

URBAN INDIA



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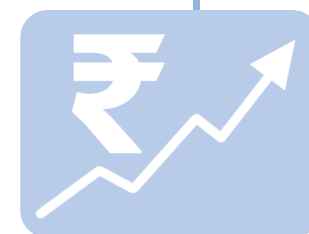


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Special Issue on Migration

Overview of Migration
Seasonal Migration
Gendered Migration
Migrant Child Labour
Job Search and Labour Market Outcomes
Migration and Conflict
Legal Aspects of Migration
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Workshops





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Volume 34	Issue I	January-June 2014	ISSN 0970-9045
-----------	---------	-------------------	----------------

Preface iii

Editorial iv

Acknowledgements x

Internal Migration in India: Setting the Context

S Chandrasekhar and Poornima Dore 1

Drivers and Impacts of Migration

Linking Separate Worlds: Understanding the Process of Rural-urban Seasonal Migration in India

Yogesh Kumar and Anamika Ajay 9

Migration Study Report of Gaisilat Block of Bargarh District of Odisha

Kanhu Charan Majhi, Abhaya Chandra Tripathi, Jadumani Pradhan 33

Labour Market in Cities

Job Search and Labour Market Conditions of Migrants at the Destination: The Case of Lucknow

Probir Bose and Ramjee Rai 47

Well-being of Migrant Workers: Perspectives from Daily Labour Markets in Navi Mumbai

Karthikeya Naraparaju 68

Migration and Conflict in the Mega City: A Study of Migrants in Hyderabad

Triveni Goswami Vernal, Bagmi Priyadarshini, Sayed Nayeem, P. Raghavendra 87

The Socio-economic Status of Migrant Construction Workers in Bangalore and Intervention Plan to Improve Their Livelihoods

Smita Premchander, V. Prameela, Shammeeem Banu, K.G. Meenakshi, Hosalli Manjunath, T. Prema 112

Migration in the Slums of Kolkata: A Gendered Perspective

Arpita Banerjee 134



Legal Protection for Migrant Workers

Child Labour in Cotton Seed Production:

A Case of Cotton Seed Farms in North Gujarat

Ashok Khandelwal, Sudhir Katiyar, Madan Vaishnav 157

Policies to Safeguard Migrants' Rights: A Critical Approach

Debolina Kundu 184

Legal Primer: Child Labour

Ashok Khandelwal, Sudhir Katiyar, Madan Vaishnav 213

Legal Primer: Brick Kiln Workers and Bonded Labour

Action Aid, Hyderabad 220

Book Reviews

'Urbanization in India-Challenges, Opportunities and the Way Forward'

Edited by Isher Judge Ahluwalia, Ravi Kanbur and P. K. Mohanty,

Published by Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Chetan Vaidya 228

'Perspective in Urban Development: Issues in Infrastructure, Planning and Governance'

Edited by Ramanath Jha and Jyoti Chandiramani,

Published by Capital Publishing Company, New Delhi

Pragya Sharma 232

'India: The Urban Transition - A Case Study of Development Urbanism'

by Henrik Valeur, Published by Architectura and Natura,

Book Sellers and Publishers, Amsterdam

Mukta Naik 235

Workshops..... 240



CHILD LABOUR IN COTTON SEED PRODUCTION: A CASE OF COTTON SEED FARMS IN NORTH GUJARAT

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Abstract

Gujarat occupies a prominent position in producing cotton and cottonseed. The area under cotton production has been constantly increasing during last few years. Owing to rising labour prices without proportionate rise in price of cottonseed and the continued practice of manual crosspollination, Bt cotton farmers commonly hire child labour at lower wages in lieu of adult males. Most farms employ children as the chief source of labour, with nearly three-fourth of the labourers aged between 6-18 years. The children work for 9-11 hours a day in poor conditions and the wages received are much below the legal remuneration. This paper is a documentation of use of child labour in cottonseed production, with a focus on recruitment processes and work and living conditions. The paper presents data from field survey in North Gujarat by where systematic interviews were conducted with farmers, contractors and workers.

The Cottonseed Industry in North Gujarat

At around nine million hectares, India has the highest area under cotton cultivation in the world. With the introduction of Bt hybrid cottonseed in 2002, the area, yield and production of cotton lint in India has seen spectacular growth to the extent that since the last two years the country, that used to import cotton, has emerged as net exporter of cotton. Whereas the average yield of cotton in India was around 300 kg/hectare between 1992-93 and 2002-03, estimates for the year 2007-08 suggest that the yield may have increased to 553 kg¹. Within a span of five years, the yield has thus grown by

¹ Union Textile Ministry data quoted in Financial Times, March 16, 2007.



82 percent. The area under cultivation has also grown from 7.3 million to over 9.53 million hectares during 2003-04 to 2007-08².

Due to increased usage of Bt cotton³ and improved cotton processing, India's cotton production is growing at 8.3 percent annually and the demand for labour in cottonseed production is increasing proportionately. This increase in the cotton production is largely accounted by the state of Gujarat with supplementary contributions from the states of Punjab, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (Table 1) and related to the expertise of farmers in using hybrid cotton seeds that has shown success with Bt cotton (Robinson, 2005).

Gujarat, where hybrid/Bt cotton cultivation has been widely adopted in recent years (Shah 2005), is India's largest producer of both cotton (Table 1) and

Table 1: Area, Production and Yield of Cotton in Major States

States	Area	Prod	Yield	Area	Prod	Yield
Punjab	6.07	26	728	6.48	24	630
Haryana	5.3	16	513	4.78	16	569
Rajasthan	3.5	8	389	3.68	9	416
North Total	14.87	50	572	14.94	49	558
Gujarat	23.9	101	718	25.16	110	743
Maharashtra	30.7	52	288	31.91	60	320
Madhya Pradesh	6.39	18	479	6.62	21	539
Central Total	60.99	171	477	63.69	191	510
Andhra Pradesh	9.72	35	612	10.96	43	667
Karnataka	3.75	6	272	3.71	8	367
Tamil Nadu	1.22	5	697	1.23	5	691
South Total	14.69	46	532	15.9	56	599
Others	0.87	1	195	0.77	2	442
Total		268			298	
Loose Lint		12			12	
Total	91.42	280	521	95.3	310	553

Source: www.cotcrop.com

² Data from Cotton Corporation of India website

³ Government support of the Bt cotton industry is hotly contested and opposed with activists alleging that the technology has ruined sustainable production and has health consequences.



cottonseed. The state produces roughly 35 percent of the total raw cotton of the country and has high yields despite relatively less area under cultivation. However, area under cotton has increased from around 15.5 lakh hectares during 96-97 to 25.16 lakh hectares in 2007-08, an increase of about 62.3 percent.

Gujarat also leads in the production of cottonseed hybrids. The world's first hybrid variety was produced by Dr C.T.Patel in 1970 at Surat Agricultural Extension Station of Gujarat Agricultural University and used for commercial purposes by the farmers of North Gujarat (Murugkar et al., 2007). A number of factors including a campaign against child labour in Andhra Pradesh⁴, a spurt in demand for hybrid and Bt cottonseeds, dominance of private players and high profit margins for the producers and cheap labour supply from surrounding tribal areas have turned north Gujarat into the main centre of hybrid cotton seed production in India. The state accounts for 42 percent of total acreage, with a growing emphasis on Bt cottonseed production. Gujarati farmers are credited for creating location-specific hybrids and are now demanding de-licensing of Bt to encourage these innovations (Herring, 2006; Herring, 2007).

Dominance of Private Sector

After many decades of public sector domination, private companies began to introduce hybrids of their own with the opening of the economy in the 1990's. Since then, encouraged by the introduction of Bt cotton by MMB Limited, a joint venture of US multinational Monsanto and Indian seed company Mahyco (which has in turn 21 sub licenses to Indian companies), the private sector has almost completely wiped out public sector. Murugkar et al (2007) observe a fall in area of cultivation under public hybrids and state that "proprietary (or private) hybrids that used to be the least important in 1996-97 (have) emerged as the most popular seed source in 2004-05." In value terms, the public sector share has come down from 55 percent in 1996-97 has become negligible in 2004-05.

Private sector companies work primarily for profit and exert considerable control over the farmer. The cultivation of seed is closely controlled by seed

⁴ Nuziveedu, an AP based cotton seed producer has recently become an important player in Gujarat, for instance, showing a shift in geography of the seed production industry.



companies and production related information perfectly guarded. The companies appoint organisers who in turn appoint agents who distribute the parent seed to farmers. The farmers have to sign an agreement with the company promising to turn over all the produce back to the company and following all company regulations. The companies closely control all aspects of production process. For example, they restrict the number of days of cross pollination that a farmer can undertake. The procurement price at which companies purchase farmers' produce is also pre-decided. It is instructive to note here that the companies have not increased the procurement prices of the seed for last many years. The payment is also made very late. The payment is made to the farmers after laboratory tests. The payment is often made six to one year after the season. The agents will often advance money to the farmers for the working capital. The whole business is controlled by a small group of large farmers.

Through this controlled process, higher priced proprietary hybrid seeds have been displacing lower priced public hybrids and the value of the seed market has grown quickly, translating into profits for seed companies and farmers alike. Control also helps the companies to dictate prices, which impacts the conditions of the seed growers and the labour who toils in the field.

Illegal Practices and Demand for Cheap Labour

Though we know that Gujarat produces a large quantity of Bt cottonseed, the scale of production and its legality is debatable. Reports have been regularly appearing in the print media that many companies and farmers are involved in the illegal production of cottonseed. The Committee dealing with Bt cotton in the Ministry of Environment and Forests has taken note of this referring to the products as "spurious cotton seeds" in one of its meetings and agreed to initiate action against erring companies and individuals (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2003).

As per Prayas' own estimates based on interviews of some of the big agents engaged in the production of cottonseed on behalf of multiple companies, the area under cottonseed production in 2006 was more than 25000 acres in north Gujarat while Venkateswarlu (2007) estimates 15-20 percent rise in the total acreage in 2007.



Consequently, the demand for labour for cottonseed production in Gujarat is very high. Hybrid cottonseed production is extremely labour intensive, requiring 10 labourers per acre for cross-pollination work. For 25000 acres, the estimated labour requirement is 2.5 lakhs. Gujarat is highly developing state and local labour is in short supply. The industry therefore attracts large numbers of migrant labour, the majority being seasonal migrants.

Extensive Use of Child Labour

The extensive use of child labour in the industry has been in the spotlight, especially in the context of the Andhra Pradesh cotton industry. Children are particularly used in the process of crosspollination, where the practices of manual emasculation and pollination are still prevalent. The Governments of Andhra Pradesh (Financial Express, 2006) and Rajasthan⁵ have accepted the presence of child labour.

The numbers of children employed in cottonseed farming have increased over the years. Venkateswarlu's (2007) latest study estimates 2.26 lakhs child labour at an all-India level in 2006-07 compared to 2 lakhs in 2003-4. While use of child labour in cottonseed production especially for the purposes of cross-pollination is widespread in all producing states, his estimate for Gujarat at 85,340 is the highest in the country. Dakshini Rajasthan Mazdoor Union⁶ estimated that 37 percent of the total labour is child labour in the year 2006-07. Estimated use of child labour for the 25000 acres in Gujarat for the year 2006-07 comes to 92,500⁷. Workers in Gujarat are more vulnerable because they are inter-state tribal migrant workers coming in from the adjoining tribal belt of southern Rajasthan (Venkateswarlu, 2004).

The government and multinational corporations have been refuting the presence of child labour or ignoring the claims of the activists and other social workers in the state of Gujarat. Keeping this situation in mind, Prayas decided to undertake a survey in the month of September 2013 to gather fresh evidence and understand the issue of child labour in Gujarat.

⁵ The Government of Rajasthan claimed that "the district administration Dungarpur has prevented more than 300 Child Labour from migrating to Gujarat" before the Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in a meeting held on 3rd of August 2007

⁶ Dakshini Rajasthan Mazdoor Union is a registered Trade Union of seasonal migrant tribal labourers who migrate from southern Rajasthan to Gujarat.

⁷ This is assuming that total hired labour requirement is to the tune of 2.5 lakhs @ 10 labourers per acre and the percentage of child labour is equal among all types of hired labour



Objectives

The study tries to find out

1. The extent and depth of child labour on the cottonseed farms, especially on farms producing cottonseed for companies are also using child labour.
2. To understand the recruitment process and the form of child labour.
3. To understand the work and living conditions and the impact of processes like advance payments, sprinkling of pesticides and migration on the child workers in particular.

Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary data. Three different interview schedules were designed to collect information from farmers, contractors and workers.

Given time and resource constraints, a sample of 80 farms was taken for the purpose of the study in the two main areas—Sabarkantha and Banaskantha—where cottonseed is produced. Forty farms from each of the two areas were chosen for intensive field study. A list of villages that had farmers working for MNCs were included in the sample.

For each chosen farm, the owner of the farm, the contractor and three workers were selected for interview with the help of the structured instrument. From among the workers one male, one female and one child were randomly selected for interview. In addition to this, short interviews were recorded on video as well as other evidences in support of the data.

Due to limitations given below, 42 farms were covered and 23 contractors and 99 workers were interviewed

Limitations

It was extremely difficult to establish the extent and depth of the child labour on cotton seed farms by directly asking the farmer. The farmer would immediately send the children into hiding as soon as the survey team approached the farm. Even when s/he was not present on the farm, the children had been programmed to immediately move away at the sight of



outsiders. In some cases, if one approached the farm from a height, the movement of children scurrying away through standing crops could be made out. The team therefore had to rely on indirect observation methods to establish presence of children. While one member of the team would talk to the farmers and fill the schedule, others would fan out and interview the workers. Over a period of time, it would become possible to understand the age composition of the workers' group. Survey work was done during the second fortnight of September 2007 which is the peak period for cross-pollination work. The cottonseed production cycle in Gujarat begins in May/June with sowing. Cross-pollination work begins from late July/early August when flowering starts and lasts till mid-October. The labour in question is hired for this specific task. Two teams were formed, one each for the two areas. Labour use data in this study relate only to hired labour for cross-pollination work.

The study was undertaken amidst a very high pitch campaign against child labour. The field work coincided with a three-day visit of the Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (henceforth NCPCR) on this very issue. This created logistical problems for the team of investigators who faced lots of hostility, even attacks, especially from a group of vested interests. The farmers who were quite cooperative in the beginning became uncooperative, even providing wrong and misleading information and we had to wind up the data collection half way.

Characteristics of Child Labour

Depth and Spread of Child Labour

One of the important objectives of the study is to find out the extent of child labour use for cottonseed production. Despite independent estimates of about 85,000, the Government of Gujarat has denied presence of child labour on cottonseed farms. Table 2 provides distribution of workers on the sample farms by age and sex as observed on the farms by the research team. On an average more than 14 labourers were employed by the farmers, with the average for child labour being to 4.7.



Table 2: Distribution of Labour by Different Categories as per Farmers

Category of Labour	Number	Percent	Maximum	Mean
Total Labour	604	100	52	14.4
Adult Male	100	16.6	20	3.2
Adult Female	51	8.4	10	2.7
Adolescent Boys	143	23.7	12	3.9
Adolescent Girls	111	18.4	10	3.5
Child Male	105	17.4	6	2.8
Child Female	94	15.6	10	3.1
Total Child Labour	199	32.9	12	4.7
Total Adolescents	254	42.1	18	6
Total Children& Adolescents	453	75	24	10.8
Total Adult Labour	151	25	30	3.6
Total Female Labour	256	42.4	20	6.1
Total Male Labour	348	57.6	32	8.3

Source: Observations of the team

Notes: Child Labour (CL) is up to 14 years and adolescents from 15-18 years. This is official age of child labour as per Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. Unless otherwise stated, the term child labour used in this study follows this definition.

Out of the total 604 hired labourers, 199 are children. Estimated number of adolescents is 254 (42.1 percent). If we define child labour as up to the age of 18 years, then the percentage increases to 75 percent. The team found child labour on all the farms except two. The survey confirms that this is a common practice. Farmers have openly accepted this before the Chairperson, NCPCR (INFOCUS 2007 and Hindustan Times 2007).

A disaggregated analysis of child labour data suggests that (a) boys (105) are more than girls (94). (b) 9.5 percent farms did not employ any boy and 28.6 percent farms did not employ any girl child. This means that girls were concentrated on certain farms. In fact there were four farms that employed 7 to 10 girls each. None of the farms employed more than 6 boys. (c) About 89 percent farms employed up to 3 boys. (d) Number of child labourers across farms ranged from zero to 12. 54.8 percent farmers employed up to 4 children and 81 percent up to 8. (e) Percentage of child labour as a component of total labour across farms ranged from zero to over 85 percent. In case of two farmers, child labour constituted 82-85 percent of total labour. In fact, in



case of 56 percent farmers, the share of child labour was 50 percent or more in total labour.

The responses by Mets (local term for agents) relating to recruitment of labour more than confirm our observations. In fact, they recorded much higher percentage of child labour at 38.14 in total recruitment (Table 5). The recruitment percentages of adolescents and total children up to 18 years come to 36.92 and 75.06 respectively.

Estimated Number of Child Labour

As noted above, in our estimation, number of child labour comes to 83,333. However, if we use the ratio based on the information given by Mets (38.14 percent), the estimated number increases to 95,350. For the year 2006-07, Venkateswarlu (2007) had estimated the number of child labour in Gujarat to be 85,340 compared to 92,500 estimated by Dakshini Rajasthan Mazdoor Union. This is because of difference in estimation methods. Whereas the Venkateswarlu's estimates are based on field survey, the DRMU estimates were based on the outmigration data from the source area. The exact estimate may be difficult but certainly the use of child labour is common and widespread and numbers could range anywhere between, say, 60,000 to 1,00,000.

Age and Gender

Out of total 99 workers, 31 were children up to 14 years and 47 in the age group of 15-18 years. Thus, 78.8 percent were children, if we take age of the child as 18 years (Table 3). 85 percent of the total workers were inter-state migrant from Rajasthan and over 80 percent were tribals from Rajasthan.

Table 3: Distribution of Children by Age and Sex

Age in years	Boys	Girls	Total
10	16.67	15.38	16.1
11	16.67	7.69	12.9
12	27.78	27.78	32.3
13	27.78	15.38	22.6
14	11.11	23.08	16.1
Total N = 31	18	13	100

Source: Worker Questionnaire



Feminisation of Labour

Another important aspect of the labour use is the feminisation of labour force. About 42 percent of the total labour force constituted of females (Table 2). Agriculture is the lowest paid occupation and feminisation of agriculture labour is an all India phenomenon. The unusual aspect here is that most of the labour force here is inter-state migrants.

Big Companies and Child Labour

All the farmers reported that they are producing cottonseed on behalf of one or the other company. In our sample, about 62 percent farmers reported to producing for multinationals. Compared to Venkateswarlu's estimates for 2006-07, which is about 6 percent in Gujarat, we find that our sample is overwhelmingly biased towards multinational. However, our study finds that farmers do not discriminate on the basis of the company so far as child labour use is concerned. In all, child labour has been observed on over 95 percent farms. Though child labour use is not uniform only one out of 26 farms working for multinational companies has reported no child labour with majority using up to five children.

The MNC Monsanto that controls the business of CSP has also admitted the problem of child labour. Its own inspections revealed the presence of children on cotton seed plots. Of course the incidence of child labour does not match. The company teams found child labour on only 10 percent of farms while the Union survey revealed child labour on more than 90 percent of farms. The difference may arise from the fact that it is very difficult to establish presence of children even though they are working on the farm.

Southern Tribal Rajasthan: Major Labour Supply Source

In our study the share of local labour is negligible. Our interactions reveal that the use of tribal migrant labour from southern Rajasthan for agriculture work dates back in time and that age old contacts of the farmers with the tribals have helped them in recruiting tribal children. The lack of discrimination between child and adult work among large number of tribal families also helped in widening and deepening of child labour recruitment from the area with the expansion of labour demand. With the passage of time many vested interests have developed in perpetuating and promoting child labour like middlemen (locally called Mets), transporters and big



contractors. The data (Table 4) clearly suggests that large number of labourers is recruited from southern Rajasthan.

Table 4: Origin Areas of Labourers in CSP

Source Area of workers	Number	Percentage	Maximum	Mean
Local Lab	4	0.7	2	Negligible
Gujarati Migrants	117	20.3	25	2.78
Rajasthan Migrants	454	79	52	11.52

Source: Farmer's Schedule

We found negligible local labour (4 out of 578) in cottonseed production. About 50 percent of the farmers reported that they made a visit to Rajasthan to recruit labour. It is a well known fact in the adjoining areas of districts of Dungarpur and Udaipur that farmers come to fix labour by giving advance to contractors. About 78.55 percent labourers were from these districts. Out of 40 farms, 32 farmers reported Rajasthani labour and 30 farmers were totally dependent on Rajasthani tribal migrant labour. Out of 28 child labour (upto age of 14) interviewed, 25 (90 percent) percent were from Rajasthan.

Relation between Farmers and the Company

The various dimensions of the relationship between farmer and the company for whom they produce cottonseed are hazy and not available in public domain. Companies are avoiding reference to child labour especially in northern part of India. Without any exception, the farmers have reported that they undertake production of cottonseed on their farms on behalf of one or the other companies. Only about 40 per cent farmers said that there is a written agreement and over 26 percent said they have a copy of the agreement. It is unlikely that companies would not have contracts with farmers, so ostensibly they were not willing to share the details of the contract fearing objection by company representatives.

Company Representative Visits to Farms

Companies regularly send their staff to guide and inspect farms where cottonseed crop is being cultivated on their behalf. Barring one, all the respondent farmers reported that company representatives have visited their



farms, though the reported frequency of visits varied with maximum of 15. The representatives of the company visit farms for the purpose of supervision or other crop related purposes. The company representatives begin their visits with the sowing of the crop and continuously visit till the end of the crop period. The visit is for multiple purpose, including (i) counting of plants and flowers/buds, (ii) recording wages of workers, (iii) finding out plant diseases and suggestion/advise about use and quantity of plant medicines, (iv) weeding out of diseased plants, (v) assessment of production and (vi) checking of and finding out/identifying mistakes. Many farmers have made a general statement that the company representatives provide all kinds of help, advice and information. Not a single farmer however reported that the purpose of the visit of the representatives of the company is to check child labour.

The Seed Price

The use of child labour, attached/bonded labour and feminisation of labour appear to be some of the well-known strategies on the part of the employers for profit maximisation as these age-sex specific groups of labourers are cheap and docile. Usually such groups are also the ones who belong to remote/backward areas and/or communities. Companies decide the price of the seed, over which farmers have very little say. A little over 50 percent said that rate is between Rs. 230 to 250 per kg and 35.7 percent reported Rs 240 per kg. The rate at which companies buy seed from farmers was the same for last three seasons at least, (Box 1) hitting adversely the profits of the farmers as the cost of production has gone up.

Box 1: Farmers Profits take a hit, Companies Make Super Profits

Farmer 'A', a postgraduate, has been in the business of producing cottonseeds for last ten years. He says cottonseed production is becoming increasingly less profitable because of increasing cost of the inputs and stagnant prices of cottonseed. For instance, three years ago (in 2004), the wage rate was Rs. 40, now (in 2007) it is Rs. 60 per day. But companies have not increased the rates of the seeds. It was Rs. 230 in 2005 and Rs. 240 in 2007. Companies sold seeds at Rs. 1000 per 450 grams in 2007. He feels companies must increase the rates (Interview with farmer on 12 September 2007).

Low seed prices are causing distress to farmers and is one determining reason for widespread child labour use. Venkateswarulu (2004a) draws a clear linkage



between procurement pricing and employment of child labour in cottonseed production and observes: "With the current procurement prices of companies, seed farmers cannot afford to pay better wages to the labourers and still make reasonable profits. Unless better wages are paid, farmers would not be in a position to attract adult labourers to work in their fields in sufficient numbers".

Company, Agent and Farmer

As we noted above, each farmer knows the parent company for which he is growing cottonseed. However, no seed company operates directly with farmers. They appoint organisers who in turn appoint agents. The job of an 'agent' is to liaison between farmers and seed organiser. He is the main link who also performs task of labour recruitment many a times. Many advance money to farmers and even sell pesticides.

Organisers usually own dedicated ginning factories for cottonseed production. Sometimes, the line between the agent as a person and organiser of the company becomes too thin to be recognised by farmers. One of the questions we asked the farmers was to name the agent. 88.1 percent farmers provided information about the agent through which they operate with companies. The agents, like any other middle men, are the most important vested interest in the business.

Mode of Recruitment

Mode of recruitment has three important aspects. One, the recruitment is by middlemen from within the community. Second, recruitment is linked with payment of advance, whatever may be the amount. Third, many workers are very young and parents take decisions for them. It is this process of recruitment that largely determines the employment conditions of the workers.

The Role of Middlemen

Middlemen, or Mets, play a crucial role in deciding and regulating terms and conditions between farmers and companies as well as farmers and workers. Over 87 percent workers reported that Mets contacted them for work. In case of farmers, about 95 percent said that they hired labour through Mets, directly or through the agent.



The role of Mets is more critical in case of inter-state tribal migrants as they are from within the tribal community and by and large come from similar backward socio-economic conditions. The socio-economic conditions of sample Mets in the present study substantiate this (Table 6). Many of them have experience of working as labourers. In fact, labour is important part of their occupation. Over 22 percent have reported labour as only source of earning. Educationally they are equally backward; almost half of them being illiterate and none of them is school pass. Apart from one exception, all live in *kaccha* houses without electricity and water. Asset wise, they hardly own anything. Many of them recruit labour from within families of their own or close kin and kith and friends and relatives. In the present study, 29 percent children reported that the Met is either an immediate or a close relative.

Table 5: Details of Labour Recruited by Middlemen by Age and Sex

Age (in years)		Number	Percent
Below 14 years	Male	69	16.87
	Female	87	21.27
	Total	156	38.14
15 to 18 years	Male	65	15.89
	Female	86	21.03
	Total	151	36.92
Total up to 18 years	Male	134	32.76
	Female	153	42.3
	Total	287	75.06
Audit	Male	70	17.11
	Female	32	7.82
	Total	102	24.93
Total N = 23		409	100

Source: Met Questionnaire

In the perception of almost all the Mets, doing labour is harmful for the children yet they recruit them and take the children for work. Perhaps this is justified by a broader social environment wherein the tribals have been a serving community or it can be because being a Met is relatively lucrative in a jobless situation.



Around 55 percent farmers reported shortage of labour and therefore farmers use money to entice Mets to recruit as many labourers as possible irrespective of age and sex and without any social concerns. It is the responsibility of the Mets to talk to the parents of the children, fix the labourers, give them the advance, collect them at one place, take them to the place of destination, help them settle there, supervise their work, settle accounts and ensure safe passage back home. Mets also take on other role like arranging for food, making purchases for the workers, taking them to hospitals and so on. Yet

Table 6: Socio-Economic Profile of Mets

Part A: Living Conditions	Number	Percent
Kachha House	22	95.7
Electricity Consumption	2	8.7
Drinking water	0	0.0
Kitchen	2	8.7
Radio	1	4.4
Watch	4	17.4
Cycle	2	8.7
Water pump	2	8.7
water pump, sewing machine	2	8.7
radio, watch, cycle	5	21.8
None of the above	7	30.4
Part B: Family Occupation		
Labour work in other state	1	4.4
Labour work in same and other state	4	17.4
Agriculture, Labour work in same and other state	16	69.6
Agriculture, Labour work in other state	2	8.7
Part C: education Level		
Illiterate	10	43.5
Below primary	6	26.1
Below secondary	6	26.1
Part D: Perception about Child Labour		
It affects development adversely	21	91.3
It affects education adversely	20	86.9

Source: Met Questionnaire



another task of the Mets is to ensure timely supply and required numbers of labourers. If some labourers leave work in between then it is the responsibility of the Mets to replenish the stock of labour.

The Mets, in most of the cases, work on commission basis. As per 71.4 percent of the farmers, the rate of commission in 2007 ranged between Rs.8 to 10 per worker per day. About 50 percent quoted Rs.8 and rest said Rs. 10. Some Mets are working on daily wage rate also. In one case the farmer reported that Met is being paid a wage of Rs. 120/- per day and not a commission.

Advance Payments

In order to ensure uninterrupted labour supply, the farmers or company agents pay advances to contractors/middlemen to recruit labour. About two-thirds of the farmers said that they gave advance money.

The amount of advance given by farmers varies a great deal, from none to about Rs 25,000. Per worker advance for Rajasthani migrants is also quite varied, with half the farmers reporting a rate of Rs. 160 per worker and rest between Rs. 160 and 769 per worker. Workers also reported a variation ranging from Rs. 20 to 2000. Though DRMU reports a range of Rs 100-200, Mets and workers seem to be becoming more assertive in demanding advance. About 25 percent workers reported that they received advance on the basis of demand raised by them.

The general understanding is that, by getting an advance, workers will work throughout the season. Most of the farmers clearly stated, "*plot pura hone tak karya*" i.e. the workers will work till the work of cross-pollination is over. If workers leave work for any reason they are not paid even if they have worked for many days. The system of advance places a restriction on the freedom of movement of workers and impacts young workers significantly.

Employment Conditions

The average duration of stay for workers is more than 60 days. This varies from a minimum of 45 days to a maximum of 90 days. However, as per farmers, most workers stay for around two months. Workers live in groups ranging from 3 to 30.



Perceptions of Child Labour

Most of the children who came for work on cottonseed farms did not come of their own choice. 67.7 percent said that their fathers took decision to send them for work. Many children reported that they miss home and many others said they don't like work. Three-fourths desired to get employment at home town and most were extremely homesick (Table 7).

Table 7: Perceptions and Reality of Child Labour

Item	Valid	Positive Responses	Percent Responses
Miss Home	31	11	35.3
Do not like Work	31	112	38.7
Want to go home	30	3	10
Want work at home	27	21	77.77
Father sent me here for work	31	21	67.7

Source: Worker Questionnaire

Table 8: Distribution of Group Members of Children

Category	Frequency	Percent
Immediate Family	1	3.2
Close Relative	8	25.8
Neighbour	1	3.2
Unknown	3	9.7
Others	18	58.1

Source: Worker Questionnaire

Working Hours

Children work in two shifts. The first shift starts early in the morning, starting between 5 to 6 a.m. Some of the workers reported that they are in fields at four, four-thirty in the morning. They work till 11 to 12 in the noon. The lunch break is for two to three hours, during which time they cook and eat lunch, take bath and wash clothes as well. By 2- 2.30 p.m. they are up again to go



to fields and they work till evening up to 6.30- 7 p.m. The working hours range between 9 to 12 hours depending upon the quantum of work. Many farmers and over 58 percent of the child workers confirmed this in their responses. The work hours are the same for all the workers. Such long working hours are well documented in other studies (Custer et al, 2005; RMoL, 2007; Bhargav and Balana, 2006, also see Table 9).

Table 9: Number of Hours Worked (percent)

Working Hours	Boys	Girls	Total
Upto 8		14	6
9-12	100	86	94

Source: Bhargav, 2006

Wages

Though wage rate ranges between Rs 44 and Rs 60, most of the farmers and children as well as workers said that fixed wage rate in 2007 is around Rs. 50 per day per worker. This amounts to only two-thirds of the legal minimum wage for a 10-hour work day and given agricultural wage rates and overtime in Gujarat⁸, it is much less than what labour should rightfully get. Moreover workers get the wages only at the end of the work sometime towards middle of the October. During intervening period, workers get some petty advance from time to time for daily essentials. This too is in violation of laws as legally the workers are entitled to wages every month. Not only this, every year there are cases of workers walking back hundreds of kilometres to reach home after the season as their wages do not get paid for various reasons. One such case is given below in Box 2.

⁸ Agriculture wage rate in Gujarat is Rs. 50 for eight hour work-day and overtime rate is one and-a-half-times. Thus the rate for ten-hour work in a day comes to Rs. 75



Box 2: Child Labour Denied Wages and Forced to Walk Back Home

Respondent 'B' is a child labour in Bt cotton seed farm in Gujarat. He is a tribal and has been going to Bt cottonseed plots of Gujarat for the last three years, sometimes with other family members and sometimes alone. He went to Gujarat first time in the year 2005. This year he went to Gujarat in mid July to work in a farm in Banaskantha district. There were five other workers from his village including his father. They were recruited by labour contractor. Some days after starting work, they were shifted to another cotton seed plot. According to him, the contractor went back to Rajasthan after shifting workers and did not come again to the plot. After some days, his father also went back. While working on the plot, the workers were paid living expenses by the plot owner.

After the work was over, the plot owner refused to pay anything to the respondent. He said that the contractor has already taken more advance than the accumulated wages and in fact he has to get his money back. In such a situation, he and his five co-workers had to start walking back on foot. They travelled some 100kms. With the help of a truck driver, the children reached home, tired and without any food.

Work and Living Conditions

Table 10 provides responses related to some of the important aspects of work and living conditions. Toilet facilities are absent despite the fact that a large number of workers are girls and women. Many of the workers (33.67 percent) report that even drinking water facility is not available on and off fields. Because of the time-bound nature of the work, the workers have to work even during rains.

On some farms, pakka rooms with electricity are available, which are usually used as store houses for storing goods like fertiliser. In many place accommodation is in a make shift arrangement. There have been reports that the children sleep in open. Workers invariably sleep on the ground which can get soggy and water logged. Cooking is invariably in the open (95.45 percent) and rain makes it difficult to cook. Moreover, on most of the farms there are no separate arrangements for boys and girls. They have to share same space.



Table 10: Working and Living Conditions of Workers

Working and Living Conditions	Child Labour	All workers
Cook in open	95.45	88.06
Girls and boys live together	52.63	70.31
Live in kachha houses	58.82	32.91
No toilet facility	100	96
No drinking water	33.67	28.09
Fell sick	10	25
Problem due to pesticides	19.4	18.55
Have to work during sickness	33.33	5
Time lag between arrival and work	70.96	62.6

Source: Worker Questionnaire

Notes: Figures represent percentage of positive responses of total valid responses in the sample

Health

Workers face many kinds of health problems including deaths for reasons of snake bites. The high dose of pesticides in cotton seed farming impacts the health of child labour. In the present study 20 percent of the child workers said that they face problems due to use of pesticides. Itching, boils, burning in eyes are the common problems reported. Other studies have also reported the pesticide related problems including loss of life (RMOl 2007, Greenpeace 2004). As per Bhargav and Balana (2006), breathing problems due to pest sprays, which are frequently done, pain in the finger tips and joints were reported by almost all children interviewed. It further says that no medical facility was available near 76 percent worksites and in 96 percent cases the labourers had to bear medical expenses during illness. In case of a death, reportedly, the farmers load the body in a vehicle and send it off back home.

Transportation of Workers

The cross pollination usually work does not start before first week of August. Labour movement starts much earlier from first week of July because of the sheer number of labour that has to be transported. The transporters and contractors start taking and placing labourers much before the work starts. In the present study, 71 percent children said that work did not start immediately after their arrival. These workers are not paid any wages during



the wait-period. The owners also encourage this to ensure the cheap labour supply and don't mind providing minimal facilities like cooked vegetables to idle workers.

The workers travel a distance of many hundred kilometres for work. Illegally operated private jeeps are the most common means of transport (93.5 percent workers). Most of the movement is at night through interior routes.

Child Abuse and Exploitation

Farmers listed about 45 responses to the kinds of mistakes workers make and nine kinds of mistakes that the children make (Table 11). Farmers are known to be abusive and intolerant with child workers who may make mistakes like improper crossing, spoiling of female buds or breakage of plants. Two child workers out of 29 reported that child labour has run away.

Table 11: Details of Mistakes Committed by Workers

Mistakes Committed	Number	Percentage
	45	100
Improper crossing	15	33.33
Spoil female flower by nail	10	22.22
Leave flowers	5	11.11
Pluck flowers/buds	5	11.11
Run away	3	6.67
Break plant parts	3	6.67
Not putting tag	2	4.44
Do not complete work in time	1	2.2
Improper emasculation	1	2.2

Source: Farmers questionnaire

Children suffer verbal and physical abuse because of these mistakes. In our study in response to various question children did say that they face problem with Mets (6.5 percent), in work (3.2 percent) as well as in living (12.9 percent). However, the overall incidence has not been high. A study by Bhargav (2006) however suggests that 36 percent of the children reported verbal abuse at the worksite by the employers or the supervisors appointed at the Bt cotton



field. In addition to this girls face sexual harassment at worksite. Custer et al (2005) and RMoL (2007) have also reported similar findings.

For cottonseed work, the workers move in groups but majority of the workers including child labour travel without families. Only one child reported that he has accompanied an immediate family member. 25 percent however reported presence of close relatives. The group may have brothers and sisters, parent or other relatives may be or may not be part of the said group (Table 8). In most of the cases of child labour, the wages are paid to parents by the Mets. The child labour is therefore heavily dependent on Mets and exploitation is common.

Impacts of Migration

As we noted above most of the child labourers are inter-state seasonal migrants. They are temporarily displaced from homes. In this section we will primarily discuss the consequences of such dislocation.

Legal impacts- Bondage

As observed in the legal discussion on child labour, these workers are effectively bonded labourers as per the relevant labour law as well as rulings of the Supreme Court. Loss of freedom is complete due to their vulnerability as inter-state migrant workers. Uprooted from the comforts of homes, the young workers are at the mercy of contractors and employers. Such bondage is not possible in case of local labourers. It is enforceable because they are migrant and tribals.

Inter-Generation Transfer of Poverty- Illiteracy

The cross-pollination work begins in the month of August and lasts till middle of October, with movement of workers starting in mid-July. All those children who migrate to Gujarat for cottonseed work do so at the expense of their formal school education. Studies suggest that the education level of migrant children is very low. Custer et al (2005) report that out of 73 drop outs, 29 wished to return to school but only 3 percent actually attend school. Study by Bhargav and Balana (2006) observed that 37 percent of child workers were illiterates and 66 percent girls never attended school. The data relating to illiterates/never to school from the present study indicates that children,



especially boys do enrol in school and attend for a few years before they drop out permanently⁹ (Table 12).

Table 12: Educational Status of Workers by Sex

Educational Status	Males	Females	Total
Illiterate/Never been to school	25.7	60.9	39.6 (29.4)
Below primary	51.4	30.4	43.2 (52.9)
Primary	22.9	8.7	17.2 (17.7)
Understand numbers only	35.0	23.0	58 (17.0)

Notes: Present study includes all workers. Numbers in brackets pertain to child labour up to the age of 14

Work experience data provides deeper understanding of the permanent drop out phenomenon. The present study finds that only 13 workers out of the total 99 started working after attaining the age of 18. This means 87 percent started living an adult life before becoming adults. More stunning is the fact that two-thirds of the total workers started working before completing age of 14 years. In fact, barring one child, all reported work experience in the range of 1-8 years. This is an important indicator to suggest that once a child drops out and starts working, the child is out of formal education forever. The working children are thus the ones who either have never gone to school or who have dropped out never to go again. There are multiple reasons - economic, social, lack of quality and meaningful education - for the drop outs.

Young migrants are condemned to low wage menial work for a life time by illiterate parents who have an ingrained attitude of servitude. Ironically, policy that legitimises child labour aids in the process of transfer and perpetuation of poverty from one generation to another. The use of child labour does not move a household out of poverty on a sustainable basis and cannot be used to justify legitimisation of child labour. For any effective strategy of elimination of poverty, elimination of child labour is an important step.

⁹Recent Rajasthan state government data claims that only 61,000 children in the State are out of school. The ground reality is vastly different.



Psycho-social and Larger Economic Implications

The psycho-socio implications of child labour are many. With no opportunity to develop and exposed to abuse, these children become alienated from concepts of equality and freedom that are so innate to tribal communities. They lose self-confidence and resign themselves to a life of condemnation and drudgery. Researchers did not find them agitated when they narrated stories of ill-treatment, for instance. They become part of a culture of silence. Besides a violation of rights, child labour drains the economy of the country by affecting social development adversely. ILO (2004) has estimated that abolition of child labour from the globe will provide net financial gain of US\$ 4132.5 billion. Asia alone will stand to gain US\$ 2736.6 billion.

Conclusion

The study finds that child labour is extensively used for by cottonseed farmers in north Gujarat. The estimated share of child labour is about one-third of the total labour force could be in the range of 60,000 to 1,00,000. A little over 40 percent workforce comprises of girls and women. Most of the farmers produce cottonseed for private sector companies including multinational companies and the workers including child labour are tribals from southern Rajasthan.

The employers, who need timely and cheap labour hire tribals by paying small amount of advance channelled through local contractors. Because of low wage rates, adult males do not prefer this work. Over the years, many vested interests have resulted in the emergence of child labour. The workers work in two shifts, working about 10 hours average per day and received only two-thirds of the legal minimum wage. The state of Gujarat is equal partner in keeping the wage rate low as the minimum wage continues to be same at Rs 50/- since April 2002. The terms of advance include work for full tenure of cross-pollination season which lasts for around 60 days. The accounts are settled only after the work is over and if workers leave in-between they lose wages. Workers stay on farm for the entire duration of 2-3 months. Poor living conditions, abuse and ill health are common. Workers cook in open, girls and boys share common place in many cases and toilets are absent, even for girls.

Unfortunately, child labour in cottonseed production appears as a legal activity as agricultural work is not prohibited u/s 3 of the Child Labour Act. Several



regulations in the Act are however flouted by the employers. The provisions of various labour Acts remain a dead letter so far as the poor migrant child workers of southern Rajasthan are concerned. Workers also fall under worst forms of child labour as defined in ILO Convention 182. By flouting labour laws employers stand to gain over 500 millions of rupees each year.

Because of the system of advance payments, migrant workers lose freedom of movement and are effectively bonded labour. Bondage conditions contrast with the inherent freedoms of tribal society, leading to several psycho-social issues and low self-confidence and thus, child labourers become part of the culture of silence. An interrupted schooling and high drop-out rates mean a lifetime loss of opportunity of further development. Child labourers become carriers of inter-generational poverty. The failure of the State in protecting the rights of the tribal, particularly the Gujarat government's apathy and denial of child labour, is prominently seen through this study.

Emerging Agenda

The results of the study indicate the need for a legal ban on child labour in cottonseed production and revision of minimum wages for agriculture in Gujarat. The recruitment of child labour for inter-state placement should be declared as trafficking and the Government of India should ratify ILO Conventions 138 and 182. Additionally, the state of Rajasthan should increase the number of days of employment under NREGA to 200 day in tribal areas of southern Rajasthan. The procurement price of the seed by the companies also remains a concern that impacts child labour and trafficking and must be taken up by the agricultural prices commission along with an appropriate recommendation that ensures adult wage for cross-pollination work.

Rajasthan state should bring in compulsory education bill that ensures formal education to children, with a special mission to implement quality education among tribals in southern Rajasthan. Residential school facilities must be available to migrating tribal households.

Primary stake holders need to be brought on the table to take up these issues. Government consultations, media advocacy and public action have a role.



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