statistics. The narrative on widows should also be reframed to reflect their important and changing role in society as mothers, caregivers, heads of households and independent career women as well as their role during conflict, and not just as recipients of benefits.

*Courtesy : [www.youthkiawaaz.com/](http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/)*

# Chandrapur Adopts Door-To-Door Campaign to Make Dalit Children Attend School

By SHIVA PURI

*The Education Unit of Chandrapur Municipality says that every possible step would be taken to help parents send their wards to school.*

In a bid to include Dalit children in the school system, Chandrapur Municipality in Rautahat is conducting a door-to-door campaign wherein teachers from various community schools visit Dalit households to encourage the guardians to send their wards to school.

The school enrollment programme is a nationwide campaign launched by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with an objective to provide school education to all children of school-going age. The campaign generally starts in the last week of April every year by organising awareness programmes to bring all the children under the school system. But due to the Secondary Education Examination and local elections, the campaign was pushed back to mid-May in several districts this year.

The District Education Office, Rautahat, has plans afoot for the campaign to send teachers to Dalit households in two weeks to encourage parents to send

their wards to school.

Rajesh Chaudhary, principal of Dumriya Secondary School, in Ward No 9 of Chandrapur Municipality, says it is necessary for the programme to see successful results in the Dalit community since the number of Dalit children in schools is not encouraging.

Although the school enrollment campaign started off as a noble undertaking by the government to bring every child into the school system, the campaign has not seen much success in the Dalit communities, says Anup Majhi, a central member of the Nepal National Musahar Association.

“The number of children of school-going age is more than 5,000 in Rautahat but not even a quarter of them go to school,” said Majhi. “There are 2,056 households in the Musahar community in the district but hardly anyone is literate.”

The low enrollment number of Dalit children in schools can be attributed to

parents' inability to afford education for their children, clubbed with a lack of interest from school management, says Majhi.

The population of Musahars in the district is 13,796 and only 635 people out of the entire population are literate, according to Majhi. Of which, as many as 3,000 are still out of the school system.

"Specific plans and policies should be put in place to ensure every Dalit child attends school because it's not enough to just look at the number of students enrolled," Majhi added. "This is the only way to ensure the next generation of the Dalit population is not deprived of opportunities for a lack of education."

Dumriya Secondary School plans to extend financial support to Dalit families who have not been able to send their children to school because of financial constraints. "We want to ensure that children are not forced to leave school to support their families," said Chaudhary, the principal.

The Education Unit of Chandrapur Municipality says that every possible step would be taken to reach Dalit settlements with the campaign.

According to Dipendra Mandal, education branch officer at the municipality, even though there are schools nearby Dalit settlements of Dom, Musahar and Chamar communities, children from these communities do not attend classes regularly even if they are enrolled. "When parents don't force them to go to school, they don't make the effort to attend classes and instead spend their days idling around," said Mandal. "Apart from enrolling Dalit students in schools, we have to create a conducive environment at home and school."

Ram Binay Singh, head of the

Education Development and Coordination Unit in Gaur, said that there are around 400 basic schools in the district's 18 local units.

Dalit children from all local units including Gujra, Gaur, Garuda, Brindaban, Ishnath and Katahariya municipalities go to school but in small numbers.

Although the government has promised to provide assistance to the extremely poor, Dalit students have not been able to access the concessions provided under the education campaign, according to Mandal.

In most Dalit households with poor financial standing, education features last on the priority list. The foremost concern for the entire household is making ends meet on a daily basis.

Rajkumar Majhi from Jugauli, Gujra Municipality-8, for instance, has two sons and two daughters, all of whom are of school-going age but he says he doesn't have the money to send them to school. "Whatever little money I make, I spend it on fulfilling my family's basic needs," he told the Post. "I would send my children to school but first, I have to keep them from starving."

According to Binod Jaiswal, the acting chief administrative officer of Gujra Municipality, none of the children in Musahar settlement of Jugauli in Ward No 8 goes to school. There are 70 Musahar households in the settlement and around 100 children of school-going age, according to Jaiswal. "This time the office will make more effort to have all of those children enrolled in schools," he said.

*Courtesy : [www.kathmandupost.com/](http://www.kathmandupost.com/)*

# Climate Disasters Drive Bangladesh Children From Classrooms To Work

.....

Twelve-year-old Alamin's house rested on the bank of the Ilsha river in southern Bangladesh until last year, when the surging river eroded it and the family's farmland away, forcing them to flee to a slum in Keraniganj, close to the capital city, Dhaka.

Now Alamin, whose father died of cancer a couple years back - works on a shipbreaking crew and his mother cooks for the workers. Together they earn just enough to feed and house themselves and Alamin's two younger siblings, now 3 and 5.

"Once we were solvent. My husband earned from our cultivable land and my son was reading in a local primary school," said Amina Begum, Alamin's mother.

But after losing their property to the river and their savings to failed cancer treatments, work is all Alamin can now expect, she lamented.

As more extreme weather drives worsening flooding, erosion and storms in low-lying Bangladesh, thousands of families like hers are moving to the slums of Dhaka.

For many of their children - who are battling climate change impacts alongside their parents - the move means the end of education, and the start of a lifetime of hard work.

In an August report, UNICEF, the U.N. children's agency, said children in the South Asian nations of Bangladesh, Afghanistan and India now face "extremely high" risks from climate change impacts.

Globally about a billion children in 33 countries face that level of threat, it added.

"For the first time, we have clear evidence

of the impact of climate change on millions of children in South Asia," said George Laryea-Adjei, UNICEF's regional director for South Asia, in the report.

Droughts, floods and river erosion across the region have left millions of children homeless, hungry, lacking healthcare and safe water - and in many cases out of school, UNICEF officials said.

"Climate change has created an alarming crisis for South Asian children," Mr. Laryea-Adjei noted.

## 1.7 MILLION WORKING CHILDREN

In Bangladesh, a fertile delta nation of close to 700 rivers, a difficult combination of more flood-driven erosion and little land for resettlement is driving many once-rural families into urban slums.

Children, who make up about 40% of the population of the country of more than 160 million, are paying a particularly high price in the move, researchers say.

Most Bangladeshi children not attending primary school live in urban slums, or in hard-to-reach or disaster-prone areas, according to UNICEF.

About 1.7 million children in the country are labourers, one in four of them 11 years old or younger, the agency's research shows. Girls, who often work as domestic labourers, rarely even show up in the statistics, UNICEF noted.

In slums around Dhaka, children are evident working in tanneries, shipyards, tailoring, or repairing automobiles. Others labour at vegetable markets or carrying luggage in bus, train and boat terminals.

Many say they once lived in the countryside, before being forced to the city.

A sweating Alauddin, 10, has worked at a vegetable market in Dhaka for a few months now, carrying out tasks such as cleaning and shifting potatoes in metal bowls he can scarcely budge. He said he used to study at Debraipatch Primary School, near the northeast city of Jamalpur, until a powerful flood last year wrecked the school and his family's home and land.

They moved to a Dhaka slum, where his father now pulls a rickshaw and his mother works part-time as a cleaner at a private school.

Alauddin's work contributes 100 taka (\$1.15) a day to the family finances, money the family can't do without, his father said.

"My children will never go back to school," he admitted. "We are struggling with rent and our daily livelihood. How would we bear (my son's) educational expenses?"

Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury, Bangladesh's Deputy State Minister of education, said in a telephone interview with the *Thomson Reuters Foundation* that floods last year inundated more than 500 educational institutions in 10 districts across the country.

While a few were entirely washed away, most have since dried out but only a few have been repaired sufficiently to be available for classes, he said.

The new flood-related closures come on the heels of long pandemic-related shutdowns, and mean even children who do not have to work are still out of classrooms in many places.

Bangladesh's Annual Primary School Census for 2021 showed 10.24 million students attending 65,000 government primary schools - but noted the drop-out rate in 2021 was over 17%, with more than 2 million children leaving classes.

Global warming impacts were a top driver of that flight from classrooms, educational officials said.

Alamgir Mohammad Mansurul Alam, Director General of the Directorate of Primary Education, called the drop-out rate "alarming" and noted "one of the big reasons is climate change".

"Last year we observed that more than 500 schools were damaged by flooding. The students could not go school for a long time," he said in an interview.

What became evident, he said, is that "a

large number of them never come back to school and are involved in different work to support their family."

More than 14,000 private primary schools in Bangladesh also were at least temporarily shuttered by the COVID-19 pandemic, said Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury, chairman of the country's private primary school association.

Altogether 37 million children in Bangladesh have seen their education disrupted by school closures since the start of the pandemic in 2020, according to an October report by UNICEF and UNESCO, the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

### **BIG BURDENS, SMALL SHOULDERS**

Rupa, 9, is among the children now in work instead of school.

After her family's home in Khulna Shyamnagar was destroyed by a cyclone last year, her family came to join an aunt living in a slum near Dhaka.

Rupa's mother eventually abandoned her blind husband, who could not work, leaving her daughter behind with him. The girl now earns 100 taka (\$1.15) a day helping unload watermelons at the wharf.

"I realize it's really hard for a little girl to work with adult workers but I'm helpless. I also have a year-old baby and family to maintain," said her aunt, who works as a cook.

Syeda Munira Sultana, national project coordinator for the International Labour Organization in Bangladesh, said she had met many girls like Rupa, forced into work by extreme weather or other climate change impacts. "I was surprised to see many girls younger than 10 years old working in a factory near Keraniganj, where women's dresses are produced," she said.

"I talked to them and they said most of them came from climate-vulnerable areas like Barisal, Khulna and, Satkhira and all of them are dropouts from school," she added.

Children forced to work can face both physical and mental harm as well as losing their chance at an education, which can restrict their future opportunities and lead to inter-generational cycles of poverty and child labour, said Tuomo Poutiainen, director of the ILO's Bangladesh office.

"Children are paying a high price for climate change," added Shelton Yett, UNICEF's representative in Bangladesh.

*Courtesy : [www.thehindu.com/](http://www.thehindu.com/)*

# A Little-Known Initiative To Help The ‘War Babies’

By MUSTAFA CHOWDHURY

One of the most important initiatives that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman undertook post-Liberation War was enacting the Bangladesh Abandoned Children (Special Provisions) Order in 1972. Unfortunately, not very many people are aware of this initiative that is deeply significant for our national history.

After assuming power, Bangabandhu's first priority was to rebuild the war-torn country, but while doing so, he recognised the grave problem regarding the birth and simultaneous abandonment of the children who were born as a result of mass rape by Pakistani soldiers and their associates. All throughout 1972, newspapers such as the *Daily Azad*, *Purbosesh* and *Daily Ittefaq* referred to the war babies as “unwanted” or “enemy babies” of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu took quite a different position and stood up for these babies, calling them *manobshontan* (humanity's children), echoing the same sentiment expressed by Mother Teresa.

Contrary to his administration, the Bangalees' indignation for the newborns displayed a more insidious form of bias prevalent in Bangladeshi society. People's attitude towards the war babies was shaped by a careful choice of terms, such as “unwanted” or “throwaway”, the objective of which was to intentionally denigrate the status of war babies in their country of birth.

Personally, Bangabandhu was particularly sensitive to, and seriously mindful of, the fact that negative attributes to the war babies had already made people see them as “undesirable” and, therefore, “disposable.” Unsurprisingly, he wanted to do something positive so that the supposedly unwanted babies

might find safe homes, where they would receive love and affection.

However, right at the outset, the government encountered a serious problem: there was no special legislation in Bangladesh governing adoption. The only applicable laws at the time were the Guardians and Wards Act 1890 and the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance for the purpose of guardianship. Under the act, “guardianship” of a minor is permitted by a competent court if it is deemed to be “in the best interest of the child.”

Simply put, the Muslim law does not allow adoption in the way it is understood by Western countries. Death, illness, and economic hardship of biological parents are generally the precipitators of guardianship among extended family members and foster care placements in orphanages and/or institutions. Two key factors – Bangladeshi war babies, and a group of Canadian couples' quest for children – epitomised the story of parenting beyond genetic lines. Fearing that political and religious leaders would play “hardball” politics, which could result in further stigmatisation, Bangabandhu's administration kept a low profile but diligently worked with key players such as the Geneva-based International Social Service (ISS) as well as national stakeholders, keeping in mind the best interest of the children.

Those in charge, while conducting research on the prospect of adoption of the war babies, recognised that, historically speaking, adoption had been a matter of what is usually referred to as “informal” adoption, whereby an orphan is taken into a home and raised as one's own child. Except that it is never legalised.

In sum, the very landscape of adoption in Bangladesh is different in that adoption is seen

as a “paper” kinship in the absence of conception, creation, gestation, and birth.

And given the muddled and ambivalent attitude towards adoption, Bangabandhu put the matters somewhat iconoclastically to counter social ostracism and alienation, and the moral and political dimensions of adoption. Evidently, the birth mothers were abandoning their babies and did not wish to take any responsibility for those whose birth was associated with stigma at a time when the putative fathers of such babies were absent. As the “statutory guardian” of the war babies, Bangabandhu had to take steps to save their lives by finding safe homes with parents who were committed to raising these babies as their own.

Bangabandhu was quite disturbed to see the predicaments of the war babies, and urgently sought counsel from the ISS for some recommendations in this regard. He sought its counsel in the hope that, given the socio-religious feelings of Bangalees, the organisation might see the issue from a broader perspective and recommend an appropriate solution. This was a time when Bangabandhu recognised that he was under tremendous pressure but had no capacity to initiate any tenuous social, institutional, or administrative changes, even though he believed there was a need for change.

After three months of study, the ISS recommended that the war babies would never be accepted socially in Bangladesh. In fact, it was feared that these “unwanted” children would be discriminated against in Bangladesh due to the way in which they were looked upon, having been conceived via rape. The ISS recommended the war babies’ adoption as an alternative.

Receiving ISS recommendations, all cabinet members of the government were on the same wavelength in terms of the desired changes to be effected in Bangladesh. They were solidly behind Bangabandhu and reviewed the complicated process of foreign adoption and its applicability. Despite his heavy workload, Bangabandhu took special interest in the matter and wished to resolve it legally through the enactment of appropriate legislation before the problem of abandonment got out of control.

Given the sensitivity of the issue at hand, the government, however, needed to clarify

where it stood on the issue of trans-racial adoption outside of Bangladesh, as per the ISS recommendations. Ongoing consultation with the ISS personnel had, no doubt, helped the key officials gather sufficient information about the risks and develop mitigation strategies accordingly.

The child welfare agencies under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs were assigned to draft appropriate legislation that would allow the infants to be sent to Canada and other countries where the prospective applicants (or future adoptive parents) had agreed to an undertaking for adoption. It would be interesting to note that, in the minds of Bangladeshi legislators, the linguistic juxtaposition had shown the oscillation between reason and passion that ultimately helped them come up with a special provision order. In doing so, they were inspired by a new impetus initiated by Bangabandhu, who wanted to construct a particular norm and the adoption of values in his *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal).

While crafting the special provision, government officials were acutely aware that adoption policies and practices around the world must serve the “best interest of the child,” a common phrase in the formulation of children’s rights. In developing the special provision order, they were thus guided by the stellar principle, working on the premise that the well-being of the war babies must be given priority.

Within months, the government of the day came up with a legislation that not only clarified but also strengthened the legal protection of children, removing deterrents to effective action for such children in Bangladesh. It is called the Bangladesh Abandoned Children (Special Provision) Order, 1972, the legislative response to the ISS recommendations. In clarifying the clauses within the special provision order, the government was careful as it did not in any way want to get mired in confusion and controversy. Personally, Bangabandhu believed that his government acceded to adoption outside of Bangladesh, having made a thoughtful and informed final decision based on an ethical framework regarding interracial adoption. In doing so, Bangabandhu also believed that adoption

should be an unfaltering commitment to providing families for children, rather than children for families.

As the government continued its work, it realised that adoption still remained a controversial topic at that time and the associated controversy within social work and allied professions reflected a general lack of consensus with respect to certain fundamental childcare principles. Given the prevailing sentiments against the notion of being “unwanted,” it recognised that placing a war baby with a Bangalee family did not necessarily ensure a perfect match. As far as the government was concerned, even though there was a lack of social reform, the proposed special provisions order had to be drafted to ensure legal transfer of guardianship beyond Bangladesh.

This single document became even more significant when one recognised the fact that it was drafted under unusual and pressing circumstances where previously there had been no legislation governing adoption in Bangladesh. The government made sure that birth mothers’ informal or secret abandonment of their babies was done legally.

Simply put, the primary objective of the presidential order was to establish “legal guardianship” of abandoned infants, and to provide certification of birth for children legally free for adoption both in and outside of Bangladesh. The “statutory guardian” in the absence of natural parents was mandated to authenticate the prospective adoptive parents from abroad who had already obtained clearance from the governments of their respective countries. In doing so, the government was extra careful, having recognised that adoption connotes a redefinition of parenthood, legal and/or formal establishment of a parental relationship that is not biological or genetic.

The government designated Sister Margaret Mary, the then superior of the Missionaries of Charity located in Dhaka’s Islampur area, as the “statutory guardian” of the abandoned war babies in the following manner: “The statutory guardian may deliver an abandoned child for the purpose of adoption to any adoption agency in or outside Bangladesh on such terms and conditions as may be prescribed and as such delivery shall constitute a valid adoption.” The proclamation also defined an abandoned child as a child who, in

the opinion of the government, is deserted or unclaimed or born out of wedlock. These children were, therefore, considered to have become the “wards” of the state and, as a result, the government ensured that the war babies were not thought of as chattels to be passed by deed from one family to another, or one country to another.

Upon assuming “statutory guardianship,” Sister Mary’s prime responsibility was to endeavour to lessen the stigmatisation of these infants by making them available for adoption to couples who would assume their parenthood. The ordinance, as a whole, dealt with social attitudes, seeking opportunities to educate and liberalise public thinking, having symbolised life and hope of better health and bearable conditions for the war babies.

It is important to note that although originally it was intended for only war babies, the law in its final form was applied to all “abandoned” children, thus providing a new lens through which to view the predicament of the orphans and then propose solutions.

Given the complexity of the issue, Bangabandhu knew that his government could not come up with a perfect solution. Since the cabinet members were on the same wavelength in terms of the desired changes, they were advised by Bangabandhu to take the time they needed – especially those in charge of writing the law to reflect on the issue and craft the legislation with forethought. This is why Bangabandhu’s name will remain etched in history forever for his contribution in enacting this ordinance to legalise adoption of war babies.

Nevertheless, there were a few who came up with muted but shrill criticism. Having certain serious misgivings regarding adoption, they saw the government’s initiative to create a family as being in the “best interest” of “unwelcome” children who were being born and abandoned at the time.

By and large, however, the people of Bangladesh were glad to learn that Bangabandhu was successful in resolving the problem of the “unwanted” war babies. We must conduct more research on this initiative of Bangabandhu, about which nothing has been written thus far.

*Courtesy : [www.thedailystar.net/](http://www.thedailystar.net/)*

# The Wrong Side of Digital Divide : Students in Jhabua Take Up Odd Jobs in Farms, Construction Sites

*Most of these children will never return to formal education, say experts*

By **MAYANK MELIWAR**

**THE** effect that the ongoing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic can potentially have on children and their schooling have worried educationists for long. A look at Dulakhedi village in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district shows why.

Jhabua has traditionally been among those districts of India that have lagged on human development indicators. And it seems the story will persist.

Several children in Dulakhedi complained that they have had to give up studies after schools turned to 'online' classes. Many have opted for manual labour.

Children working at construction sites and farms in the village have not been touched by the Union government's 'Digital India' initiative. These children were receiving formal education till the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic shuttered schools and turned classes online.

Over a year later, they have fallen behind academic schedules due to lack of internet access and have turned to labour.

Monika Bhabhar was studying in class VII at the Government Middle School in the village till the lockdown was

imposed last year. Her family doesn't own a smartphone and thus, she was cut off from the online classes. For the past several weeks, she has been engaged in the construction of their new home, carrying bricks and bags of cement.

"We used to reach school before the teacher. Our studies were going well. I learned a little English," Monika said with a smile.

The 12-year-old is from the Bhil tribe, one of the majority communities in the district, along with Bhilala and Patela tribes. Those from the scheduled tribes comprise nearly 86 per cent of the total population of the Jhabua district, which has a 35 per cent literacy rate in rural parts, according to the 2011 Census.

Over 97 per cent of the 1,597 people in Dulakhedi belong to Schedule Tribes. The overall literacy rate of the village is 25.9 percent and female literacy rate is just 9.3 per cent.

In April 2020, the state government had launched the 'Digital Learning Enhancement Programme' under which government school teachers were asked to share study material (consisting of video links) with students through WhatsApp groups.

Middle school teachers in Madhya Pradesh were asked to create WhatsApp groups with their students at the village level. The study material links curated by a team at the Rajya Shiksha Kendra, the state's education department, were shared with the teachers to be posted on the student groups.

"We have been receiving study material for all subjects for classes I-VIII daily from Bhopal," said Nanuram Gamad, block coordinator, government school office, Petlawad (3.5 km from Dulakhedi).

The same, however, has never reached Monika.

The digital divide is so wide that many students in Dulakhedi have not attended a single online class so far. Most girl students have either switched to household chores or fetching wood or herding sheep in the forests.

Only 10-20 per cent of students have cell phones in the village, according to the students and teachers. Those who have a smartphone in the family can use it for their classes only when their parents or elder siblings are back home from the field.

Himmat Charpota, 14, is not one of them. He was provided with a math book from school but has barely touched it as academic activities paused.

"Their learning status has regressed to that three years ago," said Upendra Nagar, headmaster of Government Middle school, adding that the students did not remember anything they studied before the lockdown. He added:

Around 80-85 per cent of the total 119 students attended this school in 2019. Children used show up before us, showing their excitement and hunger for learning. But now, when we occasionally visit the school, students roaming around run away seeing us, as if we will start teaching them during what they consider holidays.

The teachers started local 'study points' or 'mohalla classes' after the first COVID-19 wave waned. They would go

door to door inviting children to join the open-air lectures under a tree. Each class with 10-15 students would run for around three hours.

These classes, however, ran only for a short time and now the children are either sitting idle or doing household chores, said Jagdish Maida, a resident of Dulakhedi. He is hopeful the school will reopen for the new academic session from July.

It will be tough, however, to call students back to the school again, said the headmaster.

Benedict Damor, secretary of Adivasi Chetna Shikshan Seva Samiti, a non-profit working to empower tribal students in Jhabua district, said:

Many students were absorbed into child labour since the beginning of the pandemic. Now, it will be very tough to get them back to school. Around 50 per cent of them will never return to formal education.

The government should provide schools with Internet-powered television sets and the electricity to run them, suggested both Gamad and Nagar. "The television will be an attraction for the kids to bring them back to school for routine studies. Currently, we have a radio on which the children listen to 'Meena Ki Duniya' programme," said Nagar.

In April 2021, the state government had planned to broadcast lessons and educational programs for school students of classes 1-8. The educational programs on television will be telecasted on Doordarshan and will cover subjects including science, mathematics and social sciences, according to the state school education department.

The school Monika and Himmat go to got an electricity connection in 2018 and doesn't have a television set. A majority of the tribal students, thus, are not covered by either initiative.

*Courtesy : [www.downtoearth.org.in/](http://www.downtoearth.org.in/)*

# How Muzaffarpur's Jugnu Became The Voice of Sex Workers' Children

By MANOJ CHAURASIA

IN the late-1990s the Bihar government organised an event in Patna to promote handicrafts made by the state's poor and marginalised people. Among them were crochet pieces by three daughters of sex workers from Muzaffarpur district's red-light areas. The girls were thrilled to see their work appreciated in the state capital, but next morning a local Hindi newspaper humiliated them. It ran their photograph with the headline: "Sex workers also participated in the function". The fact that they were children trying to rise above their circumstances with hard work was lost on the paper's staff.

"We had been trying hard to craft a new image, get acceptability in society and lead a life of dignity. It hurt when we were routinely presented as 'sex workers'. Nobody supported us," says Naseema Khatoon, who grew up in Muzaffarpur's Chaturbhuj Sthan, counted among India's biggest redlight areas.

The girls left the venue that day, but the experience inspired them to become the voice of red-light areas and the deprived classes with a handwritten magazine. Thus, a quarterly named 'Jugnu (firefly)' was born in 2004 with only six pages. It has grown to 36-page issues now and is still written, published and distributed by the children of sex workers, with Naseema as their editor. Besides Bihar, Jugnu is distributed in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

"We decided to launch our own magazine to raise the problems of sex workers and lay the facts before the people and the

police, who often treat us with disdain," Naseema says. She designed the cover of the August issue herself with a dancer's ghungroo-bedecked feet as its leitmotif.

Jugnu aims to change the image of red-light areas, such as Chaturbhuj Sthan that is named after a nearby temple and has existed since Mughal times. Naseema runs campaigns with the help of her reporters – other children of sex workers – who work pro bono. The boys and girls fan out on bicycles and other means of transport to collect news, and then submit handwritten stories. In Jugnu's early years these child reporters hesitated to meet people and concealed their identity, but now they regularly visit district offices. Recently, two reporters – Md Arif and Sabina Khatoon – showed Muzaffarpur DM Pranav Kumar their magazine. "DM saheb looked very pleased with our efforts to write about the deprived, and encouraged us," Arif told TOI.

Flip through Jugnu's pages and amid the articles by its reporters you will also find notes from the children of other sex workers. Kishannath Kalbeliya from Barmer in Rajasthan wants to be a social worker, 15-year-old Omnath wants to serve in the Army.

Jugnu's reach is growing. It is now supplied to important government offices. Charitable organisations have stepped up to help it grow. Naseema was pleasantly surprised when a Delhi University official recently asked her to send the magazine to

*Continued to page 25*

# Child Labour In India : How To End The Endemic

By SHREYA GOSWAMI

“**CHILDREN** belong in schools not workplaces,” says a report by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). “Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Child labour acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school.”

These impactful words matter, especially for the 10.1 million children in India who, according to the Census 2011, work as child labourers. Of these, 5.6 million are boys and 4.5 million are girls. Globally, these numbers are even more alarming—152 million children are engaged in child labour, of whom 64 million are girls and 88 million are boys. This suggests that one in ten of all children in the world is engaged in child labour. In countries like India, child labour works as an endemic—a regular occurrence which plagues the society and impairs our future by keeping the chief drivers of that future away from education, security and opportunity. Here’s everything you need to know.

## UNDERSTANDING WHAT CHILD LABOUR IS

The International Labour Organization (ILO), child labour is often defined as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and is harmful to physical and mental development.” Essentially, child labour is a result of a number of interlinked factors.

Here are a few key ones, according to the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco-growing (ECLT) Foundation:

**Poverty** : Poverty forces children into the labour market to earn money, either as a supplement to meagre household earnings or as a means of survival. However, it’s important to remember that child labour is both a cause and an effect of poverty, making it an intergenerational vicious cycle.

**Lack of education** : Without any education, children are unable to tap into their potential and understand that they need skills development. A lack of access to quality and continuous education actually keeps children stuck beyond the formalised labour force.

**Poor access to decent work** : Children engaged in labour are usually limited to fields which are unsafe or lack any scope of social protection, fair pay, gender equality. Since they lack education, child labourers also end up being denied better job opportunities as adults, thus continuing the cycle of child labour with their kids in turn.

**Limited understanding of child labour** : Often, in patriarchal societies, child labour done by young girls is taken to be good for the child in the long run because of gender stereotypes attached with certain kinds of work. This limited understanding of child labour puts certain children, especially the girl child, at a greater risk of falling prey

to child labour.

**Climate change :** Climate change and resultant natural disasters tend to affect the rural poor, especially farming communities. Often, these families end up with no option but to send their children out to work to make up for crop losses.

**Conflicts and migration :** Children and women are often worst-hit during conflicts. Economic shocks and the breakdown of social support in conflict-ridden areas often lead to child labour as a means of survival. This is proved by the fact that the incidence of child labour in countries and regions affected by conflict is almost twice as high as the global average.

#### **TRENDS IN CHILD LABOUR: THE INDIAN SCENARIO**

UNICEF reports that even though child labour rates have declined over the last few years, bonded labour, child soldiers, sexual exploitation (especially of girls) and trafficking still continue to plague most developing economies. Girls are also twice as likely to be taken out of school around puberty and engaged in domestic child labour like cleaning, cooking, caregiving, etc. Children are also at a very high risk of other forms of exploitation, including child sexual exploitation and child pornography. The states with the highest prevalence of child labour are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In India, there are a number of industries which use child labour, including brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, domestic services, food services (like small stalls and highway eateries), etc. The following table, provided by the United States Department of Labour, explains the key industries in India that still largely depend on child labour.

The same report by the United States

Department of Labour also points out that as of 2021, India has indeed made moderate-level advancements in eliminating child labour in its worst manifestations. For example, the government of Bihar issued a huge pay-out to the Muzaffarpur shelter home case, where 44 girls between the ages of seven and 17 years were victimised for commercial sexual exploitation. As a whole, Indian agencies across states rescued 58,289 children from child labour between 2020 and 2021. However, the report also states that the worst forms of child labour cases in India still remain underreported, largely due to corruption and lack of proper accountability.

#### **THE INDIAN LEGAL PROVISIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOUR**

The Indian Ministry of Labour and Employment has been working to tackle the issue of child labour since 1979, with the formation of the Gurupadswamy Committee. Based on this Committee's recommendations, the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act was passed in 1986. The Act prohibited the employment of children in hazardous occupations and attempted to regulate the working conditions of children in other occupations. The list of hazardous occupations is frequently revised and expanded through the Child Labour Technical Advisory Committee, constituted under the 2016 Amendment of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act.

This 2016 amendment expressly prohibits the employment of any child below 14 years of age in any and all occupations, and places further prohibitions on the employment of adolescents (aged 14 to 18 years). When combined with the Right to Education Act of 2009, the 2016 amendment ratifies two of the core ILO conventions:

- Firstly, the minimum age of children at work should not be below the age of

compulsory schooling, and should never be less than 15 years except in developing countries.

- Secondly, all hazardous work which is likely to jeopardise a child's physical, mental or moral health should be prohibited.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOUR

While legislations and law regulations are in the hands of the governments of the day, there is a lot you can do to help eliminate child labour. Here are a few steps you can take at the personal, familial and even community levels.

**Spread awareness :** If parents, families and communities are aware and alert about child labour or the disruption of education, child labour can be stemmed right at the beginning. This also means understanding the difference between a child doing chores to learn self-reliance and self-esteem and a child working in hazardous conditions or being exploited for the profit of others.

**Send more children to school :** The Indian education system might have its flaws, but implementing it is the best way to prevent child labour. Making sure children in your family and community go to school regularly and well beyond puberty

can help a lot. If you can afford to be charitable, you could also volunteer with NGOs that work to improve children's access to education.

**Ask for more stringent laws :** As citizens, you have the right to ask your local, municipal and other government authorities to introduce more stringent measures against child labour. Given that corruption is a major hindrance to the elimination of child labour, asking for more laws and measures on the local level can go a long way.

**Discourage child labour around you :** We often tend to overlook instances of child labour around us, whether it be in domestic services or at local tea stalls and eateries. Taking account of our own dismissive behaviour and holding those employing children accountable is very important, and you should take every opportunity to call this out.

**Support NGOs :** There are many NGOs that are working to stop child labour, child trafficking and other forms of child abuse. If you can volunteer for these, then well and good. If not, you can donate, amplify their voices and spread awareness using the tools they share with people.

*Courtesy : [www.hercircle.in/](http://www.hercircle.in/)*

## How Muzaffarpur's Jugnu Became...

*Continued from page 12*  
their library. Better still is the response from readers who review Jugnu's contents, point out errors and suggest topics they want to read about. "My efforts to bring respect to the children of sex workers will continue. I am now getting support from every section of society. This is a big achievement for all of us," says Naseema who was recently nominated as a member of the National Human Rights Commission advisory group.

### TRAPPED MILLIONS

A February 2014 report of the Ministry

of Women and Child Development – based on a 2004 study on "Girls and Women in Prostitution" – said India had more than 28 lakh sex workers, which is roughly equal to the population of Fifa World Cup host Qatar. Bihar alone had more than 1.6 lakh sex workers at the time. The most troubling finding of the study was that 36% of the sex workers were children. Changes are afoot in the red-light areas as the children of sex workers shun the flesh trade. They are turning to education to live with dignity.

*Courtesy : [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/)*

# THE ORGANISATION OF THE ARTS

By 00000000000 00000000



....Continued from previous issue

**ARCHITECTURE** and the “applied” arts (ceramics, weaving, design of clothes, furniture, machines, cars, printed characters and the like) play a rôle in the visual field similar to that of music in the aural field in that the “things” are parts of external reality and

are “distorted” or organised directly by the affects. But architecture and the other arts are like *inverted* music. The “external” element is not a formal ideal “structure” as in music, with its pseudo-logical laws, but a human and social function. The external reality of a house or vase is its use – its coveringness or its capaciousness. This use-form is organised or distorted affectively either by the symbolisation of natural external reality (as when a carpet, vase or house is covered with sculpture or decoration) or when it is given shape, balance, harmony, curves and movement in space. This organisation is poetic; the “I” which organises the use-function is static and collective. Great architecture arises in the womb of a society where social “I” and individual “I” do not conflict but reinforce each other. Hunting man expresses the use-value realistically. He finds in Nature the correspondence to his use. His house is a cave; his vase a gourd; his weapon a rough flint; his covering a skin. In this sense his applied art is as realistic as his drawings. Crop-raising or pastoral man imposes on his materialised use-value a decoration which is conventional and distorting. He takes Nature into the bosom of the tribe, and moulds it plastically to his wish. The use-value is given a social form – it is minted. The stone implements are polished. Instead of seeking out a cave, he erects a rough hut in a convenient spot. He no longer clothes himself in skins; his covering is woven. Instead of gourds, he

uses pottery, moulded to a shape and decorated.

The birth of a class society sees the birth of palaces and temples where “coveringness” is affectively organised to express the majesty and sacredness of a ruling class. This majesty and sacredness has accrued through the division of labour and the alienation of property whereby the increased social power seems to gather at the pole of the ruling class at the same time as the humility and abasement appears at the pole of the slave class. With the merchant class of Athens and Rome this reflects itself also in municipal buildings. In feudal society castles and basilicas express the affective organisation of social power. The cathedral and the *hôtel de ville* of medieval town life already reflect the growing power of the bourgeois class and are rebellious. The bourgeois class is still collective – it is gathered in self-governing and self-arming communes – tribal islands in the pores of feudalism. At first their social expansion appears in the palaces and cathedrals of princes, who wield for a time the power of the bourgeoisie against other feudal powers. Then it passes into aristocratic villas and State structures; finally, it appears in the form of gentlemen’s residences. At first this is a naturalistic movement. Houses become less “formal” and more useful and domestic. This movement too passes into abstraction. Abstraction in painting is functionalism in architecture. Finally even the social ego is negated and architecture shows everywhere freakishness and personal whim, irrespective of the needs of function. The same movement of course takes place in ceramics, textiles and other applied arts. In general the products of a class society in this field show the same rich elaboration and aesthetic idealisation of the aims and aspirations of the ruling class as do the other forms of art.

*to be continued...*

*Courtesy : Illusion and Reality*

Your support and contribution will help ISD spread its message of Peace.  
For queries regarding donation and support write to us at [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com)

Your stories are valuable to us. Share them so that others can also read.  
Mail us at [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com)

INSTITUTE *for* SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, New Delhi, India

E-MAIL : [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com) / WEBSITE : [www.isd.net.in](http://www.isd.net.in)