

Child Artisans in Unorganised Hand Embroidery Industry: A Study in South Bengal, India

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Abstract: Child labour in India is one of the most confronting issues. In spite of growing awareness and concern for this present day's problem, number of children working in unorganised sector is not negligible at all. Hand embroidery industry in southern districts of West Bengal is one such unorganised industry where existence of child labour is a common phenomenon. Major segment of employment in hand embroidery is in the small and marginal household enterprises. A large number of home based production organisations is operated by poor artisan family members including family children. These child artisans with their meagre income help the families to somehow maintain subsistence livelihood. Marginal productivity of those tiny artisans cannot be ignored, but all of them cannot be considered child labour as defined by the extant laws. The present paper tries to find out in an intensive way the socio-economic conditions of the child artisans and their families. It also attempts to explore the causes of the existence of such problem. Concluding part of the paper suggests some measures to get rid of this social problem.

Keywords: Artisans, Child Labour, Hand Embroidery, *Karigars*, Socio-economic Conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is one of the most confronting issues faced by the World even in the first decade of twenty first century. The evil of child labour is prevailing not only in underdeveloped countries but in many of the developed countries as well. In India it is one of the burning issues, in spite of growing awareness and concern for the problem, number of children working in unorganised sector in India is not at all decreasing. The Article 24 of the Constitution of India mentioned that “*No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment*”. International Labour Organisation (1983) defined child labour as:

“Child Labour includes children permanently leading adult lives, working long hours for low wages under conditions damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development, sometimes separated from their families, frequently deprived of meaningful education and training opportunities that would open up for them a better future”.

Government of India viewed the widespread existence of child labour with great concern. The first

important legislative measure was taken by the India Government through the enactment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986. In 2008 the last amendment of Child Labour (Prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986 was made and notified in the Gazette of India to ban child labour. In spite of these laws and Government initiatives the Indian society witnesses little awareness among people to reduce the evils of child labour. In 2012 another bill was proceed to introduce in Parliament with a view to complete banning of child labour until they finish elementary education, guaranteed under Right to Education Act.

The issues of child labours in unorganised sector emphasised on the facts that, underlying causes of existence of child labour in unorganised sector cannot be imposed upon a single factor. It is actually the combination of several factors like, poverty, parents' ignorance, illiteracy, unemployment, family compulsions, interest of the employers etc. In fact, existence of child labour is the product of different socio-economic factors of the family and the whole social structure as well. A multiple policy approach is necessary in dealing with the problem of working children.

MAGNITUDE OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

Number of child labour in India was 10.75 million according to 1971 census which has increased to 13.64 million in 1981 but in 1991 it showed a decreasing trend and figured it as 11.29 million. In 2001 census the number of Indian children below 14 years of age was 364.6 million of which 12.67 million were

working child labours. Compare to 2001 Census data, the 61st round of NSSO data (2004-05) reported that there were 9.07 million working personnel of the age group 5-14 years. As per 2011 census, 259.64 million children was included in the age group of 5-14 years of which 4.35 million were working children.

Table 1: Change in WPR and Percentage Share of Child Labour between 1991 and 2001 (5-14 yrs.)

States	Work Participation Rate (WPR)		Percentage share of child labour	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Andhra Pradesh	9.98	7.7	14.7	10.8
Arunachal Pradesh	5.65	6.06	0.1	0.1
Assam	5.46	5.07	2.9	2.8
Bihar	3.99	4.68	8.3	8.8
Chhattisgarh	-	6.96	-	2.9
Delhi	1.27	1.35	0.2	0.3
Goa	1.95	1.82	0.0	0.0
Gujarat	5.26	4.28	4.6	3.8
Haryana	2.55	4.78	1.0	2.0
Himachal Pradesh	4.55	8.14	0.5	0.9
Jammu & Kashmir	-	6.62	-	1.4
Jharkhand	-	5.47	-	3.2
Karnataka	8.81	6.91	8.7	6.5
Kerala	0.58	0.47	0.3	0.2
Madhya Pradesh	8.08	6.71	12.0	8.4
Maharashtra	5.73	3.54	9.5	6.0
Orissa	5.87	4.37	4.0	3.0
Punjab	3.04	3.23	1.3	1.4
Rajasthan	6.46	8.25	6.9	10.0
Sikkim	5.18	12.04	0.0	0.1
Tamil Nadu	4.83	3.61	5.1	3.3
Tripura	2.29	2.79	0.1	0.2
Uttar Pradesh	3.81	4.04	12.5	15.2
Uttaranchal	-	3.24	0.0	0.6
West Bengal	4.16	4.5	6.3	6.8
India	5.37	5.0	100	100

Source: Census of India, 1991 and 2001

In 2001 (Table 1), the Indian state with highest work participation rate (WPR) among children was Sikkim (12.04) followed by Rajasthan (8.25%) and Himachal Pradesh (8.14%). However, when percentage share of child labour is considered among Indian States, Uttar Pradesh stood ahead (15.20%) followed by Andhra Pradesh (10.80%) and Rajasthan (10.00%). In 2001, the work participation rate among children in West Bengal was 4.5% while national work participation rate among children was 5%. Table 2 shows the comparative status of child labour in different states and respective percentage share of the states between 2001 and 2011 census.

Majority of Indian states witnessed decrease in number of child labour except Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and Punjab where significant rise was noticed. During last decade West Bengal showed a reduced trend, i.e., 6.77% to 5.38% .

In India, more than 40% children work as agricultural labours of which nearly are engaged in family cultivation. Other areas where the child labours mostly engage are construction works, carpet and handloom industry, embroidery works, gem cutting and polishing, fire-works, glass and bangle making, lock making, hotel and restaurants, tea stall etc.

Table 2: Change in Number and Percentage Share of Child Labour between 2001 and 2011

Sl. No.	States	No. of working children (5-14 years)		Percentage Share	
		Census 2001	Census 2011	Census 2001	Census 2011
1	Andhra Pradesh	1363339	404851	10.76	9.30
2	Arunachal Pradesh	18482	5766	0.15	0.13
3	Assam	351416	99512	2.77	2.29
4	Bihar	1117500	451590	8.82	10.37
5	Chhattisgarh	364572	63884	2.88	1.47
6	Goa	4138	6920	0.03	0.16
7	Gujarat	485530	250318	3.83	5.75
8	Haryana	253491	53492	2.00	1.23
9	Himachal Pradesh	107774	15001	0.85	0.34
10	Jammu & Kashmir	175630	25528	1.39	0.59
11	Jharkhand	407200	90996	3.21	2.09
12	Karnataka	822615	249432	6.49	5.73
13	Kerala	26156	21757	0.21	0.50
14	Madhya Pradesh	1065259	286310	8.41	6.58
15	Maharashtra	764075	496916	6.03	11.41
16	Manipur	28836	11805	0.23	0.27
17	Meghalaya	53940	18839	0.43	0.43
18	Mizoram	26265	2793	0.21	0.06
19	Nagaland	45874	11062	0.36	0.25
20	Odisha	377594	92087	2.98	2.12
21	Punjab	177268	90353	1.40	2.08
22	Rajasthan	1262570	252338	9.97	5.80
23	Sikkim	16457	2704	0.13	0.06
24	Tamil Nadu	418801	151437	3.31	3.48
25	Tripura	21756	4998	0.17	0.11
26	Uttar Pradesh	1927997	896301	15.22	20.59
27	Uttarakhand	70183	28098	0.55	0.65
28	West Bengal	857087	234275	6.77	5.38
	India	12666377	4353247	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011

CHILD LABOUR IN HAND EMBROIDERY WORK

In West Bengal, hand embroidery work was initiated by some Howrah and South 24 Parganas based Muslim artisans during sixties or early seventies [1]. Later, people of other districts in South Bengal and also from other communities have taken it as means of their livelihood. Different types of embroidery works have been spread even in remote corners of these districts. In some areas, the work of hand embroidery has been developed as cluster basis. The artisans of particular cluster or locality are specialised in specific branch of embroidery, and some areas won a reputation for a particular type of work. In some pockets (Howrah and South 24 Parganas districts) of southern Bengal, a sizable amount of village population, nearly 70-85% village population are directly or indirectly associated with the jari work [1]. Hand embroidery work is labour intensive, small and home-based industry to which participation of child labour is very conspicuous. The

parents have the feeling that it is quite normal for a poor family to utilize the child labour for earning to support their meagre income [2].

Hand embroidery work is accomplished in Household production units (HUs), Family workshops (FWs) and Workshops (WKs) and involvement of child labour is noticed in all production organisations, with greater intensity in home-based production houses than other production units. Strict laws against child labour are strengthened now and consciousness among private entrepreneurs has built up. However, existence of child labour in household production units has been noticed intensively but in a different form. Marginal productivity of those tiny artisans cannot be ignored, but all of them cannot be considered child labour as defined by the extant laws. Tiny artisans worked for four to eight hour but not in regular basis or not at a stretch and generally are not paid separately from their parents. They are registered students in different

schools and they perform embroidery work before or after school hours. As a result their studies are neglected.

OBJECTIVES, DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The present paper sets the following specific objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic condition of the child artisans as well as their families,
2. To find out the causes of the existence of child artisans in hand embroidery work, and
3. To suggest possible ways to get rid of the problem of child labour.

The present study is based on primary data collected from Howrah and South 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. Primary survey was conducted during November 2012 to May 2013. The present study considered those *karigars* as child labours those crossed five years of age and spend at least four hours per day at a stretch on embroidery work. We have selected 90 such tiny artisans within 6-14 years of age group from 81 families of which 57 are from Howrah and 33 from South 24 Parganas. It is noted here that, 81 families are selected from a broad sample of 1025 embroider families, 507 in Howrah and 518 in South 24 Parganas.

The method of ‘purposive sampling’ is used to collect primary data. The twin methods of data collection are applied – first, interviewing the targeted groups through structured question schedule and

secondly, observing several social, economic and occupational aspect of different hand embroidery artisans. The collected and compiled data are then tabulated and analysed by using different statistical tools. Collected data analysed with the help of different statistical calculations using MS Excel software.

CHILD WORK PARTICIPATION IN EMBROIDERY WORK

Table 3 shows the extent of child labour prevailing in hand embroidery industry within the study area. It is important to note that, work participation rates among child workers in these two districts are quite high. The overall child work participation rate (CWPR) is 10.67% although it is quite high (12%) in Howrah. In Howrah, 17.79% of 507 *karigar* families are children of which 12.08% are engaged as child *karigars* in different hand embroidery production organisations.

In South 24 Parganas, 14.75% members of 518 *karigar* families are children and 8.89% children work in hand embroidery industry. When total workforce of hand embroidery industry is taken into consideration it has been found that 5.08% and 3.50% *karigars* in Howrah and South 24 Parganas respectively of the hand embroidery-associated families are child *karigars*. Overall percentage share of child *karigars* to total *karigars* calculated as 4.35%. It is calculated that child work participation rate among embroider families is as high as 10.67%.

Table 3: Extent of Participation of Child *Karigars* in Hand Embroidery

District	Number of Families (a)	Total Family Members (b)	Total Children in the families (6-14 years) (c)	Percentage of Children to Total Family Members [d=(c/b)x100]	Number of <i>Karigars</i> in the Family (e)	Number of Child Labour (<i>Karigars</i>) (f)	Child Work Participation Rate (CWPR) [g=(f/c) x 100]	Share of Child <i>Karigars</i> to total <i>Karigars</i> in the Families [h=(f/e)x100]
Howrah	507	2653	472	17.79	1123	57	12.08	5.08
South 24 Parganas	518	2516	371	14.75	944	33	8.89	3.50
Total	1025	5169	843	16.31	2067	90	10.67	4.35

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

The gravity of the problem of child labour is better understood when child work participation rate (CWPR) between national and state level is compared. According to Indian Census [3] the CWPR rates for national and West Bengal state level were 5% and 4.5% respectively. Presently child labour work participation rate in India has fallen considerably because of strict enforcement of Government laws.

SEX OF CHILD *KARIGARS*

Child *karigars* in hand embroidery industry belongs to both sexes, majority of them are constituted by the girls. Over 72% of the child *karigars* are girls (Table 4). Howrah and South 24 Parganas constitute

75.44% and 66.67% of female child *karigars* respectively while male child *karigars* share 9.09% and 3.33% in Howrah and South 24 Parganas respectively in workshops. Only four girls were found working in family workshops in Howrah. The HUs among three types of production organisations employ maximum number of girl child *karigars*.

Percentage share of girls to total child *karigars* in HUs are almost same in both districts. Present study indicates that participation of girl in child *karigars* in hand embroidery is increasing over time. Mandal[1] earlier reported that 60% of the total child artisans in Hand embroidery of South Bengal are girls who were

mostly employed in HUs. He also mentioned that very few (mostly boys) of them work on whole-time basis in workshops or *karkhanas*. Growing awareness among *ostagars* about child labour law prevents them to engage the boys of 5-14 years as child labour in the

workshops. As an alternative, workshop owners employ the girls in the workshops. This significantly reduced engagement of boys in workshops, and thus relatively increase percentage share of girls to total child *karigars*.

Table 4: Sex of the Child *Karigars* Working in Different Production Organisations

District	Workshops		Family Workshops		Household Units		Total	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Howrah	-	-	-	4 (7.02)	14 (24.56)	39 (68.42)	14 (24.56)	43 (75.44)
South 24 Parganas	3 (9.09)	-	-	-	8 (24.24)	22 (66.67)	11 (33.33)	22 (66.67)
Total	3 (3.33)	-	-	4 (4.44)	22 (24.44)	65 (72.22)	25 (27.78)	65 (72.22)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Child *karigars*, employed in workshops are paid workers and work for eight to twelve hours per day, with relatively much less remuneration. These child *karigars* either work as apprentice or help their family members during their leisure. The young family members, who are working in household production organisations, are not generally paid for needle work per day and their income is merged with their parent's income or family income.

RELIGION AND CASTE COMPOSITION

Child artisans in hand embroidery industry belong to both bi-religious and multi-caste communities. Significant part of the child artisans

belongs to Muslim community. Table 5 depicts the actual religious and caste composition of the child artisans in our study area. It is observed that number of Muslim child *karigars* is greater in South 24 Parganas. In Howrah, about 14% child *karigars* belongs to OBC (A) section but in South 24 Parganas, no child labour belonging to OBC (A) has been reported.

A considerable part (22.22%), of Hindu child labour belongs to schedule caste and schedule tribe which include *jele, napit, podh, tanti, padmaraj, jogi etc. sub-caste community*. No child *karigar* belonging to Hindu OBC community are found working in hand embroidery industry in both districts.

Table 5: Religion and Caste of Child *Karigars*

Districts	Hindu				Muslim			Total (a+b)
	General	SC / ST	OBC (B)	Total (a)	General	OBC (A)	Total (b)	
Howrah	01 (01.75)	15 (26.32)	00 (00.00)	16 (28.07)	33 (57.89)	08 (14.04)	41 (71.93)	57 (100.00)
South 24 Parganas	04 (12.12)	05 (15.15)	00 (00.00)	09 (27.27)	24 (72.73)	00 (00.00)	24 (72.73)	33 (100.00)
Total	05 (5.56)	20 (22.22)	00 (00.00)	25 (27.78)	57 (63.33)	08 (08.89)	65 (72.22)	90 (100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

It is evident from the above Table that existence of child labour among backward community and backward sub-caste section are found significantly high. Having little alternative source of income, these socially and economically backward class people are compelled to send their children in hand embroidery work for their economic sustenance.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

A sizeable number of child artisans in hand embroidery industry attended upper primary level (standard VIII) of education (67% in Howrah and 76% in South 24 Parganas) (Figure 1). There is no illiterate child *karigar* in Howrah but about 3% child *karigars* in South 24 Parganas are illiterate. About 15-17% *karigars* in two districts have attended secondary level (standard X) of education. School drop-out rate among child artisans in South 24 Parganas is significantly high (33%) while in Howrah the rate is 28%.

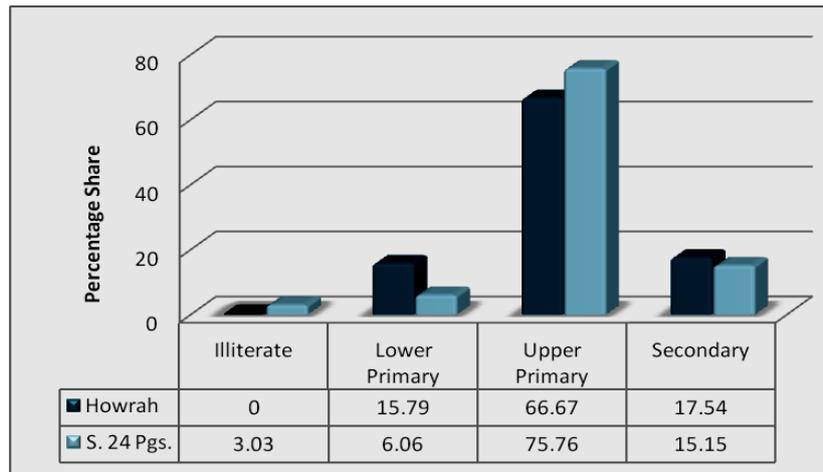


Fig- 1: Educational Attainment of the Child Karigars

Source: Primary data collected from field survey,

*Figures indicate percentage values

The *karigars* employed in workshops and family workshops do not attend their schools any more. They neither have any scope of continuing their education nor are they are not interested to continue any further. Survey showed that 7.77% child *karigars* are interested

to earn money. Some *karigars* who completed upper primary level of education are continuing their schooling. However, all child *karigars* who completed secondary level of education are presently continuing their study.

Table 6: Education Level of the Child Karigars those are Continuing their Studies

District	Total Number of Child Karigars	Education Level of the School-going Child Karigars			Total
		Lower Primary (I – IV)	Upper Primary (V – VIII)	Secondary (IX – X)	
Howrah	57	0 (0.00)	31 (54.39)	10 (17.54)	41 (71.93)
South 24 Parganas	33	0 (0.00)	17 (51.52)	05(15.15)	22 (66.67)
Total	90	0 (0.00)	48 (53.33)	15 (16.67)	63 (70.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

It is evident from Table 6 that about 72% and 67% child artisans in Howrah and South 24 Parganas respectively are continuing their study along with hand embroidery job. However, majority of these school-going artisans cannot perform well in their studies due to their association with the hand embroidery work which requires five-six hours of labour per day. Interestingly these students are also are not interested in playing which is very much essential for mental development at this level. During surveys it is revealed that the parents of these students lack awareness in this matter. Poor parents do not feel interested to let their children to continue their study as they consider their children as an instrument for earning.

FAMILY STATUS

Involvement of a child in hand embroidery work at an early age is influenced by his/ her family structure and characters. During survey it has been found that the families of child *karigars* belong to an economically homogeneous group. Most of these families belong to BPL categories (Table 7). 42% and 35.48% families in Howrah and South 24 Parganas respectively fall within BPL categories.

It is found that at least one member in 21% families do possess job cards under MGNREGS. However, embroider family members do not show any interest to register them for the above scheme as the jobs available under this scheme are laborious and requires more physical labour than hand embroidery work.

Table 7: Different Features of Child Artisans' Families

District	BPL	APL	Job Card holding	Average Family Members	Average Family Members Engaged in Embroidery
Howrah	21 (42.00)	29 (58.00)	9 (18.00)	6.02	3.52
South 24 Parganas	11 (35.48)	20 (64.52)	8 (25.81)	5.74	2.90
Total	32 (39.51)	49 (60.49)	17(20.99)	5.91	3.28

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Total family members of these families are relatively high. Participation of family members in embroidery work, either in workshops or in household units, is considerably elevated. Without any alternative profession these distressed families have taken embroidery work as their last resort to earn some money.

Some members of these families earn by working as agricultural workers, van-rickshaw pullers, casual labourers, hawkers, vegetable vendors etc. However, incomes from these sources are very low as well as uncertain. Moreover, there exists little security of employment or assurance of stable income in these

occupations. Under such circumstances, parents have little choice but to send their children to embroidery work.

EDUCATION OF THE GUARDIANS

Illiteracy and ignorance owing to little educational background of the guardians are the main causes of existence of child labour. Early socialisation of a child takes place in his own home. So parental habits are most likely to be incorporated within the children [4]. Table 8 shows that about 88% guardians of the child *karigars* are either illiterate or have completed primary level of education. Besides this, little more than 40% guardians are completely illiterate.

Table 8: Education of the Heads of the Families

District	Illiterate	Lower Primary (I – IV)	Upper Primary (V – VIII)	Secondary (IX – X)	Madhyamik	H S and above	Total
Howrah	20 (40.00)	15 (30.00)	09 (18.00)	04 (08.00)	01 (02.00)	01 (02.00)	50 (100.00)
South 24 Parganas	13 (41.94)	08 (25.80)	06 (19.35)	01 (03.23)	02 (06.45)	01 (03.23)	31 (100.00)
Total	33 (40.74)	23 (28.41)	15 (18.51)	05 (06.17)	03 (03.70)	02 (02.47)	81 (100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Education level of guardians in both Howrah and South 24 Parganas does not show any significant variation. The only notable difference noted in Madhyamik (standard X) level is that in South 24 Parganas about 10% guardians passed while in Howrah the same is figured out as 4% only.

Education level of mother of the child *karigars* is not very different from that of their guardians. Percentage share of overall illiterate mothers to total mothers is slightly less (38.27%) when compared to with that of their guardians (40.74%). Overall educational attainment of mothers is somewhat worse than that of guardians.

Table 9: Education of the Mothers of Child Karigars

District	Illiterate	Lower Primary (I – IV)	Upper Primary (V – VIII)	Secondary (IX – X)	Madhyamik	H S and above	Total
Howrah	20 (40.00)	13 (26.00)	14 (28.00)	01 (02.00)	02 (04.00)	00 (00.00)	50 (100.00)
South 24 Parganas	11 (35.48)	10 (32.26)	07 (22.58)	00 (00.00)	03 (9.68)	00 (00.00)	31 (100.00)
Total	31 (38.27)	23 (28.40)	21 (25.93)	01 (01.23)	05 (06.17)	00 (00.00)	81 (100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Table 9 described the educational attainment of the mothers. It is estimated that 92.59% mothers left their schools at their childhood before attending secondary level. Only 4% mothers in Howrah and 9.68% in South 24 Parganas possess the educational qualification upto Madhyamik level. In aggregate, 6.17% of them have just achieved Madhyamik degree.

Educational status of guardians and mother of child artisans are far from satisfactory level. Illiteracy and low level of education of guardians and as well as mothers seldom let them realize the importance of education for their children, rather they forced these children to stay busy beside *dhadda* and earn for their families.

HOUSING, KITCHEN AND LAVATORY AMENITY

Housing as well as other associated facilities reflect the economic condition of embroider families. Lack of proper accommodation and other facilities impose adverse effects on mental, physical and moral development of family members which directly or

indirectly have and adverse effect on home-based embroidery production as well.

It is evident that 97.53% child labour families stay at their own house and 2.47% of 81 families live in rented accommodation (Table 10). Mud or *kutchha* houses account to 37.04% while *pakka* (brick wall with concrete floor and roof) and *semi-pakka* (brick wall without concrete floor and roof) houses shares 8.64% and 51.85% respectively. Majority of *semi-pakka* houses are built with the assistance of local rural panchayats under *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY). 38.00% houses of artisans in Howrah are of *kutchha* type, made of earth-soil and bamboo, thatched with hay or tiles, offering little protection from rain and cold.

In Howrah, only 41.96% families, amounting to one-third of hand embroidery artisans, have permanent kitchen and rest manage to cook either at the veranda or in a have temporary makeshift arrangement, made of polythene sheets or coconut leaves. Artisan families of South 24 Parganas are in a better position in the above context.

Table 10: Housing, Kitchen and Lavatory Conditions of the Households

District	Own House			Rented House	Separate Kitchen	Lavatory Arrangement
	<i>Pakka</i>	<i>Semi-pakka</i>	<i>Katchha</i>			
	03 (06.00)	26 (52.00)	19 (38.00)	02 (04.00)	16 (32.00)	22 (44.00)
Howrah						
South 24 Parganas	04 (12.90)	16 (51.62)	11 (35.48)	00 (00.00)	18 (58.06)	18 (58.06)
Total	07 (08.64)	42 (51.85)	30 (37.04)	02 (02.47)	34 (41.96)	40 (49.38)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Over 50% families in two districts, on an average, have no lavatory arrangement at all. In Howrah district about 56% families have no lavatory arrangement. In South 24 Parganas district about 58% families have own permanent lavatory arrangements, i.e., another 42% families are living without any lavatory arrangements.

Majority of the child *karigars*' families belong to economically poor or lower middle class section, and have no capability to own spacious room. They are compelled to arrange for their embroidery production unit in a very short space, which degrade their quantity and quality of production.

ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE CHILD *KARIGARS*' FAMILIES

Majority of these family members are engaged in embroidery work. As a result share of income from embroidery to total family income of these families is high. It is observed that, almost 69% of total family income is generated from hand embroidery work by the family members. Table 11 showed the distribution of aggregate family income of the families associated with child *karigars*. Although, there are wide ranges of monthly income of the families, almost 80% of families' incomes stay below Rs. 10,000. Monthly average income of the embroider families are found to cross Rs. 7,000 mark, but variations in income are also quite high.

Table 11: Distribution of Monthly Income of the Families

Monthly Income (₹)	No. of Family in Howrah	No. of Family in S. 24 Parganas	Total No. of Families
0 – 2,000	00 (00.00)	01 (03.23)	01 (01.23)
2,001 – 4,000	07 (14.00)	06 (19.35)	13 (16.05)
4,001 – 6,000	14 (28.00)	13 (41.94)	27 (33.33)
6,001 – 8,000	09 (18.00)	03 (09.67)	12 (14.82)
8,001 – 10,000	11 (22.00)	01 (03.23)	12 (14.82)
10,001 – 12,000	02 (04.00)	05 (16.13)	07 (08.64)
12,001 – 14,000	04 (08.00)	00 (00.00)	04 (04.94)
14,001 and above	03 (06.00)	02 (06.45)	05 (06.17)
Total	50 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	81 (100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

Coefficient of variation (CV) in respect to total monthly income is considerably high (63.73%) in South 24 Parganas but in Howrah the same CV has been calculated as 48.03% (Table 12). The results indicate many economic disparities among those poor *karigars'* families. Disparities are even greater in case of total family income from hand embroidery. Like aggregate

average income, it is the maximum in Howrah district. The average family income per month crosses Rs. 7,000 mark but it must be noted that the number of family members are also quite high (Table 7). So, average income per family member is not as high as it seems to be.

Table 12: Economic Status of the Child *Karigars'* Families

District	Average Aggregate Family Income (₹)	Coefficient of Variation (CV) (%)	Average family Income from Embroidery (₹)	Coefficient of Variation (CV) (%)
Howrah	7642.00	48.03	5468.00	62.67
South 24 Parganas	7048.39	63.73	4461.29	71.02
Total	7414.81	53.78	5082.72	65.84

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

Involvement of family members in embroidery work is quite high. As a result share of income from embroidery is also high which may be due to high dependency of family members on embroidery work as their profession. Involvement of child labour in production also increases this type of dependency. In our study it was observed that in Howrah, 58.47% of total family members are engaged in hand embroidery and they earn about 72% of the total family income. In South 24 Parganas, 50.52% family members are engaged in needle work and earn about 63% of their total family income.

Most of the child *karigars* are engaged in home based HUs and FWs. They do not work individually but assist their parents to complete the hand embroidery job within a short period and by doing so they contribute to family income. In several instances child *karigars* work as trainee or apprentice *karigars*. As a result their remuneration cannot be compared with that of the adult

karigars. Income of child *karigars* working at Wks can be considered income as true sense the number of such individuals are very few.

INDEBTED SITUATION OF THE FAMILIES

Artisans of hand embroidery industry working in household production organisations or workshops do not require any financial assistance for production purpose as the production scheme is based on putting out system; the clothing and decorating materials required for production are generally supplied by the *ostagars*. Instances are there where *karigars* purchase materials and are paid at the time of final payment after finishing the job. The present study observes that nearly 58% (47 out of 81) child *karigar* families have taken family loan from different micro-credit institutions. However, these family loans have been utilized for family purposes but not for hand embroidery production.

Table 13: Loan Taken from Different Micro-finance Institutions

District	Families Taken Loan	Micro-finance Institutions					Total
		<i>Bandhan</i>	<i>Sarala</i>	<i>Sahara</i>	<i>Arohon</i>	Others	
Howrah	39 (78.00)	30 (76.92)	06 (15.38)	03 (7.69)	-	-	39 (100.00)
South 24 Parganas	08 (25.81)	05 (62.50)	-	-	02 (25.00)	01 (12.50)	08 (100.00)
Total	47 (58.02)	35 (74.47)	06 (12.77)	03 (06.38)	02 (04.26)	01 (02.12)	47 (100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field survey

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage values

It has evident from Table 13 that a maximum of 78% child *karigars'* families in Howrah have availed micro-credit loan facility but only 25.81% families in South 24 Parganas have opted for the same. Micro-finance institutions, namely, *Bandhan*, *Sarala*, *Sahara*, *Arohon*, *Kalpataru* etc. are actually micro-credit institutions which provide loan to members of self-help groups (SHG) for small production or business purposes for a duration of one or two years.

The HUs members receive loans (amounting from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 25,000) through SHG which are often formed in association with neighbouring HUs members and utilize the same for purchasing embroidery equipment, purchasing household durables, house-repairing, marriage of daughter, cultivation, financing small trade etc. Loans are mostly taken by females of embroider families. *Karigars* do not require such loans directly for production purpose. Micro finance institutions have an excellent networking system of distribution and collection of loans and provide loans because of guaranteed recovery on every weekend payment day (every Saturday of the week).

CAUSES BEHIND EXISTENCE OF CHILD LABOUR IN HAND EMBROIDERY INDUSTRY

There are numerous and varied causes for the existence of child labour in hand embroidery industry in Howrah and South 24 Parganas and no single factor can be identified as the main cause of child labour. It is significant that almost all the causes of the existence of child labour are intrinsically interrelated. Some important and noteworthy causes are as follows:

- i) **Poverty:** Almost 40% of total embroider families in the study area are still living below poverty line (BPL). Widespread poverty among embroider families forced the parents to send their children to seek jobs. Incomes of these tiny hands are important for the survival of those families. Their income supplements the family income and takes care of illness and other contingencies.
- ii) **Unemployment:** The agriculture and allied sectors of different parts of Howrah and South 24 Parganas are depended on monsoon. Most of the agricultural workers, landless and

marginal farmers are to stay idle for a period of five to seven months per year. The seasonal types of employment of the adult family members also force the children to seek jobs. It is found that about 69.14% (56 out of 81) family heads are either marginal farmers or agricultural workers, or casual labourers and the parents have nothing to do but to send their children for embroidery jobs.

- iii) **Parents' Education:** Illiteracy and least level of education prevent guardians to understand the prospects of education and they emphasize on present economic security. They induced their children to engage in easily available hand embroidery work for present financial benefit of the family. In our study, almost 40% parents are illiterate and another 45% just attended either lower or upper primary level. Lack of proper education among parents is one of the important causes of child participation in hand embroidery work.
- iv) **Family Compulsion:** A significant percentage of children are forced to work at their early study or playing age owing to the absence of their father. Some of them are forced to engage at regular work as their father either died or divorced their mother. They are living with other younger brothers and sisters under the guardianship of their utterly helpless mothers. It is observed that 11.11% of the child artisans are compelled to work at their childhood in the absence of an elderly earning member of the family.
- v) **Traditional Attitude:** In rural Bengal, the artisans families are in belief that if their children engage themselves in craft at early age they will become proficient artisans in early adulthood. This will spread earning opportunity in their families. Some other reasons behind the attitude come from belief of the elderly artisans of the household that flexibility and pliability of childhood attitude help the children to learn their work easily, and so they are in favour of childhood work.
- vi) **Ignorance and lack of Interest of Parents:** In modern India, still rural peoples are not aware

of the importance and benefit that literacy or education can bring to them. The illiterate parents do not have required faith in educational system and believe that education has nothing to give them in the future. They do not send their children to schools; rather force them to find some jobs. Only concern to them is how monetary benefit can be achieved through children's employment.

vii) Large Family Size: Poor families with large number of family members cannot provide all necessities to all its members. Even the parents cannot arrange for sufficient food-stuff and clothing for maintaining subsistence level of the livelihood of their children. As a result the minor children are forced to earn some money for themselves as well as for the whole families.

viii) Interest of the Entrepreneur: The *ostagars* treat the child artisans as cheap commodities. In most cases *ostagars* make an account that the productivity of the child artisan is almost same to an adult artisan with a very little overhead cost. Employment of child artisan leads to extra profit. However, in recent years, the attitude of the *ostagars* towards child labours has changed to a great extent. That is why only three out of 90 child *karigars* are found working in workshops.

ix) Unorganised Nature of Jobs: There is no organisation for the hand embroidery artisans. So, the artisans cannot fight for their demands and stand against the cruelty and evils of child labour. An unorganised sector is not covered within the purview of law also. There is also laxity in the enforcement department to protect labour legislation.

The underlying causes of existence of child labour in hand embroidery are actually the combination of several factors as stated above. As a matter of fact child labour is the product of different socio-economic factors of the society.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The evil of child labour exist in wide areas of Howrah and South 24 Parganas among the hand embroidery artisans family. Existing laws against child labour cannot protect these children from their forcefully working status. Almost 30% child labours are school dropouts and the rest 70% are continuing their education but without regularity and proper interest. Sizable part of the school going child artisans are not interested in continuing their study, rather they are in favour of full-time involvement in embroidery work. Parents of these children, mostly from backward and minority community are least attentive about their education.

Continuous publicity and awareness programmes against child labour left some significant and influential effects on the *ostagars* of workshops in hand embroidery production organisations. It has experienced that out of 101 *ostagars*(91.82%) reported that they are fully aware of the law regarding banning of child labour and do not employ children. In our study, only three child artisans are found working in workshops. So, home-based production houses are accommodating almost entire part of child labours and to cope with the problem we should concentrate on these sections of embroidery production organisations with due importance.

Child workers should be discouraged to work at their early ages of schooling. '*Sarbasiksha Abhijan*' programme should be strengthened to send the school left children back to their schools. Again those child labours, who are irregularly attending their schools, should be encouraged to maintain their regularity in schools so that better generation of *karigars* in future can be expected. Adult education and awareness programme will be helpful to reduce the evil of child labour.

Scholarships for education of the hand embroidery workers' children should be introduced for better education whereby child labour in hand embroidery industry may indirectly be reduced and eradicated over time. Hidden or disguised child labours should be identified and special awareness programme for those children including their parents should be done through local panchayats and NGOs.

Alternative schemes or measures may be introduced targeting those families where there are real compulsions of sending child members in search of work. These bereaved families should bring forward under the umbrella of several social security measures. Accidental benefit, maternity benefit, child-education benefit, medical benefit for certain illness, benefits for sudden misery of the artisans occurred owing to some unavoidable situations – all these should be introduced in hand embroidery industry.

A wind of change must blow through the society and through the mind of human being to fight against the evil of child labour. This will be possible if the society adopt a radical new outlook that the ultimate aim, the elimination of child labour, can be achieved and it will be practically achieved only if we fight against it jointly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The paper is a part of UGC sponsored Minor Research Project. I am extremely thankful to UGC for providing financial assistance to carry out the project. I am also thankful to the authority of Y S Palpara Mahavidyalaya for providing space and equipments to carry out the research work.

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