

# Understanding the Educational Frameworks for Street Children in India

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## ABSTRACT

Education plays a very significant role in transformation and development of the individual and the society. The Education system does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Unequal social, economic and power equations deeply influence children's access to education and their participation in the learning process. The street children's access to education is one of the major issues in most of the developing countries. Since independence, India is facing several challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, child labour, caste discrimination, and child marriages. The street children were used as child labour in mining, and illegal trade activities. However, India adopted several to strengthen the access and right to education of the street children. The primary objective of the paper is to describe the general situation of street children and their access to education. This paper also examines the major education policies and initiatives of Indian government at State and Centre level to educate the street children. It also gives conclusions and recommendations for increasing the enrolment and literacy rate among the street children in India.

**Keywords:** Street Children, Child Labour, Access to Education, and Right to Education

## INTRODUCTION

### Defining Street Children

Street Children' is a term which often highlights a certain set of working and living conditions rather than personal or social characteristics of the individual children themselves. Too often, children in this condition are victims of stereotypes such as 'juvenile delinquents' on the part of the public and authorities. The term 'street children' should refer to "all children who work in the streets of urban areas without reference to the time they spend there or the reasons for being there". According to Defence for Children International (DCI) defines, "a Street Child or street youth is any minor for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, waste land, etc) has become his

or her habitual abode, and who is without adequate occupation". Unlike the child labourer and juvenile delinquent, nobody can identify a "Street Child" by any precise scientific criterion. Nor it is possible to give a definite set of characteristics which can be attributed to a street child. The concept like "children without families", "high risk children", "unattached children", "Children in need of care and protection", "abandoned children" all overlap and it is very difficult to draw any rigid lines between them. The UNICEF has called them "Children in difficult circumstances".

The United Nations defined Street children on the basis of the absence of adult's supervision. It says, 'street children are those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the world, i.e. unoccupied dwelling,

wasteland, etc.) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults' (International Catholic Children's Bureau 1985). The most commonly used definition comes from the United Nations International children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (1986). It distinguishes three groups as follows:

- i. Children on the street: 'Home based' children who spend much of the day on the street but have some family support and usually return home at night.
- ii. Children of the street: 'Street based' children who spend most days and nights on the street and functionally without family support.
- iii. Abandoned children: Children in this category are also 'children of the street' but are differentiated from that category by the fact that they have cut off all ties with their biological families and are completely on their own.

Generally street children categorized as such are products of - push factors and pull factors. The push factors are poverty inadequate family support, gender discrimination, homeless and peer influence etc. The pull factors include fantasies of meeting movie stars, a realistic image of city life as portrayed by the media and the desire to explore a new life in the metropolitan city. The street children in India are two types some of these children are migrated along with their parents and stay on the pavements. These families have been on the pavements for long period of time and these children are born and brought up on street itself, while others have run away from their native place for various reasons and have landed on street of metropolitan cities.

Street children in India are most vulnerable without any identity and basic access to health, food, shelter and education. Many street children in India engage in menial occupations such as domestic work,

street vending, begging and rag-picking etc. due to the lack of identity and states recognition, many street children were unable access their fundamental rights under Article 21 (A) and 23 of the Indian Constitution. According to the report by Save the Children, Lucknow (10,771), Mughalsarai (1399), Hyderabad (28560), Patna (21926) and Kolkata (21907) witnessed the presence of more number of street children (Save the Children: 2019).

### **Education and Street Children in India**

The street children are deprived of educational and mental development. The provision of basic education and literacy to all is among the most important contributions that can be made to the development of the world's children (World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, 1998). Even if they have received some education; they lapse into illiteracy, having been school drop-outs over a long period of time. Many who attend school initially are forced to leave and consequently relapse into illiteracy. Street children's lack of access to education is considered a violation of a fundamental human right: the right to education proclaimed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1999). Indian Government implemented certain Acts and policies to educate children, for example RTE Act (Right to Education Act, 2009) is one among them. RTE finally came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. The Act provides free and compulsory education for all the children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. It is now legally enforceable duty of the central and the states to provide free and compulsory education.

Since child development and child welfare programs carry significant importance, the Government of India adopted the resolution on National policy for children in 1976. The policy enunciated on: a) children who are not able to take full advantage of formal education shall be provided other forms of education suited to

their requirements. b) Children who are socially handicapped, who have become delinquent or have been forced to take to begging or are otherwise in distress, shall be provided facilities for education, training and rehabilitation and will be helped to become useful citizens. c) Maintenance, education and training of orphan and destitute children. d) Care, education, training and rehabilitation of handicapped children etc. The educational programs should include helping children to complete school, school drop outs should be able to return to school. Street children should be motivated to go to school, integrating the children into regular schools, in healthy atmosphere for everyday life, self-respect and confidence in children. Provisions of educational material to needy children; organize formal and informal classes.

A new chapter in education policy began with India becoming independent. A number of problems and challenges had come up / rise in the country because of the sheer diverse character of Indian society. The Government established education commissions in order to address these challenges and recommend comprehensive policies for educational problems and also for the improvement of the education system in India. After independence India adopted the Constitution in 1950, Education became the responsibility of both state and central governments. The Constitution makers recognized that the stability and progress of the country which adopts a democratic course depends to a large extent on a well-educated electorate. In independent India education policies have been closely influenced by the Education Commissions that were set up from time-to-time. The highlights of the recommendations of these important commissions have been presented below section.

### **Major Committee Recommendations on Education**

#### **University Education Commission (1948)**

University Education Commission (1948-49) was the first Commission on

education after Independence. Its major emphasis was on higher education but it also touched upon the issues related to school education. The Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a great visionary of modern times. The Commission stated that the function of school education is to provide good general education, it further spelt out the elements of good education "which will not only prepare pupil for university work, but at the same time prepare him/her for practical work to earn his living if he /she did not proceed to a university. The Commission suggested that the functions of a school and a university should be different. The function of a school should be to provide suitable education to those who join higher education and also to those who do not have the intention of proceeding further. Education of both sets could be combined together, whereas some schools could train students for work in agriculture industry and commerce. The University Education Commission laid great stress on the introduction of general education throughout school. The Commission clearly wanted that school should diversify its outcomes in such a way that many could effectively participate in real life by taking up jobs or self-employment and only very few would continue study beyond school.

#### **Secondary Education Commission (1952)**

The Secondary Education Commission was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar in 1952. A separate education commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliyar in 1952 to address the issues related to school education. The Commission Report (1952) had envisaged schools to play a crucial role in developing democratic citizenship, emphasizing that "democracy is based on faith and in the dignity and worth of every single "individual", where the innate worth fullness cannot be eclipsed either by economic or racial or social consideration

(SEC, 1952, p.20).” Education Commissions and Policies since Independence Philosophy of the Indian Constitution 48 It stated “citizenship in a democracy involves many intellectual social and moral qualities a democratic citizen should have the understanding and the intellectual integrity to sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda and to reject the dangerous appeal of fanaticism and prejudice (SEC, 1952, p. 19). It also called for education opportunities that would translate into practice a passion for social justice.”The Secondary Education Commission submitted its report to the Government in 1953. The report gave a broader view about the educational problems of Indians and proposed to increase efficiency of production. The report of the Commission suggested diversification of high school courses and the establishment of multipurpose high schools. Another proposal was that of introducing a uniform pattern throughout India. The recommendations of Mudaliar Commission occupy a very significant place in the development of secondary education in independent India. Most of the educationists have praised its recommendations for providing very practical and useful suggestions. However, there are a few who have pointed out the limitations of this report. They opined that the Commission’s recommendations lacked freshness, were a replication of old policies and gave imperfect and distorted suggestions that could not really be implemented. The Commission’s report also did not provide framework for promotion of women’s education. Though the major recommendations of the Commission were related to secondary education, but it clearly indicated the importance of elementary education.

#### **Indian Education Commission (1964-66)**

Drawing on Nehru’s Mission and articulating most of his key themes, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari to formulate a coherent education policy for

India. The Commission was most comprehensive in nature; it reviewed almost all aspects of the education system without limiting itself to any one particular aspect, unlike the Commissions that came before and after it. Two of the unique features of the Report are: i) its comprehensive approach to educational reconstruction; and ii) its attempt to project a blueprint of a national system of education for India. According to the Commission, education was intended to increase productivity, develop social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernise the country and develop social, moral and spiritual values. The crucial role of education in national development appears in all its vividness throughout in the report, appropriately titled “Education and National Development”. Further, the Commission reviewed the development of education in India in the modern period and particularly since Independence and came to the conclusion that Indian education needs a drastic reconstruction, almost a revolution, to realise the constitutional goals and to meet the various problems facing the country in different sectors. This comprehensive reconstruction, said the Commission, has three main aspects; a) Internal transformation b) Qualitative improvement and c) Expansion of educational facilities.

#### **Educational Policies in India since Independence**

Since the nation's independence in 1947, the Indian government sponsored a variety of programmes to address the problems of illiteracy in both rural and urban India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Minister of Education, envisaged strong central government control over education throughout the country, with a uniform educational system. The Union government established the University Education Commission (1948–1949) and the Secondary Education Commission (1952–1953) to develop proposals to modernise India's education system. The Resolution on Scientific Policy was adopted

by the government of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. The Nehru government sponsored the development of high-quality scientific education institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology. In 1961, the Union government formed the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) as an autonomous organization that would advise both the Union and state governments on formulating and implementing education policies. The Union Education Minister set up the Education Commission in 1966 under the leadership of Dr. D.S Kothari. The commission was given the responsibility of advising on the development of all aspects of education so that a national policy could emerge based on the report and recommendations of the education Commission (1964-1966) the government of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced the first National Policy on Education in 1968, which called for a "radical restructuring" and equalise educational opportunities in order to achieve national integration and greater cultural and economic development. The policy called for fulfilling compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, as stipulated by the Constitution of India.

#### **National Policy on Education (1968)**

National Policy on Education (1968) Arising out of the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, the National Policy of 1968 marked a significant step in the history of Independent India. This Policy emerged with various recommendations including a common school system where access to education would be given to children from all strata of society, vocational education in middle and secondary school level and improving education quality by utilization of existing facilities and resources. The commission also gave expenditure directives on education to the government where it recommended a budget expenditure of 6% of the GDP on education as a part of governmental commitment towards Universal Elementary Education, UEE (Ghosh, 2007: 457).The policy suggested

the provision of compulsory education to children in the 6-14 years age group as proposed in the Indian Constitution. Further, it also recommended that regional languages must be encouraged for being used in secondary schools. The Commission was of the opinion that English had to be the medium of instruction in schools and it considered Hindi as the national language. The National Policy on Education also promoted the development of Sanskrit, which was the symbol of India's cultural heritage. This policy recommended to the Government of India that 6 percent of the national income be spent on education.

The National Policy on Education 1968 was widely criticised for its promotion of the 'three language formula'. The general feeling was that the third language was thrust upon the students even though they were not interested. Further, it was also pointed out that the policy was very vague and lacking in clarity by not indicating the ways by which the guidelines contained in the policy could be implemented. However, the policy received considerable attention as it was the first of its kind to give a proper direction to the educational system in independent India. The 'three language formula' was seen as a step towards national integration and was viewed as a facility provided for the improvement of education among the minorities (Sharma 2004). In spite of the criticism, this policy was still hailed as the first systematic effort to give shape to Indian education.

#### **National Policy on Education (1986)**

After 20 years, another National Policy of Education was drafted in 1986 followed by a Programme of Action in 1992. NPE 1986 drew on a national system of education with equal access to all children irrespective of caste, class, sex etc. The policy emphasized upon three aspects in relation to elementary education namely, universal access and enrolment, universal retention and substantial improvement in the quality of education (MHRD, 1986). In addition, the NPE 1986 highlighted the Kothari Commission recommendation of the

6% GDP expenditure on education which had not been achieved yet and said that the NPE implementation should be reviewed every five years. But even after these two NPE, several studies<sup>14</sup> have shown that the basic skills of students (such as simple text reading and basic arithmetic calculations) and their learning levels in government schools, leaves a lot to be desired. Even the recommendations on Kothari Commission have not been fulfilled by now, since the government has been able to allocate only about 3.7% of the GDP per year<sup>15</sup> for education till now. An additional 1.32% of GDP might be required to fulfill the present commitments of the government towards elementary education (Jha, 2007). Currently the individual state governments are assigning more financial resources towards education than the central government. But the goal of spending 6% of the GDP on education can only be achieved through larger allocation by the central government (Chowdhury and Bose, 2004).

Another concern addressed by the NPE of 1986 was the provision of decent infrastructure for school education as part of providing educational opportunities to all students. It was to be the responsibility of the state to provide infrastructure for education, accessible to all sections of the society. This included provisions for free text-books, stationary and mid-day meals to students in government schools, supplying schools with blackboards and other teaching equipment, orientation of teachers etc. and various other provisions for higher education. Inability to provide basic learning conditions till now, has come in the way of achieving desired retention rates, transition rates and completion rates of students in elementary education. The policy focused more on providing primary education to students. Further it also gave importance for the establishment of open universities by setting up the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) at Delhi. The policy had recommended that education be given to rural people in consonance with the Gandhian philosophy.

It also set the stage for the emergence of information technology in education, besides opening up the technical education sector in a rather big way to private enterprise.

### **National Policy on Education (1992)**

National Policy on Education (1992)  
The Government of India had set up a commission under the chairmanship of Acharaya Ramamurti in 1990 to reassess the impact of the provisions National Policy on Education and also to give recommendations. Later, under the leadership of N. Janadhana Reddy the Central Advisory Board of Education was set up. This Board considered some modifications in NPE. The report of the committee had been submitted on 1992 and it came to be known as the National Programme of Action of 1992. The National Policy on Education – 1992 stressed on promotion of development and strengthening national integration. The National Policy on Education (1992) emphasized the need for greater transformation of the Indian educational system, with a focus on quality enhancement. This policy also stressed on developing moral values among students and bringing education closer to life (Ranganathan 2007).

### **Major Initiatives and Programmes for Universalization of Elementary Education**

To carry forward the Constitutional commitment of strengthening the social fabric of democracy by providing equal educational opportunities to all, efforts to reach out were intensified through several schemes and programmes. This section will explain two centrally sponsored schemes implemented in partnership with State Governments on universalising elementary education.

#### **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

SSA scheme to universalise elementary education through district based, decentralized specific planning and implementation strategy by community ownership of the school system. It is a

programme for achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education in a time-bound manner, as mandated by 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education to all the children of 6-14 age groups as a fundamental right. The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grant. These provisions need to be aligned with the legally mandated norms and standards and free entitlements mandated by the RTE Act. The Report to the People on Education 2009-10 published by MHRD, Government of India has reflected on the impact of SSA on Universalisation of Elementary Education. The Report says that observations from the field indicates that with enormous increase in number of institutions and enrollment, the issue of universal access to primary education has, more or less, been successfully addressed. The universal enrolment to elementary education is being addressed through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Committee on Implementation of RTE Act and the Revamp of SSA Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is implemented as India's flagship programme for Universalising Elementary Education. The provisions in the RTE Act are applicable to the SSA goals on access and Universalisation of Elementary Education. In the present phase of SSA, it is mandatory to ensure that the approach and strategies for Universalising Elementary Education are in conformity with the rights perspective mandated under the RTE Act.

#### **National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005)**

NCERT prepared National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2005. NCF 2005 seeks to provide a broad framework within which teachers and schools can choose and plan experiences that they think children should have. The major recommendations of NCF-2005 in

addressing elementary education may be summarised as: Reducing the curriculum load based on insights provided in 'Learning Without Burden', Ensuring quality education for all children, Creating an inclusive environment in the classroom for all students, Learner engagement for construction of knowledge and fostering of creativity and active learning through the experiential mode, Local knowledge and children's experiences are essential components of text books and pedagogic practices, The school years are a period of rapid development, with changes and shifts in children's capabilities, attitudes and interests that have implications for choosing and organising the content and process of knowledge, Language skills - speech and listening, reading and writing - cut across school subjects and disciplines. Their foundational role in children's construction of knowledge right from elementary classes through senior secondary classes needs to be recognised. A renewed effort should be made to implement the three-language formula, emphasising the recognition of children's home language(s) or mother tongue(s) as the best medium of instruction. These include tribal languages. English needs to find its place along with other Indian languages. The teaching of Mathematics should enhance children's ability to think and reason, to visualise and handle abstractions, to formulate and solve problems. Science teaching should engage the learners in acquiring methods and processes that will nurture their curiosity and creativity, particularly in relation to the environment. Awareness of environmental concerns must permeate the entire school curriculum. Social Science content needs to focus on conceptual understanding rather than lining up facts to be memorised for examination, and should equip children with the ability to think independently and reflect critically on social issues. 'Peace-oriented' values should be promoted in all subjects throughout the school years with the help of relevant activities. Health and Physical education are necessary for the overall

development of learners. Environmental education may be best pursued by infusing the issues and concerns of the environment into the teaching of different disciplines at all levels while ensuring that adequate time is earmarked for pertinent activities. A school culture that nurtures children's identities as 'learners' enhances the potential and interests of each child. Specific activities ensuring participation of all children — abled and disabled — are essential conditions for learning by all. Reducing stress and enhancing success in examinations necessitate a shift away from content-based testing to problem solving skills and understanding.

### **Right to Education Act (2009)**

The most recent effort by the Indian government is the Right to Education Act (86th Amendment 2002, bill passed in August 2009) which makes elementary education a fundamental right. The Act came into existence on 1st April, 2010 and since then India became one of the 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child. Further, this Act specifies that all private schools have to reserve 25% of seats to children of socially disadvantaged groups. It also laid down that no child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. For school dropouts there is a special training, given under this Act. Since education is a concurrent issue in the Indian Constitution, the responsibilities of implementation of this Act have been distributed among centre, state and local governmental bodies. The central government bear 70 percent of the expense of the implementation of this Act and 30 percent is provided by state government. However, the RTE encountered several hurdles in the implementation level. Only a few are mentioned below. First, this scheme covers children in classes 1 to 8 only. Second, the Act is gender neutral and does not provide any special provisions for encouraging education of girls. Third, it is also silent on the right to education for children with

disability. Fourth, the Act does not talk of the post elementary stage. After completing elementary education in elite schools children from vulnerable groups will not be able to pursue their education in such schools. Then they might have to slip back to schools of questionable standards which will have negative psychological impact on them. Finally, it is evidently apparent that there are many incidents of corruption by school managements while implementing the Act. The Act does not provide any special provision for educating street children and working children.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the nearly seven decades after the country gained independence, a number of education commissions have been set up by the Government of India from time to time. The reports of the commissions have no doubt had an effect on education policy. But there have been gaps between recommendations and implementation due to social and political pressures, and also administrative lapses, lack of funds and sometimes lack of awareness etc. The society has always organized itself around such issues which have been neglected by the state, in order to raise awareness about them or to try and fill in these gaps. Education is the most cost effective possible way for India to mainstreaming street children in the society and to ensure their rights according to the country's law and policies since the child right programming could be operated under education policy. School enrolment could be useful registration process for government to count child population and simultaneously could be helpful to operate development policies throughout school. But most of the educational policies are not really targeting hundred percent children including street children education. The modern day NGOs are mostly development oriented voluntary organizations. In this context, the Indian state is viewing public-private partnerships in the field of education to improve the delivery mechanisms and also quality of



education (Gol, 2007:9). One of the most important roles that the society has played in contemporary India has been to act as a watchdog to the state and in doing so, push the state to be more accountable and responsive to the needs and demands of the citizens thereby creating a framework of participative and mobilisation politics (AGDI, 2008).

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