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## GLIMPES OF CHILDREN IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The basic purpose of this paper is to present a brief overview about children and also to provoke a rethinking about existing ideas about children and childhood. It also interrogates dominant notions which are underpinned by naturalistic and biologically determined conceptual thoughts and ideas. There is no universal picture of children or childhood. Therefore, it is necessary to demystify the glory of anyone caste, class, region, gender or time. The need of the hour is to unfold the manner in which children and childhood has been understood so a, Time has come to liberate children from begging or grovel or as a receiver of noblesse obligation or charity so that they can demand what is due to them. **Rights are entitlements** they are trumps and also valuable commodities. These are also weapons to undermine power. This write- up briefly presents the **glimpses of status of children in India** prior to introducing of five Year plans as also excluding measures introduced after independence for full development as human beings exercise and enjoyment of **Human Rights** by all the people is necessary. Human Rights and fundamental freedom help children to develop their intrinsic qualities, intelligence, talents and conscience to meet their material and spiritual needs. It is needless to mention that without the recognitions of the right to education realization of the right to development of every child and nation is not possible. Further, children and childhood across the world, have broadly been construed in terms of a “golden age” that is synonymous with innocence, freedom, joy, play and the like. It is the time when, spared the rigours of adult life, one hardly shoulders any kind of responsibility or “obligations”. However, it is also true that children are vulnerable, especially when very young, they need to be cared for and protected from the “harshness of the world outside” and around.

This being so, the adult- child relation, parents in particular, is said to provide “care and protection” serving thereby the “best interest of the child” and meeting their day to day “needs of survival and development.

The adult is presumed to be the guardian and in that respect expected to take the responsibility of child’s is welfare and development, whether or not the premise underlying this is correct or not, the “childhood reality” or the whole is

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questionable, demanding critical evaluation. Accordingly, idealistic nations and representations associated with children and childhoods have been challenged especially in relation to the poverty, disease, exploitation and abuse across the globe. It is indeed a period in a person's life during which she/he is neither expected nor allowed to fully participate in various domains of social life. In this period children are "wholly subservient and dependent. Therefore, there is nothing short of a world of isolation, sadness, exploitation oppression, cruelty and abuse. These facts of child- adults relation reveal fundamentally different ways of seeing and understanding the very essence of childhood and children. In this sense childhood is not static objectives and universal fact of human nature, but a social construction which is both culturally and historically determined. History of culture had great impact on children, by and large, who had been taken for granted by their parents and patriarchal society at a large. The resultant effect of all this was that they were treated as objects of intervention rather than as legal subjects in their own rights. Many labeled them as a "problem population" whereas others reduced them to being seen as property and thus treated them as "non-entities"

LLOYDO de Mause, a historian in the "History of Childhood" painted a very negative image of childhood in the past. In fact he went to the extent of saying that history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have recently begun to awaken. He also contended that the lower the level of childhood care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, terrorized and sexually abused" (MAUSE, 1975:1-2). According to him childhood was not discovered. It was a human universal that gradually evolved itself from one stage to another. These stages were:

- i) INFANTICIDAL (ANTIQUITY TO 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.);
- ii) Abandonment (4<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries);
- iii) AMBI-VALENT (14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century);
- iv) INTRUSIVE (18<sup>th</sup> Century);
- v) SOCIALISATION (19<sup>th</sup> Mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century) and
- vi) Helping (MID 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards)

However, abandonment of children is considered in Fairy tales and in Legends, as if it were all FANTASY. Even Western historians writing about children and their childhood were of the view that till middle ages, abandonment, harsh

punishment and the use of fear and other life inhibiting measures were all parts of the era's social history, economics and pattern of families. Hence this era of the middle ages was rightly referred to as the "Dark Ages".

At this Juncture, it would be worthwhile which to pause and look at the overall status of children in India with reference to overall treatment meted out to them by their parents and the society at large. Historically, major care takers of the child is mother, the immediate family, or at best, the joint family and secondly JATI (castes) relationship. Sudhir Kakar in his book *Child Indian Childhood and Society* has dwelled at length on Mother and Childhood relationship and how this profoundly influences the "quality" and dynamics of social relations throughout one's life (KAKAR, 1982:52-112). Consistent with the belief that life begins with conception rather than at birth, five stages of childhood were identified in Indian tradition. These were:

- i) GARBHA, or the foetal period
- ii) KSHEERDA (0-6 months), when the infant lives entirely on milk
- iii) KSHEERANANDA (six months to two years the period of early childhood in which weaning takes place).
- iv) BALA (2-5 years: and
- v) KUMARA (5-16 years)

Each of these childhood diversions were reflecting major rites and rituals which marked its transition from one period to another.

Many of these childhood SAMSAKARAS – like NAMAKARANA (naming ceremony, MUNDAN (tonsure ceremony) and UPAMAYANA (initiation into religion and wider community) are being performed even to any with fanfare by the people of India. These SAMSAKARAS also reflected about critical period both in biological and also social development. Thus paving the way for gradual ideal integration of the child into society. It was an irony going of the fate that girls and children belonging to the lower castes could not get a place in these SAMSAKARAS. For example the SOHARAS – the joyous songs of celebration sung at the birth of a child in the HINDI – Speaking belt are almost never sung for new born daughter. In fact many of SOHARAS express the relief of mothers over the fact that she had been blessed with a son and not a daughter (KAKAR, 1981: 207) The preference for a son when a child is born, thus, seems to be as old as the Indian society itself.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata also EULOGISE the importance of childhood. PARENTAL desire is VERY INTENSE IN THESE EPICS for make children and their upbringing by affectionate indulgence. This "child candidness: was restricted to male choices only, Indian tradition all along has been indifferent to girl child if not overtly hostile to the developmental fate of girls. Indian tradition has also contributed to an ideology which has lowered the role played by environment and nature in the development of a child. Major emphasis was in relation to the deterministic conception of mystical hereditary. These epics have also displayed as to how young boys were placed under GURUs for guidance and tutorship. They were thought moral precepts of shastras, as an individual. However, this was restricted to the boys of the ruling upper castes. In the laws of MANU social protection was also provided to the children who were the near bottom of a social order. The protective wall worked as a deterrent in children's chastisement. Children got punishment in the form of beating with a bamboo stick or a rope split at the end. Such stick (Split bamboo) are now used in circus clown's mock fights which makes a loud noise but does not inflict much pain. This punishment has been restricted only on the back and never on the chest or head. However, brutal forms of child abuse and maltreatment started under laws with legal texts of other ancient societies. For example, in Ancient Roman Societies. It was as late 374 A. D. That declared a capital punishment. The laws enunciated by Manu has been severely condemned and criticized as a repository of inequality. However, MANU also opined that kindness be shown to daughters as she is "physically more. More tender Than men and her emotions are more delicate.

A perusal of historical and sociological documentation of early Indian civilization reveal towards pervasive biases of that time in the upbringing of children due to the factors like caste, kinship, age, gender etc. till 415 (C.A.D.). The moral edict profounder was obedience towards parents and respect for elders. Loyalty and obedience towards elders was not only moral but also socially approved and valued behavior. In the Indian literary tradition and classical Sanskrit literatures child curiously seems to have appeared as a wish. In the context of a couple's wish or father is longing for offspring or as the fulfillment of the wish-in descriptions of parental happiness when a child was born. In lyrical accounts of parental love, usually of a father for his son. On the whole, children has not finessed as individuals in their own rights with activities reactions and feelings- separate from those of their all powerful parents.

The poets of Sanskrit literature as also Hindi associated with Bhakti Movement also reflect rich accounts of children and childhood. Hindi songs of

Surdas and that of Tulsida on KRISHNA RAMA'S childhood are Cited to substantiate the text. The verses of these songs are rich source of Hindu ideals of childhood. Bhakti poetry also laid great emphasis on the loving relationship between mother and child. Child was also a central point of focus for admiring of adults. Mother was in the foreground and the background consisted of the adults in the community. MILLING AROUND HIM GOPIS OF GOKUL and the citizens Ayodhya Child's primary needs were to be central to his world. Child was a source to of glow in the eyes of adults rather than be looked at with indifference. In traditional Indian social system early childhood was considered to be the "golden age" in individuals life history rather than western system. Sharing adult food was regard the "best age". It is worth mentioning that the most serious drawback of Indian system was inferior states to girl child. For girls, it was mandatory to acquire skills of household work, cooking, child care etc. She was also groomed to follow patriarchal order and values enforced by her mother, grand-mother, aunts, sister and sister in law, who were her allies against discriminations and inequities of the existing patriarchal order. In fact late childhood was the beginning of an Indian girl's deliberate training in how to be a good women? There was a conscious effort to inculcate "Culturally designed female role."

M.N. SRINIVAS in his book entitled, MARRIAGE and family has also mentioned that among many duties of a mother, there was a pressing role to train her daughter "to be an absolute docile daughters-in-law .... (Srinivas, 1942:195). Girls also got married at an early age leading to an end of their childhood. Possibly low status accorded to the girl child was one of the reasons for prevailing female foeticide in orient India which is existing even today.

With the advent of the ARAB, TURKS AND the MUGHALS. between the periods of eleventh to seventeenth centuries the process of alround degeneration and impoverishment was there throughout the country. These foreign invaders looted the wealth as also destroyed the wealth and socio-cultural ethos of the India. During this period there was all-round economic deterioration experienced by people. The children were no exception to it.

These invaders imposed their own culture, values, customs leaving a profound impact in every walk of life. Families particularly those living in rural areas, could not afford wholesome food and amenities for their children. The emphasis on elementary education had withered away which was widespread earlier.

Among Hindus, education got restricted to higher castes like Brahmins, Rajput and Vaishyas,. Aristocratic and rich Moushlim arranged education at home through

the Maulvis. Others had to go to MAKTABS located in mosques. Girls were almost totally neglected for education. Girls were seldom given education as also enjoyed inferior status in relation to boys. Even the rulers did not take remedial measures to educate girls. During this period legal provisions were silent on child's rights. Normative pronouncement was respect for parents and recognition of child rights was missing. The earliest trace of children's rights is perhaps in the Massachusetts body of liberties of 1649 where parents were told not to choose their children's mates and not to use unnatural society against their children.

Children were given free liberty to complain to authorities for redress of their grievances. However, there was provision of death punishment for children above 16 year who disobeyed their parents. These document reveals that even some 365 years ago protection of children went hand in hand with adding the power of the State to parental authority (FREEMAN, 1997: 47-48). During the eighteenth century it revolutions identified with children's rights. Documents of this century emanating from the great the American and the French have nothing specifically to say about children (Freeman, 1997:48)

The nineteenth century emerged as a child saving movement, the growth of the orphanages, development of child protection, legislations, schooling, construction of separate institutions including the juvenile courts for children in conflict with law in different parts of western world. This could happen due to Industrial revolution which had led to severe exploitation of many working children. These children had been employed in textiles, minings, agriculture, docks and navigation as also domestic service including agriculture. These two processes of Industrialization and urbanization had contributed to displacement of communities, unemployment and socio-political unrest against causing abandonment and marginalization of many children. This situation had resulted into "petty offending" as source of their survival because they had been left to their fate to fend for themselves.

During this time British had ruled India as its colony. The plight of children was the worst particularly those hailing from the lower strata of society. This period of uncertainty had affects its children also. Moral panic and political reaction during that period dovetailed into the already existing reform and philanthropic efforts towards chosen which had mobilized charity crusades and inspired voluntary efforts. However, these efforts had to go to the back seat in view of expanding incipient ways. Inspiration of that time prevailing in its worst forms. This development spelled doom for children who were considered bricks of British empire building. Children continued to be exploited in different ways.

The freedom struggle spread over 100 years (mid 14<sup>th</sup> century to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century) had targeted not only to achieve political freedom but also at “Reinvigorating” the oppressed and suppressed society of India. Under the decades of slavery country had fast its initiative, values and vitality. The consistent efforts of leaders like Rajaram Mohan Ray, Mahtma Gandhi and other social reformers awakened the people and exhorted them to rise up to break the shackles of their backwardness-literacy or socio-cultural practices like child marriage or neglect in upbringing of children and the like. Freedom movement started all sorts of activities termed as social action to overcome prevailing weaknesses of the society as also to build self-reliance in the people. In this process care of child came to be viewed upon as a vital element in the resurrection of nation Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders in-person gave much of their time to inculcate Social Concern for the children who were to be citizens of tomorrow.

Advancing literacy in western societies also enabled to a large extent to change the attitudes towards children. The result was that a large number of dedicated visionaries, charitable and voluntary organizations moved by harrowing stories of children made efforts tirelessly to improve the overall status of children in the society accompanied by with that of women. All of them invested their time, knowledge and resources towards better health, education and growth of the weaker children. During this period voluntary organizations like the Children’s Aid Society and Balkanjibari came into being in 1920 in the service of children of families compressing the poor, uneducated and helpless. Freedom struggle may be considered as the “DAWN” of Voluntary Action when people acquired information and communication skills as also learnt to pool their common resources to remove social ills instead of trusting an alien regime which had no policy or programs to meet the needs of children. This was also a spirit of independence as the group social action level (LUTHRA 1979: 90-91) doering this period laws were enacted for shaping and structuring of a new childhood. Some of the laws wise as under:

- o Apprenticeship Act
- o Reformatory Schools Act
- o Factories Act

The First World War posed a variety of challenges to Britain and other European Countries and North America. As a result of ravages of war on the civilians in the affected counties and growing concern in most of the countries of

Europe and North America for the Protection of children. The League of Nations established a committee on "Child Welfare" in 1919. (Lundy 1997:27)

In addition to above private organizations also realized the need to provide suitable social standards for the protection of children. Among these Save the Children and International Union had played a pioneering role inspired by the work of an English women who had founded Save the Children in response to her own experience with child victims of war in to be Alkans. The Save the Children worked out a charter on five points declaration as basic conditions, a society need to follow to provide adequate protection and care of its children. This Union also persuaded. The League of Nations to adopt the 'some declaration. The rights of child came to be known as the "Declaration of Geveva" Mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give. "The five simple principles of this declaration form the basis of this declaration. These are in terms of protection of the weak and vulnerable and promotion of the child's development. This declaration also makes it amply clear that care and protection of children was no more exclusive responsibility of families or communities or even individual countries – the world as a whole has to evince keen interest for the welfare of all children. The basic features of these declarations are as under.

- Children must be given the means needed for their normal development, both materially and spiritually.
- Hungry child need to be fed; sick children should get help, erring children should be reclaimed; and the orphan and the homeless children should be sheltered and succored. Child should be first to receive relief in the times of distress.
- Child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
- Child must be brought up in the consciousness that its best qualities are to be used in the service of its fellow men.
- The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) is set up as a specialized agency to provide assistance to children who suffered from deprivation caused by political and economic conditions as well as effects of wars and natural or manmade disaster.

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