
Children Of The Meghalyan Age

The Isa Upanishad preaches mortals that from the invisible whole comes forth the visible whole, though the visible whole has come out from the invisible whole, yet the whole remains unaltered. These teachings embrace the power of procreation that organisms have been blessed with. The title of this article has nothing to do with the children in the Indian state of Meghalaya but refers to the latest age or uppermost stage of the quaternary in which we all exist. With the advent of the world wide web in the 90s, to the multitudinous expanse of the internet today, its upper hand in connecting people around the globe and beyond has come with a fierce price of misgivings tempting people to open the Pandora's box of doom and despair. The first ever documented case of child abuse is believed to be the case of Mary Ellen Wilson in the US which dates back to 1874. Mary had been an eight-year-old girl who was ruthlessly subjected to severe abuse by her foster parents, unfortunately, there were no laws at the time which attributed to extricate her whereby, statutes against cruelty towards animals were invoked to rescue her from the shackles of her infernal home. This case of brutality paved the way for the legislators to formulate laws that dealt with savagery against children. Child abuse perpetrators have used the most significant tool of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) to fulfil their nefarious ideas of abuse and exploitation towards children.

According to a study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) By the end of 2013, almost 40 per cent of the world's population had access to the internet. In developed countries, mobile cellular penetration reached 128 per cent whereas, in the developing countries, rates reached 89 per cent witnessing a 20 per cent increase since 2010. Global trends show that usage of internet among children and youth is increasing day by day. In Europe, the average time spent by 9 to 16-year-olds ranged from one to five hours per day. Developing countries have shown a similar trend especially in India where access and availability of cheap internet services have become ubiquitous. A 2008 study in the US showed that one in five American adolescents posted nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves online. The World Health Organization (WHO), describes "abuse" of children as either the physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment of a child, or the neglect of a child, in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's physical and/or emotional health, survival and development. On the other hand, child sexual abuse can be defined more specifically as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. The facets of online child abuse can be divided into sexual harassment, sexual solicitation, sexual grooming and commercial exploitation.

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One often gets to witness cases of "cyber enticement", "solicitation" and "grooming" wherein an adult is said to communicate with vulnerable children through ICTs for the purpose of sexually abusing or exploiting them further pushing them into the diabolical business of child sex tourism and horrendous acts of pornography on demand basis. Solicitation pertains to personally meeting the minor for the purpose of committing sexual abuse or pornography. Grooming is a stage prior to solicitation where the perpetrators befriend or make false promises of a better life to the child and in turn, coerces or pushes him/her into the vicious circle of becoming a pawn in the burgeoning trade of sex tourism and pornography. There are a plethora of other problems of cyberstalking, cyberbullying and cyberharassment grappling not just the Gen Z or Centennials but the millennials and Gen X as well, it's our onus to generate immense awareness among the people about the adverse impacts of internet usage along with using it judiciously. Information of the universe is available at the convenience of a click but the dark web occupies a major chunk of the online space making it susceptible and conducive for online miscreants to thrive putting lives of common people in jeopardy. Poverty and migration have also significantly contributed to rising of ICTs related crime. It would be fallacious to pin the entire blame for crimes against children onto the rampant misuse of ICTs, a 2016-17 survey conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development show glaring and probably misleading statistics about the number of children residing in care homes. In the year of survey, 4. 73 lakh children were reported to have been under the shelter of care homes and in a subsequent survey conducted by the Centre suggested of very disturbing numbers of merely 2. 61 lakh children residing in care homes in March 2018. How could over two lakh kids possible disappear? Either childcare homes reflected inflated the figures in order to attract more funds under the guise of child care or these children are missing. The state of these homes is not all merry and hunky-dory rather overcrowded, gloomy and low spirited where children undergo corporal punishment and other abuses.

The pendency of cases under the Protection of children from sexual offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) is another lacuna in the Judicial mechanism but is the judiciary solely culpable for this issue or could the entire society and labyrinthine processes admit mea culpa? It is not quite astonishing to believe that one in two children are sexually abused at some point in their life by a near relative or a person in fiduciary position and the even more heart-rending aspect is these cases are surreptitiously shrouded by the victim's confidantes to prevent further victimization of the family and elude the society's judgmental eye. Unreporting of cases is a reality even when it is penalised under Section 21 of the POCSO Act, 2012. Such a person or in charge of an institution shall be liable to imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or fine or both. The laws are in place but the execution tremendously lags behind.

This act is pretty child-friendly in terms of dealing with the method of recording the statement of the child under comfortable settings at the child's residence preferably by a female police officer, not below the rank of Sub-inspector dressed as a civilian. The victim is referred to a child

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psychologist and rehabilitation as sensitive issues like child sex abuse have an ineradicable impact on the child's personality, it not only shatters their soul but tears apart the conscience of humanity. Section 27 of the act prescribes the procedure for medical examination of the victim as in case of a girl, the examination shall be conducted by a woman doctor in the presence of a person upon whom the child reposes trust. Mentally unsound and differently abled children endure a different level of ordeal who have to first deal with their requirement of special care as even today our public places, transport facilities, schools, public toilets have not become differently abled friendly on top of it the burden of stigmatization by the society. Separate schools do exist but why can we not provide them with adequate facilities to meet their special needs in regular schools, just like an ordinary student. Around the globe childhood of innumerable children is at grave peril. The unceasing war in Syria is nerve-wracking, when one witness the devastating graphic images of innocent children smeared in blood and rubble it not only fills us with remorse and pity but also raises serious apprehensions as to where is the human race heading towards, do we want the coming generations to be prisoners of their past or architects of a magnificent future? Many gullible teenagers are enticed into resorting to militantism and extremism due to the dearth of prospectively lucrative careers for a variety of reasons which could include the origin of their birth, religion and race.

The intellectuals and professionals should consider it their primal duty to spread their wisdom to the next generation. The biggest example can be of the great Chinese business magnate Jack Ma, Co-founder and Chairman of the Alibaba group, a multinational technology conglomerate who intends to retire in 2019 and plans to become a teacher. How exhilarating learning would become for students to gain insights from such an accomplished and influential person. It would not be just on our part to overlook the gargantuan efforts of International organisations, Governments, NGOs and public-spirited citizens who are working day in and out to ameliorate the state of children living in poverty and distress. To name a few, one such person is Kailash Satyarthi who is the recipient of Nobel Peace Prize and numerous other awards and recognition for his contributions in the field of the emancipation of children from bonded labour. He started the Kailash Satyarthi foundation for providing humanitarian assistance to children languishing under subhuman conditions. Another great pioneer in the field of children's education is Sonam Wangchuk who is also a recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for his work in reforming and transforming the education system in Ladakh and changing the lives of many students who could not cope with the persisting education system. Organisations like ISPCAN (International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect) is the only international non-profit organization that brings together the range of professionals that work toward the prevention and treatment of child abuse, neglect and exploitation. There are many other NGOs and institutions which contribute towards child welfare and development activities world over so that every child has the liberty, freedom and elation to live their life to the fullest.

Recently, The national sex offenders' registry has been launched, a data portal to provide

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details of lakhs of cases relating to offenders convicted under charges of rape, POCSO, eve teasing and gangrape. It can be accessed only by law enforcement agencies and officers with clearance. This is a remarkable step as it will ease the process of tracking repeat offenders, monitoring and investigation making India only the ninth country in the world having a National Database on Sexual Offenders. However, such a database should be made public instead of just being accessible to a few selected officers as it would bring in more transparency in the legal system and aid public-spirited individuals to support their claims when they fight for a victim traumatised by a similar incident. An online portal for reporting cases of child pornography, child sexual abuse material or any objectional content relating to sexual abuse can be reported incognito on cybercrime.gov.in Even if we have the most stringent legislation against such sinful acts unless there is collective will among the people to fight against such philanderers and paedophiles contaminating our culture and regressing our development, the harsh reality of such perverted, heinous, loathsome and vile acts against humanity shall continue to be a sad part of our society. Let's endeavour to make the world a better place for the generations to come with courage and conviction, to provide them with a life they really remember filled with hope, glee and prescience. Keep believing in the power of big dreams, shedding all the malevolence within us, working heartily for the upliftment of human race and preserving fraternity among all, as that is true valour.

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