

## Living and Educational Conditions of Child Rag Pickers in Cuttack City of Odisha

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**Abstract:** Since beginning of human history, child labour exists in our society and it indicates the social inequality. Child ragpicking also form of child labour, where children live without education from childhood. The central question of this paper is that Government of India implemented different scheme for children to providing education like Sarva Sikhya Abhijan, Midday Meal Programme and the most important is Compulsory and free education to all children age group between 4 to 14, under Article 21-A, where compulsory education is the part of fundamental rights are legally valuable but till now why rag picking children are not getting proper education? What are the main hurdles behind the Implementation process? The main objective of this paper is to find out the answer of above question and also examine the living conditions and educational situations of rag picking children. A sample of 100 rag pickers children in age group of 4 to 14 years will be selected from different areas of Cuttack district of Odisha.

Key Words: *Child, Education, Labour, Ragpicking*

### Introduction

Man has to pass several stages of life out of these childhood is an important one. During the childhood period, a child unknown about what is society? What is right? What is Education? Or what is work? Slowly they know about all these things through the interaction of their family members and through the interaction with good people in society. But those children do not have parents or migrant children they do not know about these things in childhood. These children in childhood preferred some labourers and unskilled works for their livelihood. Sometimes we called them as child labours, rag pickers and many more. Child labour is a practice where children engage in economic activity, on part time and full time basis. The practice deprives children of their childhood, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. UNICEF estimates that India with its larger population has the highest number of labourers in the world under the 14 years of age. Rag Picker means a person who picks rags and other waste material from Municipality areas, streets, drains, garbage's, platforms and medical areas can sold money for livelihood. When children engaged in this work we called child ragpickers. They choose this profession because of poverty and poor economic background of their family.

Poverty is the root cause of child labour, and education is absolutely fundamental to overcome the poverty trap. As Oxfam states, "Education is the best escape route from a life of poverty. Education brings with it improved health, the chance of prosperity, and hope for the future. It opens the door to a life of dignity and independence." Universal access to free primary education is vital in breaking the cycle of poverty, as is encouraging parents to understand the

importance of education. This is recognised in Article 26 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, Principle 7 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and Article 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which state that primary education should be universal and free for all.

Despite some superficial effort by the government to increase access to education, the state of schooling in India is still very poor. "Few schools in the public stream have proper access to drinking water, electricity, toilets, playgrounds, furniture or proper buildings. They also compromise on quality; with high rates of teacher absenteeism, unfilled vacancies of teachers, absence of teaching material and shortage of trained, motivated teachers, education becomes a farce in government schools". Indeed, it is stated in the same article that quality public school education has never been India's priority emphasis is on higher learning so that the country can produce its own professionals. In successive Plans, India spent just approximately 1.9 per cent of GDP on primary education. Indeed, the expenditure on elementary education declined from 55 per cent in the 1950s to less than 35 per cent in the 1990s. As a result, approximately 300 million out of one billion Indians are illiterate. This non-provision of effective education is thus in blatant contravention of international law, as well as stated domestic policy.

Education has a broader role to play too, other than simply teaching literacy and numeracy. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the education of the child shall be directed to (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) the development of respect for human rights and

fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

### **Historical background of Indian Educational System:**

During pre-independence days, educational rights were unknown to people. In fact, education was considered a privilege rather than a right. The State's obligation to provide education was recognized with the inclusion of a directive principle to this effect under Article 45 in the Indian Constitution (directive principles, unlike fundamental Rights, are not legally enforceable). But, after the 86th Amendment to the Constitution in 2002, the Right to Education was converted into a Fundamental Right.

The leaders of the independence movement, intellectuals and people that comprised the masses stood in unanimity on providing free education to every child up to the age of 14. This concept was adapted from the British law of Free and Compulsory Education (FCE) and incorporated into Article 45 of the Constitution. Thus, FCE became a Constitutional commitment in India from 26th January 1950, when Article 45 mandated the State to universalize education within 10 years, i.e. by 1960.

It would be pertinent to point out that between 1950 and 1960, Article 45 did not receive the importance that it deserved. The State and Union budgets treated education as a peripheral subject, allocating an insubstantial amount for this purpose. Much later, a movement towards equitable education began in 1964, when the Education Commission (Kothari Commission) was appointed to look into the problems of the education system in India.

This Commission recommended achieving universalization of education within two time segments. The year 1976 was set as the deadline to provide free and compulsory education up to 5th standard, while 1986 was the deadline to do the same, up to 7th standard. Moreover, the Commission strongly recommended the adoption of a 'common school' system, which would help remove or minimize inequality of educational opportunities. It also stressed on the need to maintain the 'quality and standards' of schools. Despite all these efforts, the goal remained elusive.

The Kothari Commission had warned policy makers about the tendencies for segregation based on inequalities in the school education system. The gravity and objective of this recommendation was aptly summarized by Naik- "the recommendation of the commission regarding the common school system is the integral part of the programme to promote the education of the poor, reduce its dual character in which 'haves' receive one type of education and 'have-nots' another, and to create a socially cohesive and egalitarian society".

In 1992, the Indian Supreme Court declared the right to education to be a fundamental right in the case of *Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka*. It observed that 'Right to Life' is the compendious expression for all those rights which the courts must enforce because they are basic to the dignified enjoyment of life. The Right to Education flows directly from Right to Life. The Right to Life under Article 21 and the dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by the Right to Education. The State Government was under an obligation to make an endeavour to provide educational facility at all levels to its citizens". This was again reiterated by the Supreme Court in 1993 in the case of *J.P. Unnikrishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh*.

It is significant that the Parliament enacted the Eighty-Sixth Amendment, 2002, to make education a fundamental right for children in the age group 6 to 14 years. It was undoubtedly a compromise on the effectiveness of education since children from birth to 6 years and 15 to 18 years stood excluded. The Right remained on paper for eight years owing to the delay in drafting a central legislation that would lay down the practical framework for its implementation.

### **Objective of the Study:**

The main objective of the study is to highlight and examine the living and educational situations of Ragpicking children.

### **Selection of Study Area**

Cuttack district of Orissa was the area of study, which was the biggest employer of child labours and also it is one of the oldest cities, better known as the Business Capital of Orissa. The study was concentrated slums, railway stations, medical, municipality area and most important industrial estates where these children were picking more rag. Taking all these factors into account this district has been selected.

### **Sources of Data Collection:**

Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed for this research. The primary data are collected from the 100 respondents of Cuttack district of Orissa. The secondary data are collected from books, journal, article, guides, magazine, news paper, and statistical report, published and unpublished document and mostly from internet sources.

### **Methods of Analysis:**

In the present study the researcher employed two types of method for data analysis: qualitative and quantitative. Both of these methods are correlated with each other, though qualitative method is little prior than quantitative methods. Qualitative method is a raw material for any type of research, by which we know the details about the theoretical aspect, but by using of quantitative method we would be able to

manipulate and evaluate the statistical analysis of the data through the helps of advanced computing package like SPSS.

**Result and Discussion**

Literacy level of the population has a strong correlation with the incidence of child labour. Thus parental illiteracy is also a contributory factor for existence of child labour. Majority of child labour comes from illiterate families. Overall literacy level is very low among rag pickers and children turn to rag picking as a means of survival as this occupation does not require prior training or education. In this part, the paper focuses on the living conditions and the educational conditions of rag picking children in Cuttack city of Odisha.

Table-1 presented above that the age of child rag pickers exists between 4-15 years. This table also reveals that 10 % of child rag pickers engaged rag picking work between 4-8 years. The higher age group of children is between 12-15 years, where almost 65% rag picking children engaged rag picking work. The second largest age group of these children comes between 9-11 years, where 25% child rag pickers have shown their participation.

**Table-1- Age wise distribution of child rag pickers**

Age group	No.	Percentage
4-8 years	10	10
9-11 years	25	25
12-15 years	65	65
Total	100	100

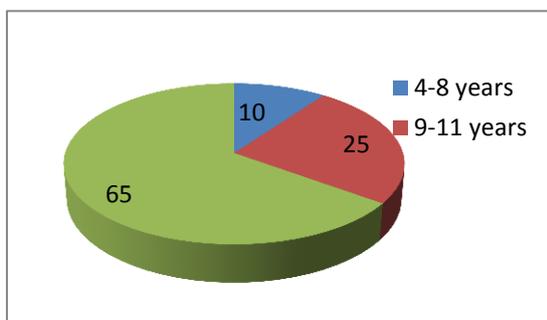
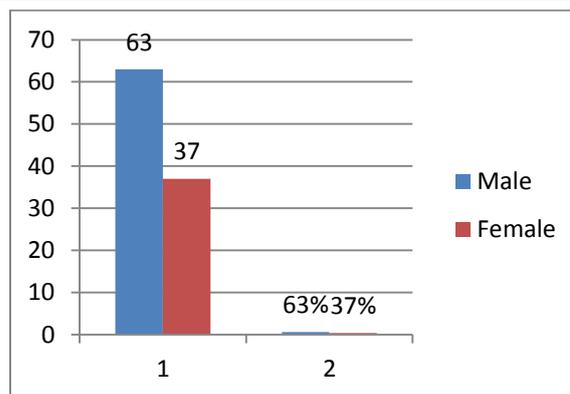


Table-2 indicates that the involvement of male child rag pickers is 63%, where female child rag picker’s involvement is 37%. The male percentage is more than female percentages because of female rag pickers stay in home for taking care of younger children and house work. Another reason is that sex risks during the collection of rags from different places.

**Table-2- Sex wise distribution of child rag pickers**

Sex	No.	Percentage
Male	63	63
Female	37	37
Total	100	100



As information’s shown in table-3, which collected from child rag pickers different areas of Cuttack city, it indicates that all caste wise child has engage in rag picking work. Child participation is higher in Schedule caste Community than other castes like general, other backward class and schedule tribe, whereas SC participation is 56%, OBC participation is 11%, general participation is 9% and finally ST participation is 24%. Due to the poverty, poor and many more reasons children are in all the caste engage in rag picking work.

**Table-3- Caste wise distribution of child rag pickers**

Caste	No.	Percentage
General	9	9
OBC	11	11
SC	56	56
ST	24	24
Total	100	100

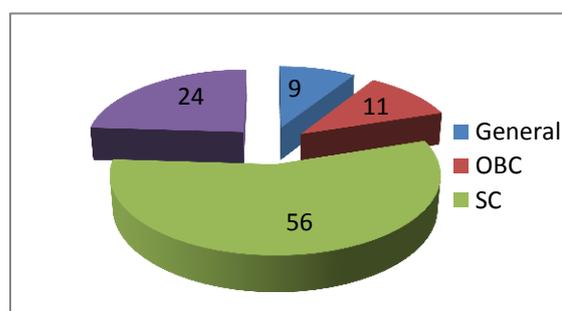
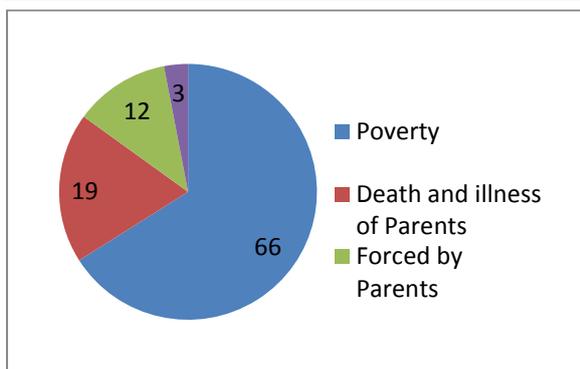


Table-4 reveals that the maximum number, i.e. 66% of rag pickers have chosen this occupation because of poverty, wherein 19% of child rag pickers have chosen because death and illness of their family members. And about 12% of the child rag pickers engaged this rag picking work through the forced by their family members because they are leggy and hard drunker. Finally this table indicates that about 3% of children chosen this profusion because they want to improve their economic conditions.

**Table-4-Factors for children choose rag picking work**

Factors	No.	Percentage
Poverty	66	66
Death and illness of Parents	19	19
Forced by Parents	12	12
To increase family income	3	3
Total	100	100



The table-5 shows the details of school attendance of rag pickers in the sample. It shows that 30 percent of children have been to schools and 70 percent have not attended any schools. It means that more than half of children in the sample are deprived of basic education.

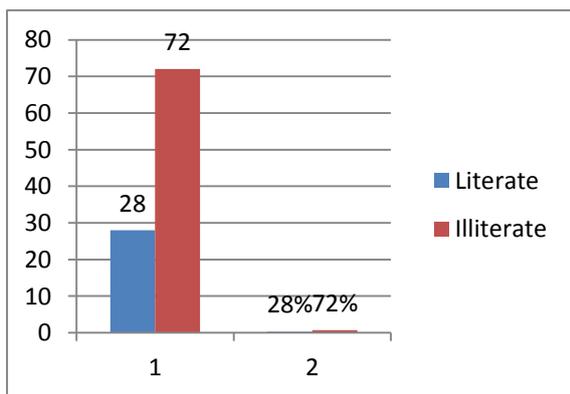
**Table-5-School Attendance of child ragpickers**

School Attendance	NO.	Percentage
Yes	30	30
No	70	70
Total	100	100

Education is the most important right of every child for their personal and mental development. Table-6 reveals that 72% of children are illiterate and 28 % of children are literate. Most of child rag pickers are illiterate because their parents do not give that much opportunity for education and also think education is not give food for their empty stomach.

**Table-6-Education achievement of Rag picking Children**

Education	No.	Percentage
Literate	28	28
Illiterate	72	72
Total	100	100



The Constitution stated that compulsory universal primary education be provided for all children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. But in spite of all that has been done since independence, universal primary education remains a distant goal. Table-7 throws light on school dropout level of child rag pickers. It can be seen that a very high percent 66 % of these children drop out from school and only 34 percent children continue their education. The

dropout rate of these children shows apart from poverty, although that is the main reason, other factors attributing to this. It is observed that children do not enjoy going to school.

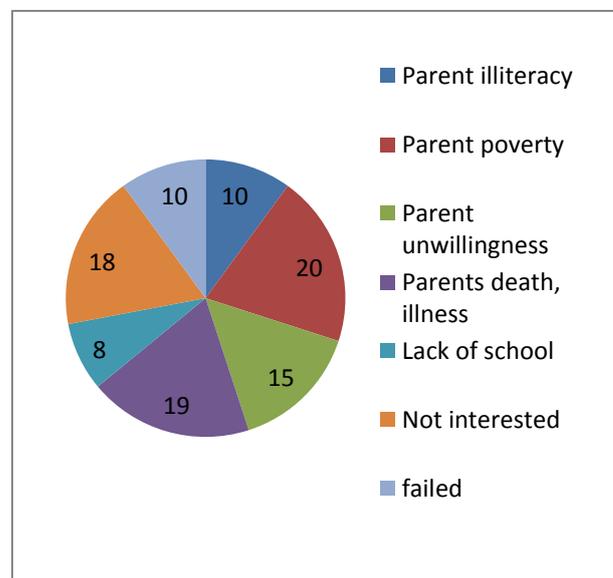
**Table-7-Drop out of School of child ragpickers**

Drop out of School	No.	Percentage
Yes	66	66
No	34	34
Total	100	100

The figures of Table-8- shows that parent related factors such as poverty (20%), unwillingness (15%), death, illness (19%) are main contributory factors for drop out of child ragpickers. Another major factor for drop out is children's not interest in the education.

**Table-8-Reasons for Dropping Out of School of Respondent**

Reasons for Dropping Out of School of Respondent	No.	Percentage
Parent illiteracy	10	10
Parent poverty	20	20
Parent unwillingness	15	15
Parents death, illness	19	19
Lack of school	8	8
Not interested	18	18
Failed	10	10
Total	100	100



**Key Findings:**

1. Majority of children engaged in rag picking activity are 12-15 years age group.
2. Larger number of child rag pickers engages in this job due to poverty.
3. Many of child rag pickers reside in slums.
4. Majority of boys are engaged in rag picking.

5. The largest portion of child rag pickers belongs to Schedule Castes (SC).
6. Large numbers of child rag pickers have not attended any school.
7. Vast majority of child rag pickers are illiterate.
8. Very high percentage of child rag pickers is school drop outs.
9. Parent related factors are main reasons for drop out of child rag pickers.
10. Regarding the educational level of children in the study area 72 per cent of the children are illiterate and only 28 per cent reported to have completed primary Education.
11. Most of the children are school dropouts and the dropout rate is higher among boys than that of girls. Children dropped out of school due to financial problems and lack of interest in studies. Though girls get enrolled in school they remain absent for long. Some of the children have also reported other reasons such as migration, no accessibility of schools, supplementing family income, large family size, sibling care, unfavourable climatic conditions etc.

#### Conclusion:

Child ragpicking is a severe form of child labour. The paper concludes that poverty, poor economic conditions, family conflicts and death and disease in the family were to be found main cause of the children choosing this profession. The findings show that child rag pickers are facing multivariate problems of shelter, health, security and exploitation due to their illiteracy. The main occupation of child rag pickers family is rag picking itself. These children are found living with parents or guardians in Cuttack city and their parents are also involved in rag picking. These children are working under unhygienic conditions just for sake of daily bread. Child rag pickers have their dark future and their life is in danger by the point of view of health degradation and polluted working environment. Even under such condition children themselves are willing to work as rag pickers.

According to findings, child rag pickers start to work at early age and for longer hours a day. Large number of child rag pickers had to leave school due to parent related factors. Consequently the children remain uneducated and unskilled. It leads them to the limit of expectations and they are not aware of their future. It is loss to nation because today's children are tomorrow's strength for nation's future. But if the children's future is dark, then we cannot expect nation shining.

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