



# THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND SAVING CHILDHOOD

MANVI HINDWAN

**Abstract** : The article analyses nature, causes and intensity of myriad problems faced by the children of street .Besides, it is attempt to explore all the possibilities and ways of sensitizing civil society about the plight of these hapless lot and provides a few suggestions to get them out of the clutches of unending quagmire.

**Key Words** : Philanthropy , Rights, Social Work, Child Labour, Equality, Sociology.

Paulo Coelho's popular tweet, "Don't waste your time with explanations: people only hear what they want to hear," is indeed discerning and prudent; however, given the current circumstances, the quote doesn't appear to fit in a world where the destitute are suffering ever more under the atrocity of the coronavirus pandemic. Desperate times, such as these, call for us to be morally obligated to sensitize people about the overlooked plight of the indigent. There needs to be a strong and compelling voicing of the concern for street children, which constitute a highly vulnerable section of society. The present-day situation has thrown a conundrum at the prisoners of circumstances by leaving them in a highly vulnerable stage. The impact of Covid-19 has left these children virtually at the mercy of God. The major question that we should ponder upon is how to protect millions of impoverished homeless children who are out there in the open without any shelter to live under or any food to survive on. The problem faced by these children is not a new one but compels us all to reflect on how the coronavirus has pushed these innocent souls deeper into a quagmire for which they are not responsible. Not only the street children, but also the handicapped and malnutrition are drawing on an identical parallel which is further adding to their woes. This problem is universal in nature and not confined to any nation or boundaries, which further reinforces the magnitude of the crisis. The 21st century has been an age of transformation on account of over-extending reaches of globalization. While the world developed at its highest rate during this period, the contradiction of modernization has left behind a huge dilemma. The former Chilean president and present UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Verónica Michelle Bachelet's concern for the issue of Human Rights of children with disabilities is remarkable since it attaches a great importance to the issue of empowerment of equal rights for education to all. She reiterated her demand for Gender Equality and Empowerment in many recent deliberations at the international forum. A genuine plea for proper implementation of human rights can, undoubtedly, get people at the receiving end out of the clutches of ignorance, poverty and exploitation. Her call for the right of choice to decide for the lives of the children with disabilities is very touching because the children with various disabilities, such as, mental retardation, speech, language and vision impairment, will experience more than adverse impact on their psyches under the current state of affairs, causing added emotional disability and behavioural problems. There have been many cases of total apathy towards the rights of women and children particularly in conflict-intensive zones. There has also been consensus to create awareness about the issue of empowerment. While addressing the issue of Human Rights across the globe, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary General, recently made it clear that the 2030 Agenda would have a prominent place for the issue of Human Rights. The purpose is greatly influenced by a deeper humanitarian urge of including children with disabilities in the

mainstream and offering a practical solution which would enable them to participate in sports and recreational activities. Therefore, it has become imperative to have a sustainable development plan in place for proper implementation of these inalienable rights. Several cases of violation of human rights are very frequently reported from across the world which magnifies the gravity of the problem. The cliché of “iron fist in a velvet glove” is an appropriate ideal to be followed in enactment of human rights, particularly of street children, for the fact that the expression itself derives its relevance from the idea of “Transparency, Justice and Truth”. Even the United Nations has already conceded that the issue of human rights of disabled people, particularly children and women, in conjunction with the trafficking and refugee crisis, can be a bigger challenge for Europe and hence must be tackled sooner. More than one million refugees have moved to Europe during the last one year mainly through sea routes.

The main concern has been of the rights of the people who are physically challenged. There has been a recent case of a Pedophile ring getting exposed leading to the rescue of more than 230 children from a Dutchman exposing the worldwide network of exploitation of children. In Britain alone, about 60 children have been safeguarded from the clutches of sex offenders. Cases of such exploitation are depressingly rampant. Three years ago, two child abusers were arrested in Spain. Hence, highlighting the issue of prevention of child labour becomes crucial because it is not merely a question of exploitation but also of the emotional scars they leave that acts as a trigger for crime later in the individual's life. This childhood trauma shapes itself as juvenile crime and adult crime, thus helping in the propagation of the legacy of exploitation. Childhood conditioning is what shapes the future of our youth, and without protection these children would be doomed for the future. The solution to this menace is the empowerment of children and children rights, particularly for women, in conjunction with exercising the power of education, information, economic independence, courage, self-respect and unflinching faith and integrity in their being.

In India, the recent legislative curbs have brought about tremendous changes in the pattern of employment of children in the organised industry. There are strict procedures in place to ensure the rights of the children. Human trafficking stands banned for quite some time now. Besides this, per the laws, no child below the age of 14 can be employed in any hazardous profession. Child workers, per such cases, fall mostly in the age group of 10 to 18, and are engaged in gainful occupation which exposes them to hazardous work hampering any chance of their development. The perturbing issue is that many of these are having physical disabilities. There have been newspaper reports about the cases of children being forced into begging by local syndicates for making fast bucks. At the root of the problem, lies the question of poverty and the very low family income of child workers. In recent years, there has been a decline in the proportion of child labour in the organized sector but it has spread itself to unorganised sectors, such as road construction, weaving industry and restaurants.

The problem is mainly related to small at times isolated and a few powerful groups who misuse the poor condition of children for their greed. A number of efforts have been made by the governments across the globe through various agencies to eliminate child labour. The Human Rights Commission has been active in protecting these children. Similarly a number of NGOs are spreading awareness among the general masses, but a lot needs to be done at the implementation level. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the economies of most countries have been experiencing a declining and pessimistic trend. It is therefore important that a major portion of the national resources be utilized to save lives, health and future of every individual, in addition to allocating extra efforts towards the safety and empowerment of the homeless children. It takes only one small step to succeed. The issue of Children with disabilities can only be handled once the level of physical challenges, the mindset of the child, the level of financial and social barriers of the family are identified and addressed promptly. A sudden upsurge in cases all over the world has brought up different points of views on certain measures being adopted by governments. Numerous articles have expressed the viewpoints of experts and their dissatisfaction over the economic slowdown. The most apt quote from John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism, published way back in 1863, concedes, “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And fool or pig, is of different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question”. During the last few years or so, there has been a mammoth jump in fake messages on social sites perhaps tremendously inspired by the concept of Post-Truth, wherein desperate attempts are made to project fake look like original through many predatory and at times cloned social media sites and web opinions catering the need of vested interests. But at times wrong viewpoints get circulated quickly leading to difference of

opinions. It is really astonishing to learn that certain fake news is circulated followed by a clarification about the authenticity a few days later .If not monitored promptly can virtually create havoc in the society. The message appears to be quite tacit: one should always yearn for quality .Effective and proper regulatory mechanism may perhaps show a way in handling such crisis .A clear post-lockdown strategy including extra concern for the most vulnerable sections of the society would shape the future of human civilization. Believe and pray the pandemic does not take away the childhood and future of the innocent children.

(Author is a Risk Advisory Analyst with a Big four firm and an Engineering Graduate. Earlier she has been Convener of Training and Placement Cell and E Cell Representative of UIET, Chandigarh at IIT Mumbai, India)

