



A Review on “Rescuing Railway Children”

Author: Malcom Harper and Lalitha Iyer

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One can easily trace the presence of ragged children hanging around the railway stations- begging, scavenging, helping vendors and sometimes involving in acts of theft. Generally we brush them away but the problem is not that simple.

In an age of networking and information, an age where informed parentage and careful upbringing of the children gets utmost importance, facts about runaway children reveal the other side of the story.

On an average, more than 1, 00,000 children use the Indian Railways to run away from homes and most of them end up as railway children witnessing stark realities of a crude world that they had never imagined. ”Rescuing Railway Children” by Malcom Harper and LalithaIyer is an earnest effort to depict the struggle of platform survival and stories of their re-union. Weaving together a bunch of heartrending stories around the efforts of Sathi, an NGO devoted to the cause of runaway children, the book presents interesting insights into the Psyche of these Children.

Though there is no specific study or Statistics available about the comparative trends in the number of children running away from home now and in the past, it is likely that social and economic pressures such as urbanization and weakening family ties are additions to the list of reasons for running away which includes unwillingness to attend school, poor result or mishandling of money etc.

What astounds us at the outset is the sheer magnitude of the problem. The 2006 UNICEF estimation records the number at 11,000,000.

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This book gives the picture of major railway stations across the country. A simple Calculation of daily arrival of children in 11 railway stations in India shows that about 230 children arrive at the platform every day. Sadly, unlike the other passengers, for these children platform is the destination. While some are rescued, many fall into evil hands-their life loses track and moves in an entirely different direction.

Rescuing Railway Children presents the plight of platform presence-the socio economic reasons for the problem, the broader milieu of policies and preventive actions. There are government homes and NGOs such as Sathi that strives for rehabilitation and reunion. The book draws our attention towards the measures taken such as counseling, providing life skills and preparing them for reunion with their family, an event invariably marked with emotional outburst.

The book, stretched into eleven chapters written in lucid prose, presents the case of platform survival and the efforts of NGOs to rehabilitate the children. The meticulous details, data from different surveys and the case studies presented make it an interesting and informative book. The design of the book is also interesting as it involves in the form of brief columns interesting narratives from the world of reality and of fiction and movies such as *Salam Bombay* and *Sum Dog Millionaire*. What proves the worth of the book further is a film in the making that draws heavily from the book. *Tindrum Beats*, a production house from Udupi, is inspired by the book in to make a film on *Railway Children*. All these credentials make the book worth reading.