



# A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF REINTEGRATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN IN INDIAN SOCIETY A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Sanjana and Dr. Birpal Singh Thenua**

Research Scholar (Ph.D.), Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology and Political Science

Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Dayalbagh, Agra, India

**Abstract:** Mahatma Gandhi was a great social reformer who fought against the social evils of Indian society, as well as an educational thinker of great repute. He represented his views on existing social, political, economic and cultural issues emerging in Indian society. For him, education is an instrument to establish a free and casteless society with no exploitation and racial discrimination. An individual is the most important element of the society. He viewed education as closely related with the socio-economic development of the individual and the society. In India, there are many children who are socially deprived, and are homeless. These children are indulging in many kinds of abuse, violence; have no families and in greater need of concern. These children are not aware of education and its importance in their social development. For Gandhi, education is the basic way of life for all. It is defined as the overall development of the child, man-body, mind and spirit. The real meaning of education, for Gandhi, is to promote physical, mental and spiritual development of the child. It is an individual aim of education to develop all aspects of the child which can help in reintegration of such socially deprived homeless children. This paper is an attempt to identify the role of education in reintegration of homeless children in the society by using Gandhi's principles of education. The paper is followed by descriptive research design. The secondary data sources are used to define the objectives of the study.

**Index Terms** - Education, Homeless, Street Children, and social reintegration.

## **Introduction:**

India is the country that facing many issues in present. In which poverty is one of the major issues of India. In India, nearly one out of every three persons lives below poverty line in urban areas. Poverty is the major reason for homelessness in the country. This is the first and major reason for children being on the street as homeless children. In India, there are more than 11 million street children, according to the UNICEF estimation, the largest number of any country in the world (Child Line India). These children can be found near railway stations, bus stations, markets, on footpaths, pavements, and near temples. These children face many problems on the street, exposed to violence and generally precarious conditions. These children are socially deprived and homeless. These children face many problems as being on the street and are also indulge in many unsocial activities. Thus, they are in a greater need for concern for their social development, which can help these children in reintegrating in the society. Education is the key for overall development of an individual in the society. Mahatma Gandhi was a great educational thinker. For him, education is an instrument to establish a free and casteless society with no exploitation and racial discrimination. For Gandhi, education is defined as

the overall development of the child, mind and spirit. Thus, it can help in the social development of homeless children (Joseph, J., 2013).

### **Homeless (Definition):**

Homelessness is one of the major issues in India. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), "Homeless are defined as those who do not live in a regular residence because of lack of adequate housing, safety and availability. In India, homeless are those who do not live in census houses, but rather stay on pavements, roadsides, railway stations, streets or other open spaces (Goel, G. et al. 2017)

### **Street Children (definition):**

The term "street children" was first introduced by the UNICEF in 1979. According to UNICEF, "street children are those for whom the street more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or directions from responsible adults" (Reddy, N. 1992). According to Cosgrove, "there are two dimensions of defining a street child: the degree of family involvement and the amount of deviant behavior. He defined a street child as any individual under the age of majority whose behavior is predominantly at variance with community norms and whose primary support for his or her development needs is not a family or family substitute". The current prevalent definition used widely by UNICEF defines street children as anyone under the age of 18 years who either live or work on the streets. According to this definition, street children are categorized into three: -

- **Street Living Children:**

These children live alone on the streets, public or open places, roadsides, pavements, railway stations and do not have any responsible adult.

- **Street Working Children:**

These are the children who form the largest category. These children spend majority of their time working on the street but return to their home either daily or occasionally.

- **Children of Street Families:**

These are the children who stay on the streets with their families, do not have any residence but live on the pavements/street, public places and are homeless.

### **Street Children in India:**

There are more than 150 million street children in the world who are chased from home by violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, the death of a parent, family breakdown, war, natural disasters or simply socio-economic collapse, many destitute children are forced to living out on the streets, scavenging, begging, hawking in slums, and polluted cities of the developing countries. Poor, marginalized street children are a very common sight in India. These children exist without education, care, affection and guidance. In India, there are more than 11 million of street children, according to the UNICEF estimation. The India Embassy estimated more than 300,000 street children in cities like Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai and Kanpur, Bangalore and Hyderabad and around 100,000 street children in Delhi.

### **Research Methodology:**

This research paper is followed by descriptive research design to define its objectives. The secondary data sources are used for understanding the concept of education and its important role in the reintegration of socially deprived homeless street children by using Gandhi's perspective of education.

### **Objectives:**

- To discuss the views of Mahatma Gandhi on Education.
- To discuss the problems of reintegration of homeless street children in Indian society.
- To define the role of education in reintegrating homeless children in Indian society by using Mahatma Gandhi's principles of education.

## **Mahatma Gandhi's views on Education:**

Mahatma Gandhi was a great leader, a practical philosopher, a social reformer who fought against the evils of the Indian society, as well as an educational thinker of a great repute. He has represented his views on existing social, political, economic and cultural issues emerging in Indian society. Gandhi wanted to establish a society which is free and casteless with no restrictions and discrimination. For him, education is an instrument to establish such a society. According to Gandhi, "education is the basic way of life for all". The meaning of education, for him, is to promote the physical, mental and spiritual development of an individual. It is the overall development of the child, man-body, mind and spirit. Education, to him, is a mean to achieve perfection of individuality on the one hand and an instrument of service to the nation on the other. Gandhi was the first who advocated education upon he values of Indian culture and civilization. For Gandhi, literacy is neither the beginning nor the end of the education. It is only a means through which a man or a woman can be educated. The aim of education, according to him, is a balanced and harmonious society, a social order in which there is no differentiation between the haves and have-nots and everyone is assured for a living and the right to freedom.

Gandhi evolved a scheme of education to materialize the vision of society. His scheme of education is known as "basic education". It is related to the basic needs and interest of Indian children. The goal of basic education is to enable a child to acquire desires through his or her own actions. The most important point in Gandhi's philosophy of basic education is its analysis on relating school education with the needs of the society.

## **Problems of reintegration of Street Children in India:**

The phenomenon of street children is not new. These children are found all over the world. The studies on street children show that these children face many problems on the streets such as lack of food, shelter, and do not have family contact, poor health and many of the face some kind of abuse. Street children are the victims of one or more types of abuse such as substance abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Many of the children on street are involve in substance abuse such as using inhalants, alcohol and hypo-sedatives and stimulants (Gaidhane, A. M. et al. 2008). Children, working on streets as child labour, are engaged in different occupations like begging, vending-selling of different kinds of food items including fruits and vegetables, selling cosmetics, grocery and cloth items on the streets (Chande, H. A. 2008). In a study on street children in Jaipur city found out that only 20 per cent of the street children were attending a community school in their slums (Mathur, M. 2009). According to a study conducted to find out the street children access to health and education revealed that extreme poverty is the primary reason of increasing number of street children. Lack of awareness among illiterate parents about educational opportunities was the reason why children did not continue to schools.

## **Role of Education in the reintegration of Street Children: Gandhi's principles of Education:**

According to the United Nation's Convention and the Rights of the Child, "education is the most important priorities in the development of life skills. Education plays an important role to provide individuals with the skills and attitudes which are important in order to adapt in changing situations. For Gandhi, education is the most important means in the society that can be used as a tool of socio-economic progress, material advancement, political evolution and moral development of an individual. His philosophy of education is based on the development of human personality, to maintain the discipline, to create the manual work with learning and to develop the culture. Street children in India are disadvantaged children who lack access to formal or basic education, primary services and family environment. These children are deprived of social contact and interaction. Such schools should be formed to provide them basic education which can help in their social development. So, they can connect with the society and its culture. Mahatma Gandhi has provided some principles of education. By using these principles in providing education to street children, their social reintegration can be possible.

### **• Free Compulsory Education:**

Street children under the age of 7 and 14 should be provided free, compulsory and universal primary education.

**• Craft Centered Education:**

Gandhi believed that the highest development of man and soul is possible only through handicraft. Thus, the education of a child should begin with a useful and productive craft. He wanted to exploit the craft for educative purposes. For him, education should be inspired by craft.

**• Self-supporting aspects of Education:**

According to Gandhi, “education should be self-supporting”. He believed that handicraft- besides developing the personality of the child- would make education self-supporting. Street children can enhance their skills and can be self-supporting by learning productivity.

**• Mother-tongue as the medium of Instruction:**

Education to the children should be provided in their own language. Gandhi emphasized mother-tongue both as a subject of study and a medium of instruction. It helps in understanding and expressing effectively. Street children should get education in their own language so they can feel more connected and can learn in things easily.

**• Creed of Non-violence:**

The application of the principle of non-violence in the training of the child is a unique feature of Gandhi’s philosophy of education. Basic education is based on truth and non-violence in individual and collective life. The scheme of basic education is intended to bring an age from which class and communal hatred is eliminated. By providing education with this principle to the street children can help in their mental development.

**• Emphasis on Practice rather than Theory:**

Basic education is based on activity centering on a productive and useful craft. Gandhi focused on imparting knowledge and acquisition of productive efficiency and practical skills through craft. Providing street children practical learning can enhance their skills.

**• Social Awareness and Service:**

Social awareness and service is another important aspect of Gandhi’s philosophy of education. According to him, “the end of all education should surely be service”. Social awareness can be developed through involvement of children in programs of community service. These children can be aware through participating in community programs.

Education is an instrument in overall development of the child. It can help in their psychological and social development.

**Conclusion:**

Providing help to the street children in fulfilling their aims and developing their personality is not only beneficial for them but also for society as a whole. Education can play an important role in developing the overall personality of the child. It is the only way through which a street child can learn the social values and culture of the society. Gandhi’s principle of education can be beneficial in this way. Street children can understand the society better through the education with having these principles. For Gandhi, providing children with knowledge of culture and social values can develop their personality and can help in their interaction with the society.

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