

From the Bhavan's President  
**Under-privileged  
Children**

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"The child shows the man", Milton has said, "as morning shows the day". It, therefore, becomes the duty of every society to accord not just high but the highest possible priority to the well-being of its children.

A child is a precious possession. It has been very correctly said that a nation's wholesomeness can be judged by the wholesomeness of its children. "The child shows the man", Milton has said, "as morning shows the day". It, therefore, becomes the duty of every society to accord not just high but the highest possible priority to the well-being of its children. One of the most moving sights, and one that is difficult to reconcile to, is the sight of a child orphan.

Societies have been deeply touched by their plight and since time immemorial have tried to help. In fact, the earliest known form of service to children in need anywhere in the world is said to have begun with orphanages. Many of the early orphanages in human society evolved as adjuncts of religious institutions. The Holy Quran itself has specifically mentioned the need of child orphans and I quote: "For justice to orphans there is not a good deed, which ye do, but

God Is well, acquainted therewith. And do good-to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near." The earliest known orphanage is said to have been run in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by an Iranian mosque at the Holy Shrine at Meshad. Many Catholic countries had orphanages attached to their monasteries.

In modern times, the world has learnt much from socialist countries where the State has officially recognised the fact that care of the child is the responsibility of the State. It was Maria Montessori who first discovered the fact that the child's most formative years of life are before the age of 6 and that in this period when the brain is most active and capable of absorbing the greatest amount of knowledge, it must be exposed to the right influences. Our own tradition in India, with its built-in reverence for age has tended to take the child for granted or, at best as a passive recipient of

instruction from the older generation. It goes to the credit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that he made the welfare of the child in India a specific object of State Policy. Under his direction, the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Social Welfare accepted the premise that "since India has the ultimate goal of a socialist society, the ultimate aim of economic development is the welfare of the family. And in the family, the most precious asset is the child. Therefore, in the strategy of planned national development, India has focussed its foremost interest in the young child." In Jawaharlal Nehru's own words, "ultimately, of course, it is the human being that counts, and if the human being counts, well, he counts much more as a child than as a grown-up." Among the suffering children doubtless are those who have no parents. Such children need protection and care. And it is one of the most natural responses of sensitive

individuals and institutions that they should come forward to substitute to the extent possible the care which parents give.

An uncared for child is a potential danger to society. Juvenile delinquency and drug addiction come naturally to the destitute child and finally he turns into a criminal. Well-run orphanages can save such a calamity and can make all the difference between fortune and misfortune. The philosopher John Dewey has said, "children are people. They grow into tomorrow only as they live today." An orphanage gives to a child the sense of belonging which fate has denied that child. 'Belonging' has been recognised as one of the most essential ingredients of a child, often more important than the pleasure of play or of simple happiness. The security of family is irreplaceable. But if some effort is made then we will be returning to the child orphan what has been robbed from him. It is a matter of

pride that we had an angel like Mother Teresa, with us. She had an unusual approach to the problem of destitution and poverty. The most remarkable thing about her activity had been that in her service to the destitute and the lost including orphans, there was not the slightest sense of condescension or of a favour being done by her. Mother Teresa's Sishu Bhavans, where children were cared for pending their adoption had been pace-setting. What we do for the under-privileged child is, of course, a help to that child. But we are also in the process helping ourselves and helping society.

It should be the attempt of institutions and orphanages engaged in looking after under-privileged children not just to fill a vacuum in their lives but to go beyond and help the children overcome disparity to such an extent as to merge in society as the equals to children more fortunately placed. It will not do for

orphanages merely to produce mediocre individuals who are just equipped for low key occupations. Such institutions should aim at producing outstanding children who will not only bring credit to the institutions but to society and the State from which they come.

Let me conclude this letter with a quotation from a remarkable piece of verse written by Dorothy Law Holtz:

*If a child lives with criticism,  
he learns to condemn,  
If a child lives with hostility,  
he learns to fight,  
If a child lives with ridicule,  
he learns to be shy,  
If a child lives with tolerance,  
he learns to be patient,  
If a child lives with  
encouragement, he learns  
confidence,  
If a child lives with  
acceptance and friendship,  
he learns to find love in the  
world.*

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